Cherwell

Oxford's oldest independent newspaper, est. 1920

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No Greek life doesn't mean no rape culture

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Professor Avi Shlaim on Iraq, Zionism, and belonging

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Oxford University Proctors turn away seven in eight sexual misconduct reports



- 5 of 40 complaints investigated over 7 years
- Only one confirmed disciplinary sanction
- Cambridge investigated 84% of reports

CHRISTINA SCOTE

CW: Sexual assault, rape

A *Cherwell* investigation found that only 5 of 40 sexual misconduct complaints reported to the University of Oxford's Proctors' Office in the past 7 years were accepted for investigation. Excluding the four reports complainants withdrew, 86% of reports resulted in a No Further Action outcome.

In contrast, the University of Cambridge investigated 84% of reports made through its Student Disciplinary Procedure in the same period, and upheld 33% of total complaints.

In the course of this investigation, *Cherwell* spoke to students who said that their assaults were referred to as "misunderstandings" by staff, that they were discouraged from reporting as they were told it would be a devastating process, and that they were told that Oxford prefers to resolve these matters with "informal conversations" between the victim and the accused rather than disciplinary action.

At Oxford, if a student experiences misconduct from a student at their own college, they can make a report to their college dean. Each college has its own disciplinary procedure, which the dean can then use to investigate the report. If, however, a student experiences misconduct by a student at another college, the student must contact the Proctors – the two academic officers who oversee student discipline across the entire University. The Proctors would then consider whether to investigate under their own disciplinary procedure.

Freedom of Information (FOI) responses show that policy restrictions were the main reason cases were not accepted for investigation by the Proctors.

Fourteen cases, or 35% of the total number of reports, were referred to another body. Of these, ten were referred to the police, two were referred to colleges, and two were referred to investigation by other bodies.

Referrals to colleges occur when both the reporting student and the accused student attend the same college, so the complaint falls within the jurisdiction of the college dean.

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Striking workers demonstrate at Oxford University Press

STANLEY ARLIDGE

A demonstration in favour of striking finance workers was held outside the Oxford University Press (OUP) last week, as the dispute over offshoring at the world's oldest publishing house continues.

Last week's strike, which began on 28th September and ended on 9th October, marked the second round of strike action by the affected workers, who first went on strike between 1st and 11th September. The dispute began over OUP's plans to offshore 48 finance department jobs to India-based EXL Services.

On Wednesday, Unite, the union behind the strike, held a demonstration outside OUP on Walton Street. The demonstration was attended by around 25 people, including union representatives, striking workers, and OUP workers who had come out in solidarity with those on strike.

Under the shadow of a giant inflatable rat brought by the demonstrators, striking workers told *Cherwell* that OUP was trying to "intimidate" workers into not striking. One striking worker, who is not allowed to talk to the media, said that OUP had tried to say the strike was illegal. *Cherwell* understands that 21 of 28 union members, the only people legally allowed to strike, voted in support of it.

Naomi Gravett, Unite's regional officer, told *Cherwell*: "Some of these staff have been with Oxford University Press for 20, 30 years. They've given their heart and soul to this place… and they just feel like they've had their legs taken out from under them…

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Summit calls for human rights safeguards on AI

CHERWELL NEWS

Human rights experts called for stronger legal protections against the risks posed by artificial intelligence (AI) at an Oxford AI and Human Rights Summit, with speakers arguing that human rights standards must be embedded into AI governance and technology.

The summit was hosted at the newly redeveloped Rhodes House in Oxford and organised by the Institute for Ethics in AI. It built upon Professor Yuval Shany's consultation on a white paper, published in 2025, on the need for and feasibility of an international AI Bill of Human Rights, which proposes ways to adapt existing human rights standards so as to better address some of the unique challenges posed by AI systems and their uses.

An opening video address from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk outlined how AI policy can keep pace with a fast-developing technology. He said that "great power demands responsibility on the same scale, and when the two don't match, we have a problem". Corporate control, he explained, means that AI policy stretches beyond existing national borders. He continued to praise this summit for bringing together leaders and representatives at the forefront of the discussion.

Speakers called on the UK government to establish legislation, recalling Labour's manifesto commitment to an AI Bill of Human Rights. The panellists broadly agreed on the importance of human rights, but appeared less aligned on what enforcement should look like in practice.

In an exclusive interview, Michael O'Flaherty, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, told *Cherwell* that political short-termism risks undermining efforts to address the long-term consequences of AI. "We are infected across our societies with short-termist responses to the great issue of our societies and politics," he said, adding that electoral cycles make it difficult for politicians "to think beyond the next election".

O'Flaherty also noted that younger generations no longer take the international human rights system for granted. "There is no longer an assumption that the human rights system is safe, that it will survive," he told *Cherwell*. He argued that political leaders increasingly treat human rights selectively, saying: "Increasingly, leaders are treating human rights, if they are respected at all, as an a la carte buffet. We take those rights because they serve our goal. We'll ignore others because they get in the way."

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Striking workers demonstrate at Oxford University Press

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"I could understand if it was a company that's on their knees and they need to cut costs, but this is one of the biggest publishing houses in the world. They don't need to save money, so it's just profit over people."

According to public filings, the press made a profit of £47.1 million in 2025/26. OUP is an official department of Oxford University overseen by a delegation of the University's academic staff.

Asked whether OUP was in active consultation with the union to end the strike, Gravett and other union representatives told *Cherwell* that the union has received no contact from OUP since August. She added that "it was made very clear to us at the outset of the collective consultation that the decision had already been made. It was going to be outsourced; we were just discussing the measures."

Discussing the aims of the strike, Gravett said that "what we'd really like is Oxford University Press to turn around and say, 'look, we screwed up here. You know we've made a mistake because this is people's lives'".

In response, OUP told *Cherwell*: "All of the colleagues impacted by the changes have accepted the terms offered, which include enhanced redundancy terms. We have provided outplacement and wellbeing support, and funding for professional development. We continue to seek opportunities for redeployment, and some colleagues have secured alternative roles within the Press.

"We have met with Unite to explore ways to resolve the dispute. Approximately half of the colleagues who voted in favour of industrial action took part in the strike. We have always acted, and will continue to act, in good faith."

Image credit: Stanley Arlidge for Cherwell.



Summit calls for human rights safeguards on AI

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The summit also heard concerns about the effects of AI-generated misinformation on communities that may have limited access to, or awareness of, the technology itself. An audience question asked human rights experts to consider the impacts of AI on populations, such as those in India, who might be unaware of its existence. The focus on the impact of AI on populations in developing countries more vulnerable to the power of big tech was a key theme of the summit.

Eileen Carter from the South African Human Rights Commission warned that underrepresentation of African languages in large language models could exacerbate existing inequalities. She also raised concerns about the effects of misinformation and deepfakes on elections, referring to more than 360 deaths associated with unrest and the amplification of narratives.

The third panel, which offered a civil society perspective on promoting human rights in AI systems, offered some hope. Across all speakers, the potential for AI to transform the beliefs that underpin human rights, including the rights to water, education, and an interpreter, was debated. When asked about AI's potential to unravel and alter the definition of human rights, such as what is included in the 'right to education' O'Flaherty told *Cherwell*: "The damage that can be done by AI has hit more dramatically and more visibly than perhaps any other sector within education through the phenomenon of cognitive loss, of cognitive transfer. We're only beginning to realise the extent to which we have allowed education to be fundamentally undermined for an entire generation.

"It's time to seize that now and engage it. I'm not sure that the classic understanding of the human right to education is particularly well-framed for this extraordinary development."

In a discussion on different countries' regulatory approach to AI, Suresh Venkatasubramanian, professor at Brown University and former AI advisor to US President Joe Biden, argued that AI systems should not be treated as inevitable developments beyond human control. "We continue, I think, to talk about AI as a thing that emerged out of nowhere that we just have to deal with," he said. "We forget that these aren't coming from an alien planet and they were built by entities that choose to build them in a certain way." He called for pressure on technology companies to make different choices about how AI systems are developed.

Questions of accountability also emerged during discussions about AI's potential to improve access to justice. Research presented by Philippa Webb said that only 10% of people who have access to a lawyer can get one while there are thousands of bookings for an interpreter in a court covering 150 languages. However, this progress is not cemented as "general-purpose chatbots hallucinate 58% of the time on a legal task". The use of AI in moderating legal proceedings raised fundamental questions about humanity and authority. Thompson Chengeta from Liverpool John Moores University said that "human rights is the last line of defence so when we say we want a human rights based governance… human rights is not an idea, it is an obligation. There is a gap that can only be recovered by a legally binding instrument".

The event culminated in a panel offering an industry perspective. Co-host Dr Caroline Emmer De Albuquerque Green questioned representatives from Meta, Google, Microsoft, and OpenAI. Michael Karimian, who works in digital diplomacy at Microsoft, discussed the role of private sectors in engaging with AI, defining corporate responsibility as something which "provides transparency and identified risks".

All companies supported having formal programmes to ensure that they have an AI policy in place. Within their own companies, they suggested protective measures such as specialised training to ensure that policies, such as whistleblowing, are understood. Alexandria Walden from Google described how consultations with stakeholders could be used to identify when the product breached users' boundaries. These assessments, according to OpenAI's spokesperson, "feedback into tangible technical input" and "benchmark it".

Fundamentally, understanding the rationale behind human rights is imperative, though lacking. Alexandria Walden from Google said: "Whether or not they understand human rights, they care enough to infuse it in their company… we might not always get it right, but it is something we care about."

Where former panels discussed controls to ensure human rights are considered in the development and implementation of AI products, this panel focused on mitigation. A spokesperson from Google pointed out that technology is inevitably going to move faster, so multiple tools are needed. Companies, OpenAI's representative noted, still encounter issues such as discrimination and free speech. Consequently, they regard this as an additional policy which companies have a structured model to deal with, but newer companies, and newer industries, haven't learnt it yet.

In her concluding remarks, Green called for policy makers to "make the abstract actionable" at both governmental and corporate levels. She argued that, by framing the issues posed by AI as human rights issues, we gain a "foundation" for recognising AI's many societal impacts.

Image credit: Mair Andrews for



Innovation and technology define Vice-Chancellor's annual oration

CARA HENE

Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey opened the new academic year on Wednesday, 7th October, with the annual Oration at the Sheldonian Theatre.

The Oration allows the Vice-Chancellor to define the priorities of the University's highest office and reflect upon the past year at the University. This year, these include AI ethics, bridging the gap between "town and gown", and the increasing importance of scientific innovation for the University.

The Vice-Chancellor commented on the University's influential role in shaping the AI landscape, both through technical research and noting work on AI governance from the newly launched Oxford Institute of Technology and Justice. Tracey referenced the university-wide rollout of ChatGPT-5 last year, while stressing the need for places where "students are taught to think critically and independently". She identified Oxford's tutorial system as a "unique asset" in combating the potential pitfalls of AI in learning.

Tracey also spoke about local community work, such as partnering with the homelessness charity Emmaus Oxford: "I want my hometown people to actually feel that having the world's number one university on their doorstep really does make their lives better."

From the start, the Vice-Chancellor also referenced that the turmoil facing British politics today might reflect "a nation not sure of its identity".

As for Oxford's identity, Tracey pointed at the role of innovation and STEM, lauding a dizzying array of successes."It is estimated that over two billion people worldwide are using or benefiting from a piece of research that came from Oxford… that's impact," the Vice-Chancellor said.

The Vice-Chancellor also praised the "eye-watering investment" that Oxford quantum spin-outs have attracted. One such spinout, Oxford Ionics, was acquired for $1.075 billion by US-listed IonQ last year, while Oxford Quantum Circuits (OQC) closed a £260 million funding round this June – the highest ever won in Europe by a quantum computing company.

"I sense we're more comfortable now owning [innovation] as part of our identity," the Vice-Chancellor said.

For a university traditionally prized for the humanities and philosophy, with eight out of the last eleven prime ministers studying at it, this is a notable shift.

The Vice-Chancellor went on to link these achievements in innovation to strong investment, referencing the University's £6.9 billion in net asset value. In it, she thanked the Syrian-Saudi Arabian businessman and philanthropist Wafic Saïd for a "transformational" £15 million donation to the new Global Leadership Centre.

The Vice-Chancellor then spoke about Oxford's unique financial stability amongst struggling UK universities, calling for "that difficult national conversation about how we fund the UK higher education sector". Just last week Nottingham University confirmed the closures of all modern language and music degree courses. Oxford is not immune to financial pressures. Oxford University Press workers are also still striking over offshoring jobs to India.

The Vice-Chancellor also affirmed her support for diversity in higher education. She said: "If you are serious about excellence, the potential for excellence and finding top talent, you will end up with a diverse team." "Look at the Premier League, or my beloved Everton", she said.

As said at the beginning of this year's oration, the Vice-Chancellor concluded by arguing that "at this critical point in our collective history", the University would make a mark on Britain's identity as a "place of ambition, excellence, kindness and hope".

Image credit: University Communications, with permission.



University expansion to close Common Ground café

ILYA ROSENBAUM

Oxford City Council have accepted plans by the University of Oxford to redevelop a building on Wellington Square hosting the Common Ground café. The building, which currently contains unused graduate accommodation, will be demolished to make way for new academic, teaching, and office space.

The possibility of demolishing the site has generated concern since the plans became public in 2024. In a vote by the City Council planning committee last week, the plans passed by a narrow six votes to five. Both Common Ground and the live music venue The Nest will be forced to close, with potential relocations during the construction of a new "state-of-the-art" building.

Common Ground, founded in 2018, has been a staple of Little Clarendon Street, offering a space for co-working and socialisation. It houses second-hand clothing, books, and records, and hosts live music, comedy nights, and a range of other events.

Oxford University Development (OUD), the company that proposed the plans, gathered responses from the general public in December 2024 and found that 65% of respondents raised concern over the risk to Common Ground. A student frequenter told *Cherwell*: "I would be sad to see Common Ground go – they provide a colourful and lively space, not just for students but the wider Oxford community."

As a solution, the University offered Common Ground alternative premises, but such options did not satisfy the café's requirements. As things stand, the café, along with The Nest, will either have to relocate or close.

University launches Uganda Ebola vaccine trial

JEREMY AZZOPARDI

Ugandan participants in a clinical safety study received an Oxford-developed Ebola vaccine this week.

Researchers vaccinated the first participants on 6th October in Masaka, Uganda. The phase follows the launch of a first-in-human Phase I trial in the UK evaluating the same vaccine candidate.

They received the vaccine as part of an evaluation of the safety and efficacy of a ChAdOx-based Bundibugyo Ebola vaccine candidate developed by the Oxford Vaccine Group (OVG) and the Pandemic Sciences Institute at the University of Oxford.

Development for this vaccine began in May this year in response to the ongoing Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The research, led by OVG's Professor Teresa Lambe and Professor Simon Drysdale, is funded by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). No licenced vaccine for the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola virus currently exists.

In a statement to *Cherwell*, OVG said its involvement includes collaborating with the Ugandan research team to support "the study's scientific design, clinical trial coordination, safety oversight, and evaluation of vaccine safety and immunogenicity". The Phase I clinical trial addresses a rare strain of Ebola virus affecting communities in the DRC since May. The phase is a collaboration between the Medical Research Council/Uganda Virus Research Institute and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM).

Dr Nicole Lurie, CEPI's Executive Director for Emergency Preparedness and Response, told *Cherwell*: "It [the Bundibugyo outbreak] remains the fastest-growing and second-largest Ebola outbreak ever recorded – and we currently remain without a licensed vaccine or treatment." The Bundibugyo Ebola epidemic in the DRC has surpassed 8,600 cases, with almost half of infections proving fatal.

The outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in May.

OVG told *Cherwell*: "For more than a decade, the University of Oxford has performed many clinical trials of candidate viral-vectored vaccines. Some of the most promising vaccines used a modified chimpanzee adenovirus, a harmless version of a common cold virus. The Oxford-AstraZeneca (ChAdOx1) COVID-19 vaccine was approved for emergency use in the UK in December 2020 and was estimated to have saved six million lives during 2021 alone, and over 3 billion doses were used worldwide." The adenovirus vector vaccine technology trialled in this study was successfully used worldwide as part of the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

More funding is necessary to ensure the development and approval of the Ebola vaccine. Lurie told *Cherwell*: "Without sufficient additional funding, we are at risk of not being able to develop these promising vaccine candidates… CEPI urgently needs US$128M now to keep our Bundibugyo emergency R&D response moving. Without it, we are putting the DRC, and the world, at tremendous risk."

Image credit: Discasto, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



Pitt Rivers Museum returns Māori artefact to New Zealand

ORLA MCMAHON

The Pitt Rivers Museum, with assistance from the Homebound Project, has returned a kahu kiwi to its Māori community in Aotearoa New Zealand after more than 100 years on loan to the museum.

A kahu kiwi is a traditional Māori cloak covered in the feathers of a kiwi bird. It is one of the most prestigious garments within the Māori community. On 10th October, a ceremony was held at the Pitt Rivers Museum to mark its departure.

The particular kahu kiwi was loaned to the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1913 by the widow of George Cleghorn, a 19th-century physician. Cleghorn was originally gifted the cloak by the local Māori population when working in the Wairau Pā region of the South Island. His initiatives to improve public health in the community included establishing a fever ward in the grounds of the local hospital.

The transportation of the kahu kiwi to Aotearoa was funded by the Homebound Project, a charity that works to repatriate items of cultural significance to indigenous communities worldwide. On its website, the Homebound Project highlights that the UK, unlike other countries, has no law that requires repatriation of items belonging to other cultures, meaning that the cost of repatriation often falls on the indigenous community.

Dr Berklee Baum, Founder of the Homebound Project, told *Cherwell*: "Across the United Kingdom, hundreds of thousands of Indigenous ancestors and cultural belongings remain in museum and university collections. Securing their return can involve long and complex negotiations. Even when a return is agreed, many UK institutions will not cover the costs and Indigenous communities are left to bear the financial burden themselves…

"The University of Oxford has refused to pay for the physical return of these belongings and ancestors. I think this is a very important fact to point out, so that we are not too quick to praise the University for their generosity. I created the Homebound Project to fill the financial gap left by UK institutions like the University of Oxford, relieving Indigenous communities of carrying the burden alone."

Baum's Homebound Project was founded on a one-off donation of $2 million, which was then invested. The interest generated from this investment funds projects like the return of the kahu kiwi to Aotearoa. It has also funded the repatriation of Naga ancestral remains from the Pitt Rivers Museum, with a return expected later this year.

When asked about the decision not to fund the kahu kiwi's journey home, the Pitt Rivers Museum told *Cherwell*: "Where a claim for return is approved, the claimant will be responsible for the costs of returning the object(s), including the costs of any conservation processing that may be required for safe transport, packaging, transport and travel. An exception to this may be made in cases of financial hardship, where the University may consider a contribution towards the costs on a case-by-case basis."

In a press release, Professor Laura Van Broekhoven, Director of Pitt Rivers Museum, said: "We are very pleased that the day has come for the kahu kiwi to return home… It has been our privilege to have cared for it on loan here in Oxford, and we know how deeply it will be cherished at Wairau Pā."

Lorraine Eade, Chair of Ngāti Rārua o Te Wairau Society, a society representing the Māori community from which the kahu kiwi came, said that the return of the kahu kiwi was "beyond measure", adding that it marked an "opportunity to extend [their] knowledge in terms of traditional weaving techniques".

Before returning to the community in Wairau Pā, the cloak will be temporarily housed in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa until construction of a new Wharenui (meeting house) is completed at Hahunga Marae (a meeting ground in the Wairau region of New Zealand).

Image credit: Berklee Baum, with permission.



NEWS SHORTS

The Bay-Ox tapestry

A tapestry commissioned by David Hockney, who died on 11th June 2026, will appear in London's Guildhall Art Gallery from 23rd October. The 6m wide tapestry is a version of Hockney's 1963 painting *Play Within A Play*. The tapestry will be installed in Lincoln College next year to mark its 600th anniversary.

Hagueiography

A new portrait of Chancellor Lord William Hague has been unveiled at an event at the Schwarzman Centre. Painted by British contemporary artist Louise Pragnell, the oil painting depicts Lord Hague in his ceremonial robes in Convocation House. The portrait marks Lord Hague's tenure as Chancellor, and joins the portraits of previous chancellors displayed across the University.

Overreach at Oxford

Seemingly not satisfied with 2nd in the BNOC list, the 'anonymous' Instagram account @overheard_at_oxford engaged in a shocking overreach into *Cherwell* territory this weekend. The Instagram account, famous for Oxford tittle tattle, has launched a website to publish features, op-eds, and (eventually) news. An unnamed *Cherwell* spokesperson said: "There will be a Pryce to pay for this attempt to step on *Cherwell*'s toes."

Ten years down, humanity to go

The Oxford Robotics Institute (ORI) celebrates its tenth anniversary this year, with major highlights including an AI development collaboration with Amazon (our soon-to-be overlords). Unlike the Bodleian, however, *Cherwell* will not allow AI near its pages. Probably.

CROSS CAMPUS

Generation 67 repeats May 68

Sorbonne students have joined pupils in protesting against the underfunding of the French education system. More than 5,000 students have been arrested this week, most of them being minors. It's 1968 all over again, except this generation somehow manages to have aura battles in the middle of getting tear-gassed.

Cam I say something?

A group of Cambridge students have established the Cambridge University Free Speech Society (CUFSS) alongside a termly Substack journal. Its term card, published on Instagram, promises talks by GB News host Patrick Christys and psychiatrist Dr Sami Timimi, as well as a panel event on the motion: "What's wrong with the Equality Act? From negative to positive freedom". The society has won funding from a scheme run by the Free Speech Union (FSU), which has also funded the controversial Cambridge University Society of Women (CUSW).

Oxford's Labour and Green parties clash over 'Zionism is racism' motion

STANLEY ARLIDGE

The Labour and Green councillors on Oxford City Council clashed over the Green Party's controversial "Zionism is racism" motion.

This weekend's argument between the two largest groups on the Council comes after the Green Party conference passed a motion stating that Zionism should be "treated as any form of racism". The motion's passing has provoked reactions from many Jewish groups claiming that the motion could leave Jewish members subject to disciplinary action for being part of synagogues with ties to Israel.

On Friday, Susan Brown, the Labour leader of Oxford City Council, wrote to Lois Muddiman, the leader of the Green grouping about the "deeply concerning decision" at the conference. In the letter, Brown called on the Green group to "clearly condemn the appalling decision" saying that "this new Green Party policy crosses a line and can only encourage division and fear in our communities".

In a statement about the letter, Brown added that the policy "has caused shockwaves in communities around the country where people of Jewish faith, already feeling under threat, are now feeling even less secure. Our Jewish communities in Oxford need to hear from our local Green Party that they are not standing behind this reprehensible new national policy".

The Oxford dispute reflects a national trend of local government concern over the Green Party's motion. In councils in Enfield and Bristol, Labour leaders have expressed similar concern and demanded, as Brown did, to know how local Green councillors voted on the motion. Liberal Democrats have similarly criticised the party's coalition with the Greens in Southwark Council following the motion.

Muddiman responded to clarify that she did not support the motion but "respect[s] other members within the party who took a different view on how we can best advocate for the rights of Palestinians and against Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza". She emphasised that the Green Party's member-led democracy means that "unlike within the Labour Party, no one member can change or repeal any given party policy". No other Green member of the council has confirmed whether or not they supported the motion.

Muddiman also stated that "the local Green Party is fully committed to fighting antisemitism, a form of racism as pernicious and poisonous as any other – wherever it is found". The Green leader also stated that membership of a Zionist synagogue or communal organisation would not be grounds for disciplinary action.

Nidal Shah, the President of Oxford Student Greens Association, a society with ties to the local Green Party, struck a similar tone. While not clarifying whether Oxford Student Greens had a position on the motion, Shah told *Cherwell*: "We must support the rights of Palestinians, call out the ongoing genocide and apartheid, and safeguard Jewish members". The President also sought to "reassure" Jewish residents that "we will call out and condemn antisemitism wherever it occurs."

Oxfordshire CEOs sleep out for homelessness

BARNABY CARTER

Forty-eight business and community leaders slept out in University Parks to raise money for homelessness as part of the annual Oxfordshire CEO sleepout on 8th October.

The charity event has raised over £43,000, with 655 donations at the time of publication. The event attracted figures from local politics and the University of Oxford alike, including Labour MP for Oxford East Anneliese Dodds, City Councillor Mike Rowley, University Church Vicar William Lamb and Director of Accommodation at Jesus College Angela Unsworth. Unsworth has participated every year since it began, and Jesus covered logistics on the night, with its catering team helping prepare for the event.

Unsworth told *Cherwell*: "Even when the weather has been atrocious, it does us all good to remember that we can go home, have a shower, and breakfast. We don't have the problem of drying out all our kit, finding dry bedding, and having to do it all again the next night." Before trying to catch some sleep, participants heard from Jack and Tony, who talked about their journey out of homelessness and experience with it. Unsworth also highlighted talking to Steve every morning, a 70-year-old man sleeping rough in the city centre who cannot afford accommodation. Unsworth told *Cherwell*: "These are good people who just need a chance."

CEO Sleepout, an organisation dedicated to uniting the business community against homelessness, held the event. They hold similar sleepouts in cities across the UK, and have raised £4.5 million for various charities to date. The Oxford CEO Sleepout chose to donate to the Oxford Homelessness Movement (OHM), a partnership of various charities tackling homelessness in Oxford. Over the past five years, the sleepout has raised just over £250,000 for OHM and its partner organisations.

Yvonne Pinner, Project Chair of OHM, told *Cherwell*: "Oxfordshire Homeless Movement (OHM) is lucky enough to have our core costs paid for by a donor, and so all the funds raised will go towards delivery of our project work and partners. This means that all money raised will help someone locally." Pinner also added that students can get involved in the initiative by "talking about the event to lecturers, college staff, and management and getting them to sign up".

More than 1,700 people died on the streets of the UK in 2025, including 51 children, both figures being the highest ever recorded. Although the national number of households assessed as threatened with homelessness dropped by 4.5% from January to March 2025 compared with the same figure in 2024, in Oxford the number doubled. Oxford's average monthly rent reached £1,875 in 2025, an 11.5% annual increase, being the highest average monthly rent outside London. As many as 41 individuals were reported as sleeping rough in November 2024, but this figure likely underreports the population of homeless women in Oxford. This is because women are much more likely to experience 'hidden homelessness', staying in hidden or unsafe places to avoid danger on the street.

Homeless Oxfordshire's CEO Simon Hewett-Avison has called for a greater investment in social housing in the city. He also highlights that addressing rent hikes isn't the only way to go about the problem, saying that: "The average age of death in the homeless population is early 40s and the incidence of poor physical and mental health within the homeless population far outweighs that of society as a whole". He has called to "work more closely across sectors".

Students can join a number of organisations tackling homelessness, including Oxford Student Social Action Coalition, Food Rescuers, and Oxford Mutual Aid.

Image Credit: Angela Unsworth, with permission.





Oxford University and Council plan to build Greenway cycle lanes

VANISHA KARNA

Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, and the University of Oxford have announced plans to build expansive new walking and cycling routes in the Greenways plan. The new greenways would link Oxford to nearby towns and villages, connecting 200,000 residents to the city on traffic-free paths.

The plans include 18 proposed routes, most extending 5 to 8 miles around Oxford. They will involve creating new routes, as well as upgrading and incorporating existing ones. The plans would cover around 60 towns and villages within cycling distance, including Woodstock, Abingdon, and Kidlington.

All routes will be car-free, either through paths next to busy roads, as on Marston Ferry Road, or completely traffic-free paths. One route will go from the Peartree Roundabout at the end of Woodstock Road to Blenheim Palace.

Oxford University told *Cherwell*: "The University keenly supports the Oxford Greenways Masterplan, which will help create a better, more livable city for everyone", adding "we are committed to helping our staff and students commute... in a healthy, sustainable way". Between 2023 and 2024, the University committed £33,000 to the project.

Oxford University has maintained its top position in the Times Higher Education rankings globally for its 11th consecutive year. However, in certain categories its lead has narrowed, with MIT outperforming Oxford on citation impact and research strength. When announcing the plans earlier this month, the vice-chancellor emphasised the importance of attracting research talent.

The University has also been building a growing number of facilities outside the centre of the city, including the Oxford University Science Park in Begbroke, which would receive better traffic-free connections if proposed routes were to be implemented. There are plans to build 1,800 new homes near Begbroke, and the plans would make commuting to the centre more feasible.

While the concepts of each route have been agreed, construction is expected to be delivered in stages, dependent on investments from the council and government as well as developer contributions and partnerships.

Image credit: Martin Addison, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

St Edmund Hall unveils new eco-friendly accommodation

ISA BOJAJ

St Edmund Hall has opened new, sustainability-focused accommodation in Norham Gardens, one of Oxford's most affluent neighbourhoods.

The College describes the buildings, which took three years to construct, as an "exemplar" of sustainability. Designed by architects Wright & Wright LLP, they are certified with a Passivhaus standard, widely regarded as the industry benchmark for energy efficiency, and were built using "sustainably sourced and low-embodied carbon materials". According to a press release on the Teddy Hall website, the buildings will use 70% less energy than the typical modern building.

It contains 127 en-suite study rooms, split across three new buildings: Willis House, Ashton House, and Elliott House, on the nearly 50-year-old Norham St Edmund site. The buildings, which back onto University Parks, are powered at least in part by solar panels and are heated by air-source heat pumps.

The rooms include heated towel racks, big double beds, and dimmable lights. Despite the luxury, the College kept the nightly rate in line with the rest of its Norham housing. The College told *Cherwell* that it "recognises the need to keep rents as low as possible" and that its accommodation costs are "below the median of all Oxford colleges". By that standard, tenants are expected to pay around £30 a night.

Rooms on the site will be reserved for Teddy Hall returning undergraduates. They will not be available to postgraduates and, by extension, not be offered through the Oxford University Collegiate Accommodation System, now in its second year of opening college rooms to students from other colleges. The accommodation will allow Teddy Hall to accommodate all undergraduates for their whole degree.

The development's outdoor spaces are boasted as climate-resilient and biodiverse, with landscaped gardens and lawns. For budding geographers and biologists, the most intriguing feature may be an ecology pond.

Chancellor William Hague said in a press release: "Norham St Edmund is a world-leading blueprint for future student accommodation projects and sustainable building design, both in Oxford and beyond. I look forward to seeing it serve a thriving college community for generations to come."

Oxford University Proctors turn away seven in eight sexual misconduct reports

Continued from Page 1

Referrals to the police occur when the matter involves "serious criminal conduct". The University stated in a FOI response that, under its Serious Criminal Conduct Policy, it "will not usually investigate a report of conduct that could constitute serious criminal conduct until it has passed through a Police procedure".

Seven reports were refused investigation because the alleged incident occurred outside the context of the University. Two were refused investigation because too much time had elapsed between the alleged misconduct and the report. An additional report was refused investigation because both reasons applied.

Three complaints did not progress because one of the parties left the University. One was refused investigation because the student was about to finish and was dealt with under a No Contact Arrangement. Three cases received a No Further Action outcome with no reason recorded.

Of the five cases the University investigated, one was upheld with a formal disciplinary sanction, two were referred to the Student Disciplinary Panel with outcomes unknown, and the other two did not result in disciplinary sanctions. As a result, the percentage of reports made to the Proctors' Office which end in a disciplinary sanction falls between 2.5% and 7.5%.

The University's investigation and complaint-upholding rate are markedly lower than those of the colleges. Of the 15 colleges that responded to FOI requests with exact figures, 50% of reports were investigated, and 35% were upheld.

Cherwell also compared Oxford's investigation rates and complaint-upholding rates against other universities. Of all the universities that responded to *Cherwell*'s FOI request, Oxford's Proctors' Office had the lowest investigation rate: Cambridge investigated 84% of complaints in the same period and upheld 33% of them; the University of St Andrews investigated 100% and upheld 38%; the University of Edinburgh investigated 44% and upheld 13.5%; the University of Newcastle investigated 100% and upheld 56%; and the University of Bristol did not specify how many cases were upheld, but investigated 100% of cases in the past five years.

These figures raise questions about whether Oxford is doing enough to take action against sexual assault and harassment, as well as supporting those who are victims of it.

The University's Non-Academic Disciplinary Procedure classifies "sexual intercourse or engaging in a sexual act without consent" as a Category 4 Breach, the most serious category, with an indicative penalty of expulsion. "Touching inappropriately through clothes without consent" is Category 3, with an indicative penalty of suspension.

On paper, this suggests the University recognises sexual assault among the most serious forms of misconduct – one which merits severe punishment. In practice, however, the data suggest the University is highly unlikely to take formal action against it.

> Of all the universities that responded to *Cherwell*'s FOI request, Oxford's Proctors' Office had the lowest investigation rate.

The data also highlights likely under-reporting at Oxford. Across the 30 colleges that responded with figures, between 85 and 111 formal sexual misconduct complaints involving members of the college were recorded in the last 7 years. Combined with the 40 formal complaints received by the Proctors in the same period, this averages 18-22 reports per year. Even though this excludes some colleges, this suggests that, in a University of 26,000 students, sexual misconduct is under-reported.

This is consistent with findings from Oxford's Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service, which found that among students using the service in 2023/24, only 16% reported to the Proctors' Office and 11% reported to their college. It explicitly says students choose not to report because of concerns about negative outcomes or that no action will be taken.

An OURSPACE survey by sexual violence researchers, administered to Oxford students in 2021, found that 76 respondents reported they had been raped in the past year at Oxford. One hundred and fifty said they had experienced unwanted sexual touching, and 188 reported that they had been stalked. The survey included 1,314 respondents, only around 5% of the total student population. Because students chose whether to respond, the survey may not represent the wider student body, so it cannot tell what proportion of all students experienced sexual violence that year. But it does strongly suggest that the real number of sexual violence incidents dwarfs the number of formal reports received.

University context

Oxford's Student Disciplinary Procedure states the University will not investigate conduct that occurs outside a University context. Conduct occurs in a University context if it takes place on University or college premises, or in the course of University activity.

In a FOI response, the University stated its rationale, and in doing so, referred to sexual assault and harassment that happens outside of a University context as "disputes amongst individuals" that were outside of the intended aims of University procedure. They told *Cherwell*: "The purpose of the disciplinary procedure is to address misconduct by students, rather than to resolve disputes between individuals."

The policy makes no provision for the effects on the victim of being denied the opportunity for an investigation.

Colleges

Among the 30 colleges that responded with figures, between 85 and 111 formal sexual misconduct complaints were recorded in the last seven years. That averages 2.6 to 3.4 per college.

A higher number of reports does not necessarily indicate a higher incidence of sexual misconduct: other factors that affect the number of reports may be the culture around reporting, students' confidence in the college's response, and staff's attitudes.

Colleges often offer the provision of an informal meeting to advise students considering making a complaint. Whether deans or principals appear encouraging or discouraging in such meetings can affect whether a student goes ahead to make a formal report.

Jesus, Regent's Park, and Reuben were the only responding colleges that recorded no formal complaints. The three colleges together represent thousands of students passing through over the period, so the absence of any formal complaints across these colleges raises questions about whether students who experience sexual misconduct are being adequately encouraged and supported to report it.

Like the Proctors' disciplinary procedure, many colleges include a provision stating that a dean will not normally investigate an incident if more than six months have elapsed since it occurred. Balliol, Brasenose, Christ Church, Lady Margaret Hall, Lincoln, Mansfield, Regent's Park, St Hilda's, St John's, Trinity, and Wadham all have such a provision. Harris Manchester and Keble have an equivalent provision of 3 months, and Merton offers 60 days.

These provisions often state that a dean may investigate in "extraordinary circumstances", with considerations like "risk of harm", "reasons for a delay in reporting", and "the gravity of the alleged breach" viewed as making such circumstances more likely.

"Risk of harm" is not defined in any of these policies, and it does not specify whether it refers to the risk of reoffence or whether it includes any psychological harm to the reporting student of having their case denied an investigation. In practice, both are highly likely to be the case in instances of sexual misconduct. Research shows that rates of recidivism for sexual offences are significant: one study in the U.S. found that of 238 students who reported committing at least one act of sexual coercion or assault, 68% committed another act during the four-year period, and a separate study analysed data from 12,624 male students and found that more than 87% of alcohol-driven sexual assaults were committed by serial perpetrators. This raises questions about whether perpetrators who routinely escape formal accountability are emboldened to continue their behaviour, and thus pose a safeguarding risk.

Without internal guidance on how to interpret "risk of harm", the attitudes of deans and wardens may vary, meaning the same circumstances could result in an investigation at one college but be rejected on the basis of the time limit at another.

Student testimonies

Cherwell sent out a survey to ask students about their experiences of reporting sexual misconduct, or their decision not to report. The survey had 27 respondents.

30% of respondents said they reported their experience of sexual misconduct, while 70% said they did not. Of the options listed, the most prominent factor influencing students not to report was fear of social consequences, with 18 respondents citing this. The second most prominent factor was a lack of trust in the colleges' or the University's procedures, cited by 15 respondents. Third was the fear of a counter-complaint initiated by the perpetrator, cited by eight. Six respondents cited a lack of information on reporting channels, three cited policy barriers, and the "Other" category included concerns that the respondent wouldn't be believed and concerns that the matter wouldn't be taken seriously since the perpetrator was a woman.

Of the eight respondents who said they reported their experience, three said they were "very dissatisfied" with the University or college's response, two said they were "somewhat dissatisfied", two said they were "somewhat satisfied", and one said they were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied".

University response

When asked for comment, Oxford University told *Cherwell*: "Sexual misconduct, harassment and violence have no place at the University of Oxford. We are committed to fostering a safe and respectful community and to preventing and responding effectively to misconduct. In 2025, we made significant changes to our disciplinary procedures, informed by student feedback and consultation with student groups. These changes removed some of the barriers to reporting sexual misconduct and harassment, although we recognise that cases are under-reported relative to the number of students seeking welfare support.

"The University's complaint-handling processes provide clear routes for concerns to be raised, considered and acted on. Changes to Statute XI, approved by Congregation in 2025, strengthen the University's ability to investigate serious misconduct, including sexual violence, and allow the University to investigate more cases without a Reporter first having to make a report to the police.

"The changes also make disciplinary processes clearer and more accessible, and support compliance with Office for Students requirements on harassment and sexual misconduct. The revised procedures allow discretion for the University to investigate cases beyond the six-month timeframe, noting that there are more likely to be good reasons for delayed reporting in cases of sexual misconduct, harassment, bullying or conduct involving violence or a threat of violence.

"This term, all students starting a course at Oxford are required to complete the University's Harassment and Sexual Misconduct online training. Developed with Oxford students, it reflects Oxford's collegiate structure and signposts students to both college and central University support. This complements Healthy Relationships and Consent workshops delivered by trained student facilitators, with support from the Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service."

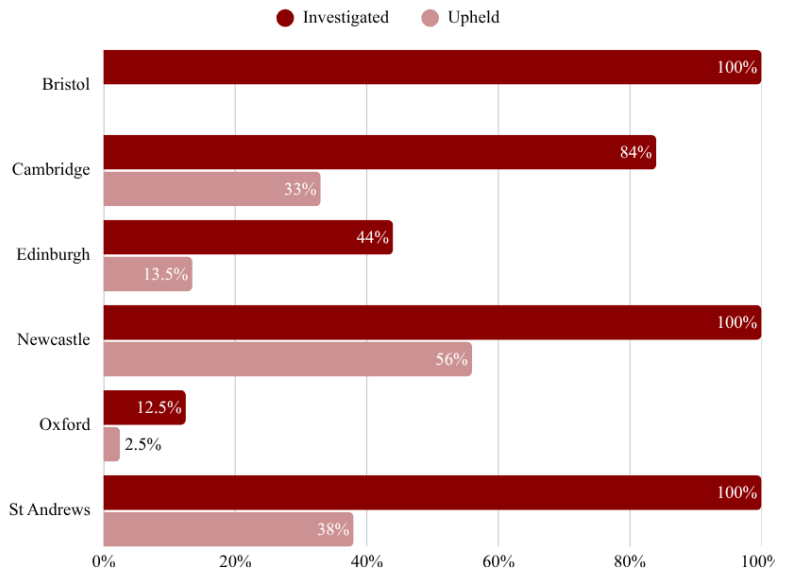
Despite the University's 2025 policy changes, none of the six cases reported in the academic year 2025/26 was investigated.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

Graph credit: Oskar Doepke for Cherwell.

Share of sexual misconduct complaints investigated and upheld by university

Based on Cherwell's analysis of Freedom of Information responses since 2020



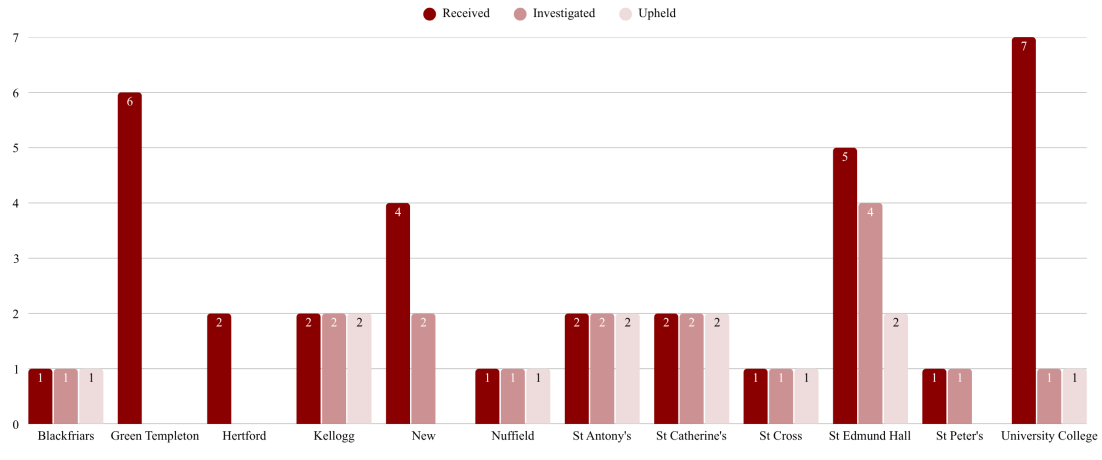
** Bristol did not report the cases upheld and includes the last five years*

*** At least two outcomes at Oxford are unknown*

**** Cambridge data excludes 2025/26*

Sexual misconduct complaints received, investigated, and upheld by college

Based on Cherwell's analysis of Freedom of Information responses since 2020



** Data excludes at least 16 colleges that withheld figures, gave ranges, or did not respond*

*** Jesus, Regent's Park, and Reuben reported no sexual misconduct cases*

OPINION

The quiet guilt of upward social mobility at Oxford

AAYAH ASLAM

Freshers' formal. The first black-tie event I attended at Oxford. The golden glow of the candlelight, the grand dresses, tailored suits, and frustratingly elegant food should have been infinitely exciting for me as an incoming student. Yet the overwhelming feeling I remember was not, happiness or awe, but guilt. The beauty that surrounded me should have been inspiring, tangible evidence of my success, but a sombre emotion sat heavy in my chest.

I could not forget the place I had departed from. I was the first person in the history of my school to be accepted into Oxbridge. I was paraded around in assemblies as proof of meritocracy. Even my own family members repeatedly questioned whether I could truly fit in here.

The glittering world of Oxford felt like a faraway land compared with the area I grew up in. Experiencing my success without a deeper sense of responsibility towards my community was difficult. I felt embarrassed benefiting from an institution whose privileges are unfairly distributed while people from my community still did not have access.

I found myself sitting in a majestic dining hall at an Oxford college, wondering what was so different between me and any of the other hard-working girls at my school. What amazing things had I accomplished to be given the chance to sit in these halls as an intellectual equal? I knew I had worked incredibly hard, that I had spent endless hours hunched over a desk in random empty classrooms in my school because we didn't have a library – but so had so many other people in my area. What differentiated me from them? Was it a lack of access and opportunity?

I believe such sentiments stemmed from a lack of self-confidence. That is not to say I was confident I would be accepted. I was susceptible to the occasional dose of imposter syndrome.

My uncertainty did not stem from a belief that Oxford was above me. I did not feel out of place at Oxford, nor did I feel undeserving of a place here. I felt guilty that it was me who had been offered an olive branch out of the socio-economic disadvantages of my area, and not the hundreds of other young people who were far more competent than I was. They had just never been taught to be confident in their abilities and that honing them was not an embarrassing endeavour.

I wondered how many of my peers in that formal hall felt the same way. Were they able to enjoy the infinite beauties of Oxford without an ounce of guilt? The invisible burden weighed heavily on me; the emotion was deeper than impostor syndrome. I felt I had to be a flawless representative of working-class students, as proof that people like me have full capacity to thrive in prestigious institutions like Oxford.

I felt that the only way to lessen this guilt would be to repay my community – to go off into the world, become successful, and then return home, proving that being accepted into Oxbridge no longer felt like a random anomaly, but a genuine chance.

I was reminded of this silent burden every time I returned home for the vacation. I secretly felt glad I did not have to stay there for long, that it would only take six weeks in this temporary space before I could return to a better place. Perhaps I should have wholly enjoyed all the privileges that Oxford has to offer without constantly binding myself with these chains of guilt. After all, could I presume that my peers from wealthier backgrounds did not also feel concern for such causes? I still felt accountable to the community I came from, and that assimilating too well at an institution like Oxford could be weaponised as proof of my abandoning them.

There is no way of getting out of the burden of social mobility. One may either embrace the shift, or remain without purpose. Perhaps the only solution to limit the emotion is direct action: helping disadvantaged communities while recognising our own privilege.

Image credit: Emma Heagney for Cherwell.



Politics must not be a barrier to education

TI-JEAN MARTIN

As this article goes to print, Oxford University is missing two of its offer-holders. In a haunting echo of the trials faced by approximately 78 Palestinian students last academic year, several of whom held places at Oxford, two Sudanese doctors are unable to begin master's courses at the University this October. This comes after the High Court dismissed their legal challenge to Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood's 'emergency brake' visa policy, which also affects applicants from Afghanistan, Cameroon, and Myanmar.

As the Oxford Sudanese Society stated in its recent announcement, the decision is a "collective penalty" against students who have faced extraordinary barriers in accessing higher education. Based on rhetoric accusing students from the four nations of "abusing" the visa system to claim asylum in the UK, it is symptomatic of an en vogue desire to pander to anti-immigration sentiments. This flies in the face of the educational meritocracy successive governments have said they wanted to achieve.

If the UK holds itself to be a centre of educational excellence, it cannot deny deserving students access to universities on political grounds. The Home Office's own figures, moreover, do not scream "abuse of the system". In 2025, the four affected nations made up only 0.7% of study visas granted; 380 of the 1,480 Sudanese students given visas between 2021 and 2025 went on to claim asylum.

The rhetoric used to prevent talented individuals from taking up deserved places at Oxford and elsewhere, therefore, appears to be no more than a string of buzzwords. Effectively, the government is punishing students for falling foul of the current political landscape's value systems. It did the same to the aforementioned Palestinian students, who could not be granted visas without registering biometric information that has been impossible to acquire in Gaza since 2023.

After a summer of uncertainty, at least six of these scholars reached Oxford last academic year, benefiting from the University's Palestine Crisis Sponsorship Scheme, which allowed them to carry out the biometrics process in Jordan. Yet many students without sponsorship remain unable to acquire the necessary documents. Some, who cannot meet the requirement of having to leave dependent families in a warzone, have had to make what one St Hilda's College offer-holder described as the "heartbreaking choice" to remain. Many are therefore as shut off from British education as their Sudanese counterparts.

> "If the UK holds itself to be a centre of educational excellence, it cannot deny deserving students access to universities on political grounds."

There is hypocrisy to this at every level. It is, of course, obvious that falsely claiming that students are "exploiting British generosity" contravenes both universities' efforts to attract diverse intellectual talent and the basic human right to education. But on a deeper level, we must examine British complicity, both contemporary and historical, in the current state of the countries the government has denied visa access to.

There are no visa offices in the Gaza Strip partly because it is being bombarded by a state the UK continues to have a defence relationship with. There are, arguably, conflicts in Sudan, Afghanistan, and Myanmar partly because of British actions dating from the peak of the British Empire to the present day – and it is largely because of these conflicts that student visa-holders would choose to seek asylum.

And if they were to seek asylum in such great numbers, why would it be a problem? Are we not facing a shortage of skilled, specialised minds, for example in the medical profession? Would the NHS not benefit from the government allowing students to study International Health, Genomic Medicine, or Health Service Improvement (a selection of the MSc courses that Sudanese and Palestinian offer-holders held places for), rather than blocking them from entering the country?

Most saddeningly, this decision disadvantages students aiming to use higher education to better ameliorate the problems facing their home nations. One of the Sudanese students barred from entering the country saw an education at Oxford as her way to "help rebuild health systems in a country devastated by war". It is paradoxical to take the current situation in Sudan as justification for preventing its students from accessing an education that could help lessen its severity.

Every student with an offer from Oxford deserves to take up their place, regardless of nationality. By denying a whole generation of students their future on trumped-up charges of asylum 'abuse', the government is dealing direct harm to both Britain and the wider world.

"Everyone has the right to education… higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit." (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 26(1))

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Creativity in careers

Honor Thompson's 'In defence of the dreamer' reminded me of the Faculty of English's introductory lecture. Hordes of misty-eyed first-years were informed that careers didn't matter for now, and that everything would work out in our Finals years. And now I am faced with the prospect of endless virtual assessments, AI interviews, and skills-focussed competency tests that seem utterly meaningless.

Earlier this term, the Careers Service glamorously unveiled their new name of 'Careers' (how exciting) and it seems a part of Oxford that many people in the humanities are hesitant to talk about, as if admitting to exploring career routes meant owning up to the increasing lack of entry level jobs. Perhaps, when facing the fact that Oxford will come to an end, it would be best to remember that more creative routes are possible.

Ben Woodward, English, *St Hugh's College*

Defining Oxford's identity

Anish Vedantham's claim that 'We should hate more' was unfortunately ironic in its argument. I enjoyed points raised on the nature of a good rival – one that, in his words, 'must be similar enough that beating them matters and different enough that you can pretend it proves something'. Cambridge certainly provides this. Regrettably, however, in trying to promote a stronger hatred of Cambridge, it gave 'the other side' far too much credit for boosting our own sense of identity, and even suggested towards the end that we should be grateful to the 'Tabs'.

The article scrabbled to pinpoint what even defines the Oxford student body, failing to reflect on our shared academic values as well as the consistent reputation of students and alumni, to name a few. While I thought the piece was an excellent read, and also agree that factors such as colleges dilute an overall sense of cohesion within the student population, Cambridge, though an excellent rival, doesn't produce this answer of identity for us – we can do that for ourselves.

Elizabeth Millett, Music, *Hertford College*

THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts

The greed of the colleges knows no bounds ('Exeter College to fund data centre in Oxford')

jemimalhunt via Instagram

The way my smile faded ('Oxford partnership allows OpenAI to use rare Bodleian texts to train ChatGPT')

crystal_2371q via Instagram

Those mandem don't even wear subfusc to exams or have collections and they think they're in the club ('We should hate more')

patrickragebaitman via Instagram

We boutta turn jesus college into a datacenter ('Exeter College to fund data centre in Oxford')

nicksu49 via Instagram

You wouldn't have been able to make this post without a data centre ('Exeter College to fund data centre in Oxford')

hpf_xz via Instagram

damn it i was hoping this would be sensual ('*One Night Only* (2026) and the death of romance')

anyawhitehouse via Instagram

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

A year abroad for all

LEO JONES

As Michaelmas rolls around once again, I open my phone to the unmistakable signs of a new academic year at Oxford. Society committee pleas, ads for upcoming club nights, and emails welcoming a new wave of freshers fill my inbox and feed. But this year, scrolling through those familiar notifications leaves me with a feeling I did not expect.

Now in my third year, the time has finally come for the long-anticipated, even longer-in-the-making 'year abroad'. While friends return to Oxford, I find myself watching the new academic year unfold from a distance – no collections to revise for, no frantic search for a last-minute BOP costume, and no Plush Thursday to inevitably mark the weekend drawing near.

As I sit writing this from Buenos Aires, Argentina, I feel deeply conflicted. Of course, there is a certain melancholy in watching friends slip so effortlessly back into the rhythms of university life. It can be oddly unsettling to see a place that has played such a significant part in my adult life carry on as though I had never left.

Yet simultaneously, I am glad not to be there. The concept of lining up for hall food, pulling an all-nighter in the library, or squeezing into the queue at Bully is significantly less appealing from 7,000 miles away. For all the nostalgia that comes with watching Oxford from afar, distance has also given me something I didn't realise was needed: perspective.

And no, this is not going to be a long rambling of how I 'found myself on my gap yah'. Although, somewhere between getting on the wrong bus to work and confidently preparing mate in entirely the wrong way, I have started to wonder why an experience this valuable should be reserved for students studying certain subjects.

There is something liberating about being somewhere where nobody knows your name, your college, or your subject. While abroad, I am no longer simply an Oxford student navigating the same routines of term-time life; I am an outsider, and, most importantly, a beginner again. The world suddenly feels much bigger than the few square miles I had grown accustomed to calling home.

It would be easy to romanticise this feeling. I am not Anthony Bourdain, travelling the world with a camera crew filming an episode of Parts Unknown. I am, instead, entirely reliant on a far less glamorous student loan, a questionably downloaded eSIM, and what appears to be a complete inability to read Google Maps.

Indeed, it can at times be overwhelming to think just how much I have left behind. Over two years' worth of friendships, routines and rituals do not simply disappear because you board a flight. Friends are still there, returning to university for their final year, before graduating and stepping into the increasingly structured world of work. From a distance, it can feel as though everyone else is moving forward along a path that I have temporarily stepped away from.

For my friends back in Oxford, that step is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. With 78% of graduates reportedly worried about finding employment, and 71.9% already in professional-level roles within just 15 months of graduating, it is hardly surprising that the job market can feel overwhelmingly competitive. Talks of internships now dominate a FaceTime catch-up, and for many, there is little choice but to climb to the first rung of the corporate ladder as soon as possible. The opportunity to travel, experiment, and explore a different way of living (both personally and professionally) can all too easily be pushed aside in favour of getting on with the 'more serious' route of starting a career.

That is precisely what makes the time away so valuable. It is a rare opportunity to step away from the well-trodden path for a while, without having to abandon it altogether. As more UK universities begin to offer years abroad across a wider range of subjects, it seems worth asking why Oxford should be any different.

The benefits are far from merely personal. I am now working at an Argentine news network, using a language I have spent years studying, but in an environment where getting the grammar right is rather less theoretical than it is in a classroom. Language students are fortunate in this respect: learning a language inevitably means learning something about the people and culture that speak it. But what about everyone else?

At its core, it is an exercise in empathy and human connection. A PPE student can encounter political and economic ideas outside the British context; a historian can experience another country's relationship with its past; a scientist can apply their technical skills in a professional environment shaped by an entirely different set of assumptions. With funding available to make these experiences more accessible, there is little reason for the year abroad to remain the preserve of language students. Studying something is one thing; being forced to apply it somewhere unfamiliar is another.

With this may come the feeling of being out of one's depth. But, certainly for me, that is the most important part. At a time when immigration, integration, and national identity occupy so much of British political debate, there is value in experiencing what it actually feels like to enter a society in which you do not automatically understand the language, the customs, or the unwritten rules.

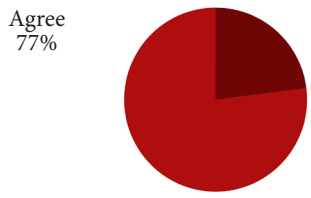
Here, I am a newcomer trying to work out how things are done. More than once, I have forgotten to kiss the cheek of a superior at work, or have asked for completely the wrong thing at a supermarket. With that comes a certain humility, as you become constantly more aware that integration is not simply a matter of arriving somewhere and expecting to feel at home – an all-too common attitude of 'Brits abroad'.

And perhaps that is the greatest argument for going abroad. Not because everyone needs to spend a Bourdain-esque year in South America, or because life in Oxford is somehow too small. It is because it is surprisingly easy to mistake the familiar for the universal. Living somewhere else forces you to question assumptions you did not even realise you had – about work, education, politics and culture, or even something as simple as whether a greeting calls for a firm handshake or a warm embrace and kiss on the cheek.

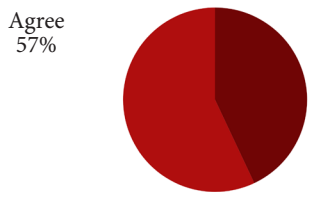
Eventually, I will return to Oxford, and life will presumably slip back into its familiar rhythms. But I hope to return with a little more perspective on the bubble I have spent two years inhabiting – less convinced that Oxford is the centre of the world, and considerably more curious about everything beyond it.

THE VERDICT

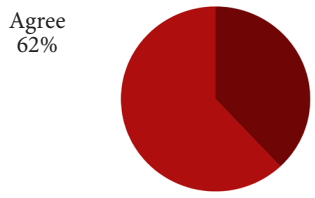
More courses should have a year abroad



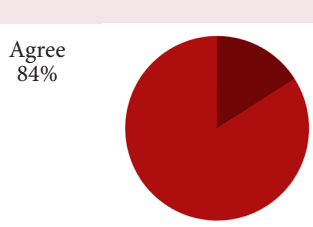
All offer-holders should be able to come to Oxford



Upward social mobility at Oxford creates guilt



A good Oxford work/life/sleep balance does not exist



I no longer want to be an astronaut

ZOË MCGUIRE

The Millennium Prize Problems are a set of seven famous unsolved maths problems collated by the Clay Mathematics Institute, each with a $1 million bounty. They range in respective subfields – for instance, P versus NP asks about computational complexity classes, while the Riemann Hypothesis, perhaps the most famous, seeks to characterise the non-trivial zeroes of a well-studied function on the complex plane.

The very fact that these problems exist contributed in no small part to my desire to become a maths researcher. For me, and I'm sure for many others, the dream of solving one of these 'unsolvable' problems carries more significance than just the cash reward. It's only slightly about the reputation and fame it would bring. To the mathematician, the beauty of the problem and the satisfaction of conquering it are impetus enough. Indeed, when the first (and, until recently, only) one of these problems fell in 2003 at the hands of noted recluse Grigori Perelman, he declined the money and the Fields Medal – the maths version of the Nobel Prize – that came with it.

Perelman's solution to the Poincaré conjecture was to young mathematicians in 2003 what Apollo 11 was to aspiring children playing with toy rockets in 1969. It proved these challenges are not insurmountable – after all, if Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, why shouldn't I be able to?

The second Millennium Prize problem gave way just this September. The Navier-Stokes problem, a problem of fluid dynamics, was solved.

By OpenAI.

It's worth acknowledging the ongoing dispute about the publication of this solution. Allegedly, OpenAI (the company behind ChatGPT) gained unauthorised access to research by Australian mathematician Tristan Buckmaster and Anthropic staff member Levent Alpöge, who were independently working on the problem while using advanced models of Anthropic's own large language model (LLM), Claude. This has understandably opened up a wider conversation about plagiarism and the ethics of using AI in research. But while this is certainly morally dubious, it's not what concerns me. Regardless of whose solution this was, it was certainly found using heavy AI assistance.

> "The very fact that these problems exist contributed in no small part to my desire to become a maths researcher. For me, and I'm sure for many others, the dream of solving one of these 'unsolvable' problems carries more significance than just the cash reward."

Just last week, OpenAI dropped 372 papers covering various well-known unsolved problems in mathematics and computer science. As someone in the unfortunate position of soon applying for a PhD in maths, it seems to be harder than ever to get one's foot in the door. How can I, a bright-eyed but inexperienced undergraduate, compete with thousands of machines trawling through the sum of all human knowledge in parallel?

The irony in this situation is not lost on me. Mathematicians and computer scientists have developed tools capable of stealing the jobs of millions of artists and writers worldwide, and now our chickens are coming home to roost. That said, though, while perhaps a generation of future software developers and quant traders may find themselves a few hundred grand shorter each year, the prospective maths researcher will not suffer as much financially. It's notoriously underpaid, and is out-earned by a large proportion of jobs that don't even require a degree.

The mathematician doesn't study maths because it pays well. To quote Poincaré himself, the mind behind the first Millennium problem to be solved, "he studies it because he takes pleasure in it, and he takes pleasure in it because it is beautiful". Even if it no longer pays, the artist can still paint. The author can still write. The mathematician's very canvas is stolen from them, and they don't even have the satisfaction of knowing they could have done a better job – anyone with a semblance of taste is disgusted by AI art and would refuse to read an AI novel. But it is brilliant at maths.

I don't have a way to spin this in a positive manner. I don't like being bleak, but I can't see a future for me in maths anymore. Any unsolved question will soon be munched up and spat out by a computer, and there'll be nothing left to aspire to.

The stars are going out, and I no longer want to be an astronaut.



Image credit: Project Apollo Archive, public domain via Wikimedia Commons.

No Greek life doesn't mean no rape culture



Behind Oxford's elite facade, everyday misogyny thrives on silence and jokes – but student activists are pushing back with 'casual feminism'

RÜYA ORAL

CW: sexual assault, sexual harassment, rape, drugging

In November 2024, *The Cornell Daily Sun* broke the news of a sexual assault reported to the Cornell University Police Department, alleged to have taken place at the university's Chi Phi fraternity house. The case was brought up again in the student publication on 18th September, after the victim, identified as 'Jane Doe', filed a civil complaint against the university, the fraternity chapter, seven current and former students, and related organisations including a campus bar and several university sororities. She claimed to have been gang-raped by several men

> None of the hush-hush behaviour that typically surrounded criminal conduct, behaviour that suggested people knew what was happening was wrong, was present here – it was completely out in the open.

belonging to the fraternity, who knew she was too intoxicated to consent and further coerced her into taking ketamine and other drugs. Part of the evidence cited in the complaint is an image taken from a Snapchat group chat, wherein one of the defendants encourages other fraternity brothers to join in the assault by directing them towards "free pussy" on the premises. None of the 57 members of said group chat have yet come forward or claimed to have intervened.

According to the lawsuit, after an initial suspension of the fraternity chapter's activities, the university's investigation resulted in two of the accused being expelled, while the rest were "offered a chance to mitigate conduct by submitting essays". The Tompkins County District Attorney's Office has since reopened a criminal investigation into the case, though District Attorney Matthew Van Houten claims the victim's initial report contained no accusations of non-consensual behaviour. Doe will be allowed to present her case before a grand jury, two years after she was allegedly forced to leave the university following the university and local police department's inaction. Cornell allegedly refused to refund her tuition payments, though she reportedly felt she would never feel safe enough to return to the university. At the time of writing, the five students who remain at Cornell are on track to graduate in the next year. Many have high-profile jobs lined up.

Every news and social media platform I have browsed in the last week has been flooded with further details and reactions to this story. Some respond in anger, some in disbelief. Some have found the strength to share their own experiences with collegiate rape culture. None of the stories ends happily, and with the horrifying rollback of protections under Title IX (a civil rights law that bars sex-based discrimination in education) by the current US administration, it's hard to believe that this or any subsequent ones will.

There is no doubt in my mind that there are men I know, men I share social and academic spaces with, who are reading about this story and pompously thinking to themselves: "Well, that's the kind of thing that would only happen in America." While it is undeniable that Greek life has fostered a particularly vicious culture that permits, if not glorifies, gender-based violence (as well as elitism and racial discrimination – whether Greek life should be allowed to retain its current standing without serious reform, or whether total dissolution is called for, is a separate yet increasingly urgent conversation), the building blocks that create this toxicity are reflected in many prestigious UK universities, including Oxford.

A 2025 Office for Students sexual misconduct survey found that nearly twice as many students reported sexual harassment at selective universities compared to 'low tariff' universities. In recent years, Oxford in particular has faced backlash for the mishandling of sexual misconduct cases involving students and staff associated with the university. Though institutional malpractice certainly both emboldens perpetrators and weakens victims, it's easy to look at official statistics and famous faces and forget that unhealthy sexual attitudes often emerge casually, unremarkably, and without any big names to blame.

When I was in high school, I knew this guy – let's call him John Smith – whom everybody in my year affectionately called 'Consent Smith'. The nickname emerged from an instance where he had engaged in some consensually dubious sexual acts with a girl whose identity is unknown to me, but was very public information for most of my classmates. Strangely, though, none of them seemed to recall the origin story when they referred to him this way. It was always said with a laugh and a playful punch on the shoulder, and received with a smirk and an eye-roll. I'm ashamed to admit it, but the normalcy lulled me into silence, as I imagine was the case for many of my peers. None of the hush-hush behaviour that typically surrounded criminal conduct, behaviour that suggested people knew what was happening was wrong, was present here – it was completely out in the open. It was funny.

Since starting at Oxford, I have borne witness to countless cases nearly identical to that of John Smith. Variations of 'rapist', 'molestor', 'nonce', and 'paedophile' are shouted across hallways, in tones anything other than accusatory. The addressees may be completely innocent, or they may be people publicly known to have displayed sexually inappropriate behaviour. Those that claim to have been sexually harassed at the hands of these friendly 'molestors' are told not

> The plausible deniability is strengthened by the implication that his friends wouldn't be joking about it if it were serious. Of course, what these people consider 'serious' is anybody's guess.

to flatter themselves. He does this to everyone, they say. Don't go thinking you're special now. The plausible deniability is strengthened by the implication that his friends wouldn't be joking about it if it were serious. Of course, what these people consider 'serious' is anybody's guess.

As women, we are conditioned to think about sex as private, if not illicit and shameful. The casual violations we face every day that we are told to shrug off – but often end up internalising instead – only exacerbate these negative associations. This is part of the reason why, according to a 2021 investigation, 83% of the 3.4 million acts of sexual violence committed every year in the UK go unreported. 'Locker room talk' is so clichéd it almost feels removed from reality, but the Chi Phi text chain proves that, amongst men, sex is talked about as a winning game where the opposing side never stood a chance. Fraternities, as well as, say,





rugby and football clubs, are able to reinforce this model of thinking through ritualistic synchrony and cyclical violence. As long as hazing is a requirement for men to join masculine social spheres, they will view casual acts of violence as social rather than violatory. As long as other men continue to reaffirm this behaviour as unserious, funny, something to bond over, 2.8 million Jane Does who are never heard from will continue to emerge.

Perhaps the most effective tool we have at our disposal against casual sexism is casual feminism. Whilst it is our hard-earned prerogative to call for radical change, calling out misogynistic and sexually inappropriate behaviour we perceive in our day-to-day interactions is equally important to driving institutional change. One of the greatest resources that Oxford has available to promote casual feminism is collegiate feminist societies. Despite its century-long history as a women's college, St Hugh's College has only had an active Feminist Society for just over a year. Co-founders Eleanor Suh and Alex Cutmore say carrying the legacy of the college's history was part of their reason for setting up the society. "It's important to honour our history," Alex tells me, "keeping alive what notable alumni, like Emily Wilding Davison, fought for is one of the central aims of the society". Eleanor agrees, contending that "Oxford has a very male history in a lot of ways – FemSoc is one way of counteracting that".

However, it is important to both the founders that FemSoc is a space that allows for communication between students of all genders. "In our experience, the men who attend FemSoc meetings tend to have the right attitude. We are yet to have anyone in attendance who only showed up to make a joke out of everything," Alex says. "It's up to the individual space to decide their own guidelines regarding who can attend, but I believe that FemSoc is first and foremost a political space, rather than a representative or social one. The primary factor that should draw people to the society is that they are feminists, not that they are women. To me, it is imperative that all people are welcome – we should be united by our politics, rather than our identities." I ask them whether they think a tangible stigma inhibits men from contributing meaningfully to feminist discussions.

"I have had conversations with some men who believe they cannot come to FemSoc, even though they identify as feminists, because of a belief that the space isn't for them. They don't want to 'speak over women'." Eleanor thinks this is a weak excuse. "You can come and just listen! I've found that many men intellectually present as feminists, but don't apply the principles of feminism to their own lives. Part of our objective as a society is to make feminism practical and visible, and not have it sidelined as an abstract, academic ideal. Having a male attendance at meetings where we explicitly discuss topics like sexual assault is necessary. I find it very upsetting when people think they are not allowed to participate in feminist spaces, because having people voice their varied perspectives is what leads to tangible progress."

I wonder what their experience with rape culture has been, and what role they think the society plays in combating unhealthy sexual attitudes. "Rape culture in university spaces is mostly upheld through humour," Alex asserts. "What makes hazing in social spaces centred around drinking and sports so powerful is that nobody takes it very seriously. They are means of socialising that are well-integrated into college life. Greek life has an added element of having to pay to become a member, which compounds the corrupted power dynamics, but in order to participate in many collegiate societies here at Oxford, you have to implicitly agree to not interfere with the rituals of that particular social sphere." FemSoc is both a foil and an accessible alternative to these social spaces. "I believe that FemSoc is a passive threat to rape culture. It's not just a deterrent, but a way of acknowledging that there isn't a monoculture at our college." People who condemn these male-dominated rituals do exist and, using the society as a vehicle, are less afraid to make themselves known, she says. This is a remarkable advantage for all the female members of the college. "Even if you don't come to meetings, just knowing that there are like-minded people around you can be comforting."

> As long as hazing is a requirement for men to join masculine social spheres, they will view casual acts of violence as social rather than violatory.

Alex and Eleanor agree that despite the positive impact that FemSoc has had on their lives, as well as those of all its members, it is difficult to quantify whether there has been a tangible decrease in sexism in college spaces. The bulk of the necessary changes must come from men themselves. What the Cornell case reveals is not that there are some deranged men, or that educational institutions are ill-equipped to respond to sexual violence, or even that the justice system frequently fails victims. What it has successfully, awfully brought to light is that for every seven men who commit unimaginable acts of sexual violence, there are 50 men who watch silently. I want to say I hope this is where the cycle breaks, and men start speaking out against each other. But let's start with immediately achievable goals: I hope this will urge the men I know to have the decency not to laugh.

Image credits: [banner] 颐园居, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons; [top left] Women's eNews, CC BY 2.0 via Flickr; [top right] Antonio Reis, with permission.

Oxford's obsession with being busy is pretty performative, right?

Oxford students treat a full diary as proof of worth, but we risk turning privilege into pressure

FINBAR DINNEN

Soon, it'll be that time again. You've hit Week 5 of Michaelmas, found a minute to breathe, and now you're looking at the blurry image of your family at the other end of a video call. You're rattling off the items on your calendar: the work due next week, the society events you're heading to, the time slots you've meticulously booked for your hobbies and your mates. It's a smooth recitation at this point – after all, you did have the chance to rehearse it earlier with that friend you bumped into on Broad Street. And the only question you were asked was: "How are you?"

At Oxford, it seems like we get used to talking about our lives as nothing more than a summary of the things we've accomplished lately, or at least are just about to. The longer your list, the better you must be doing, because to be busy is to be making the absolute most of your time here – and who doesn't want to be doing that?

What this actually creates is a culture of 'busyness' in which having a full diary – regardless of what with – is valuable, and downtime is dangerous. It's an attitude that has managed to pervade everything from our everyday conversations to the way in which we (and the University) present ourselves online.

For one, the popularity of Oxford 'day in the life' content means we're never short of reminders that reinforce this mindset, even from official channels. Examples of the typical student day on the English Faculty website cite "my busy day" and wall-to-wall activity, where even the smallest lulls are filled with something worth mentioning. YouTube videos offering a glimpse into life at Oxford and attracting millions of views paint similar pictures of days with little blank space on the canvas. *Cherwell*'s own depiction makes no bones about an "intense" lifestyle and "long to-do lists".

You might be quick to dismiss this as content produced for its entertainment value, and there would be some truth to that; no one clicks on a five-minute read about a midday lie-in. But in doing so, you might also miss the important truth that the things we say about ourselves often reflect the way we talk to each other. The language of these students sharing their schedules is used thousands of times each day, in coffee shops and colleges, kitchen catch-ups and corridor chitchat. If it's one that reflects the same romanticisation of hurtling from one thing to the next, then the case for a cult of busyness is clear.

Oxford students aren't alone in this either; a culture that prizes constant productivity seems to be an almost universal university experience. Last year, London School of Economics student paper *The Beaver* published a piece on the 'performative busyness' there, describing an attitude of "relentless hustle" that will ring familiar to the reader who knows all too well what it's like to define success by the sheer volume of studying they've managed to pile up. American accents are saying the same at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where *The Daily Cardinal* writes that "rest starts to feel unearned unless it follows exhaustion". Just like in Oxford, to have free time means to fall behind – whether academically, socially, or even simply in how much enrichment you're extracting from your university experience.

This is the crux of the issue, and, importantly, the reason why the belief in busyness is more than just a performance. Having a lot to do earns you respect, yes, but these writers suggest the motivation is more intrinsic than simple social currency. Students are busying themselves not only because they worry that their peers will find their level of activity inadequate, but because of the far more dangerous fear that they aren't doing enough for themselves and their futures.

What is left, then, is a way of talking in which 'making the most' of your time is casually conflated with taking on as much as possible. If plans with friends or recreational pursuits must be considered 'things to do' to meet this high and rising bar, then so be it. We're busy, and we're proud of it. Some of us are so busy that we decided to spend the summer vac writing about it.

Where has this come from? And what's keeping it up?

Naturally, some of this reflects the fierce competition between students. 62% of undergraduates get straight to work in high-skilled jobs after they leave Oxford, concentrated around industries like finance, consulting, law, and technology. Many of these will be competing directly with one another for a small number of opportunities at a handful of top firms, where any edge on a CV could make all the difference. You can't afford to feel like you're wasting precious years that you could spend adding to this at university, especially given the spectacular range of ways to do so that we're so fortunate to have at our disposal.

> Students are busying themselves not only because they worry that their peers will find their level of activity inadequate, but because of the far more dangerous fear that they aren't doing enough for themselves and their futures.

Another look through *Cherwell* archives confirms this: at least part of our desire to be busy comes from an awareness of just how talented the people entering the same job market are. An article debating whether Oxford works too hard describes one student's acute awareness that here, you might find "your neighbour is a world debating champion fluent in 5 languages or your college mum has already been headhunted by NASA". Better get working if you want to keep up with that.

University is a uniquely difficult place to manage these expectations; much of your workload is organised on your own time, and there's no clear limit on the amount you need to do, even before all the extracurriculars come in. There's no '9-to-5', no office to clock out of at the end of the day, and no space to leave your work behind.

Still, despite the stereotypes, Oxford students are often at pains to demonstrate that they do know how to have fun, and competition is far from the full story. The desire to 'be busy' extends beyond flashcards and job applications, into the activities intended to be more exciting than productive.

The implication is that the more you do, the more you get out of your time; busyness is valuable because it shows you're taking every opportunity you can. This gives you cause to be suspicious of your spare moments, to worry about the things that will rush past you if you dare to spend a minute standing still.

Economists will be familiar with the term 'labour theory of value', which holds that the true worth of a good is determined by the total amount of labour needed to produce it. We risk applying the same logic to our time at Oxford, worrying that we can't be having the best experience possible if we're not doing all we can – a dangerous value system when the list of fun pastimes is practically endless. Besides, the theory has been rejected by mainstream economics for over a century.

So why are we so preoccupied with being busy? The best argument, perhaps, is that university represents a golden window for young people, one in which it's really possible to pack each day with the things that excite us. Our daily workload isn't bound by a convenient time window, but neither is our chance to explore beyond it.

We live within minutes of our mates, surrounded by societies, sports teams, and student productions. And it's not just that we can busy ourselves, but also that we should – ahead of us lies an increasingly difficult working world, above us the hefty amount we've given up to be here. We have a precious period on our hands that we can't afford to waste.

More than that, this is a precious period made available for just eight weeks at a time, adding to the feeling that such opportunity is remarkably fleeting. The lengthy holiday awaiting at the end of each term seems to be a green light to reach breakneck pace in those two months, a whispered suggestion that it'll be over before you know it and that there's plenty of time to be tired later.

So, is it bad for us?

The fact that time at Oxford is brief and full of chances to do exciting things is not a particular revelation, nor is the insightful observation that we try to take as many of them as we can. Neither is a new theme to a University that is famous for attracting students ambitious and talented across a huge range of disciplines, including but never limited to academia. The reason we talk of a 'cult of busyness', then, is not because the lives of students look drastically different – it's because the conversation has changed.

Instead of recognising that we're able – and willing – to be so busy because so many interesting things are happening in the community, so many incredible people around us, we've begun to treat the Oxford experience like a burden. We see busyness as a standard we'd be wasteful not to reach. We're rattling off hobbies to reassure ourselves that ours is not a fortunate position we're letting fall by the wayside. These things aren't, and never have been, the bar for belonging in the university community – what's changed is how we talk to ourselves.

This doesn't mean we're any less aware of how much we're getting from our three, four, maybe six years here; that much, at least, is the same. The 'cult of busyness' arises solely from that negative attitude towards it, one that frames busyness more as a bare minimum than a remarkable result. It exists only insofar as the language we use to describe what we do, the way we perceive other people telling us what they've been up to. In fact, we're making the same choices about how we spend our time – busy culture or not – and explaining it differently. You wouldn't be part of a society, go to an event, or make plans with your favourite people just to avoid an idle evening; so why talk about them like a tute sheet with a looming deadline?

Language that puts a premium on productivity can only be unhelpful if it warps the activities meant to bring us joy. It attaches the pressure of necessity to opportunities that should excite, turning things a younger you might've dreamed of into another job to be done. Oxford is worse than anywhere for a pressure like that, precisely because it's so rich with great people to meet and interesting things to do; treating it as a task can make it seem like a mountain.

Nevertheless, it's a mountain firmly of our own making – and not one we need to climb. By reminding ourselves that we're so busy because of the abundance of once-in-a-lifetime experiences we're fortunate enough to have in our handful of years here, we can reframe the conversation. Without losing any of the achievement that makes university worth the sacrifice, we can cast off the 'cult of busyness' and start to look more lightly at how we spend our time. And a simple "how are you?" can go back to being just that – a friendly question, not an interrogation of accomplishment.

Illustration credit: Sylvie Borez for Cherwell.



Cherwell

MT26

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John Evelyn



I'm afraid to report, dear readers, that as the days draw shorter, so too has the committee's patience. Particularly with me. Oh well, Keep Calm and Carrie On, we suppose. But worry not! Our very own Miss(guided) Marple has begun the termly witchhunt. Whilst one may think it easy to locate a literary genius amongst this cesspit of hacks, it seems we have successfully thrown her off the scent. John Evelyn does not apologise and will in fact continue to shamelessly throw hacks under the bus.

Speaking of how what (or who) you don't know can't hurt you, let us discuss Andy Burnedout. #Titanic has veered entirely off course. Meanwhile, Blank Slate drowns in candidates begging for a spot on her life-raft. When asked for comment, Andy told Jevelyn that "everything is fine", yet his Woody Woodpecker tone has started to sound more like a scream.

Regardless, we at Jevelynn commend Burnedout's sportsmanship in loaning Fifty-One-May and Olaf to the other side. However, one does wonder whether he is being merciful or myopic.

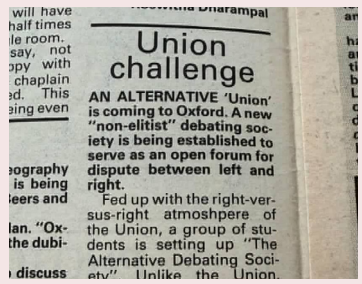
Unfortunately, #Titanic has been sinking while dear old Andy approaches the end of his tether. The President Neglect's vehement backing of #Titanic during the membership drive has left Andy Burnedout looking more like Fear Starmer by the day. It's okay Andy, doing four hundred tours and every hour of Freshers' Fair is tricky, and it's definitely not like other people wanted to.

Unfortunately, the LinkedIn goblins have abandoned their sacred texts. Reports to our hotline warn us that a total of ten Instagram handles were exchanged during Sunday's Prats and Prejudice. Five of them were just the appointed committee meeting each other after yet another reshuffle. Solid work, gang.

Burnedout, Dershowitz and Joey Essex belted a delightful rendition of the national anthem in a circle so hostile to one another it rather resembled a chorus line. However, Essex quickly deserted the disparate bunch after realising that Blank-Slate's 'non-slate' had firmly withdrawn from the typical Tory chorus.

Whilst Dershowitz' recent feature on PoliticsJOE has shown us how Lowe he can go, the question remains: with only a few weeks until nominations, how low can the rest of this cast stoop?

ARCHIVES



Union challenge

AN ALTERNATIVE 'Union' is coming to Oxford. A new "non-elitist" debating society is being established to serve as an open forum for dispute between left and right.

Fed up with the right-versus-right atmoshpere of the Union, a group of students is setting up "The Alternative Debating Society". Unlike the Union,

If this week's Jevelyn also made you completely sick of the Union, you may be so inclined to do exactly what a group of Oxford students sought to accomplish in 1983: establish an alternative Oxford Union. "The Alternative Debating Society" is the focus of a particularly miniscule Cherwell article, close to what we would now publish in our 'News Shorts'.

Describing itself as "non-elitist", membership to the Society supposedly did not come with a price tag, perhaps disappointing to those accustomed to lavish debate dinners. The society ultimately aimed to "serve as an open forum for dispute between left and right" following criticism of the Union's "right-versus-right atmosphere" – criticism that has, famously, never been made of the Union, before or since.

At the society's first event, debaters would have dealt with the prompt: "CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) appeals to the emotions but not to the intellect." The motion itself is perhaps the only detail of the article to place us in the 1980s, rather than 2026.

EDITORIAL



Anish Vedantham
Deputy Editor: Features

By the time this edition comes out, I will have survived two consecutive weeks of *Cherwell* print production, Freshers' Week, and the first week of Michaelmas. As JCR President at Somerville and Deputy Editor for Features, I have spent the better part of a fortnight running between college meetings, Freshers' events, and the Choffice, occasionally remembering that I am also, ostensibly, here to get a degree.

It was therefore particularly unfortunate that, somewhere in the middle of all of this, I found myself editing an article about Oxford's culture of busyness, an article I had commissioned during the golden days of the long vac where I had nothing to do but hang out with friends.

Reading through its examination of the Oxford student's pathological need to fill every waking moment with something vaguely productive, I couldn't help but ask: "Is this f*cking play about us?"

The article argues that Oxford students have developed a tendency to read their lives as an endless exercise in maximising opportunities, becoming so preoccupied with making the most of our time here to the point that even having fun has become another obligation to fulfil.

Of course, I would like to think that my own schedule is entirely justified. There are newspapers to produce, freshers to welcome, and an undergraduate student body to represent. I am sure everyone else with a colour-coded Google Calendar has equally compelling reasons for their predicament.

The more uncomfortable observation is that I genuinely enjoy most of it. Sure, my 5th hour fighting with InDesign isn't particularly fun, but I like being involved, I like the people I get to work with, and I know that I would be bored if I suddenly had nothing to do.

It's ironic that I've spent this editorial whinging about my workload, so I suppose the article is right that I ought to spend less time worrying about making the most of Oxford and more time actually enjoying it. To anyone who I've whizzed past while on my way to yet another meeting, my apologies. To my friends from home and my parents, I promise I haven't forgotten you. I've just been very busy, which, having edited an entire article about why that's a terrible excuse, I appreciate is not a particularly good defence.



Rüya Oral
Deputy Editor: Culture

As my final year comes into full swing, I'm finding myself feeling terribly melancholic about every mundane thing that is part of my life at Oxford. Every time I drag mud into my room from getting stuck in the rain for 20 minutes on the way back from Tesco (after having bought a double pack of Jaffa cakes instead of whatever it is I actually made the trek there to buy) feels like it might be the last. Lecturers I once privately rallied against appear to be misunderstood saints; classes that went on too long suddenly slip away; plays I've hated, club nights I've regretted, both late nights and early mornings I've complained about… it all looks rose-coloured with my retrospective goggles on.

I envy the freshers their greenness – I would give anything to be totally in over my head and unaware that I'm about to start the greatest chapter of my life again. I've ultimately resolved to leave both the melancholy of this term and the cynicism of the first two years of my degree behind, and commit to savouring everything that Oxford has left to offer me.

That is precisely what *Cherwell* has been for me these last two terms (and prior to that as a reader): a place to enjoy, savour, and commit to memory the experiences unique to Oxford life. I cherish every cultural event I attend for the paper – the good, bad, and ugly – if only because it belongs to my Oxford years. I hope future contributors can taste the delicious balance of writing a seething review about something you kind of loved, because you did it with special people in a special place, too. It's a flavour like no other.

Professor Avi Shlaim on Iraq, Zionism, and belonging

'I am proud of being a Jew, and equally proud of being an Arab.'



SABA AHMADZADEH NOUGHANI

Long before he became one of Israel's 'new historians', Avi Shlaim was a boy in Israel, self-conscious about the sound of his first language. Years earlier, that same boy had been growing up in Baghdad, a city that had been home to Iraqi Jews for two millennia, in a Jewish family that called Iraq home and felt, in his words, "very Iraqi".

> "We were Iraqis whose religion happened to be Jewish. We had a sense of belonging, rather than feeling that we were a persecuted minority. We were not aliens, we were not intruders, we were not strangers."
> **– Avi Shlaim**

In Baghdad, Shlaim recalls only speaking Arabic growing up, and tells me the other main aspect of Arab culture that remained with him throughout his life was food: "very spicy" rice and chicken, a staple in his Iraqi household. Upon moving to Israel, he encountered Ashkenazi food which he said was "culturally alien" and, in comparison, tasted "incredibly bland and boring" to him.

"Religion didn't mean very much to me then," Shlaim says, as he describes his family as being culturally, rather than religiously, Jewish. Equally, he felt "very Iraqi", and that in Iraq, his family "felt very much that this was our home. This was our country. We did well there. The Jews in general did very well".

Shlaim points to the thriving Jewish communities that existed throughout the Middle East, the Levant, North Africa, Iran, and Turkey before the creation of the state of Israel: "We were Iraqis whose religion happened to be Jewish."

For him, a sense of belonging is the crucial difference between his experience in Iraq and that of Jews in Europe. "Iraq didn't have a Jewish problem", he says, describing this as a problem that pertained instead to European Jews, in particular in Germany. In Iraq, however, "we had a sense of belonging, rather than feeling that we were a persecuted minority". "We were not aliens, we were not intruders, we were not strangers."

The turning point, as he sees it, was the establishment of the state of Israel on 14th May 1948. Following this, "any Arab who didn't like Jews could say, 'You are foreigners. You don't belong here'". Shlaim also singles out the Farhud, a violent pogrom against the Jewish population of Baghdad that took place on 1st and 2nd June 1941, as a pivotal moment for Arab-Jews. However, while Zionist historiography has often claimed the Farhud as evidence of pervasive antisemitism in the Arab world, Shlaim rejects this interpretation: "I don't deny that there was an antisemitic element in it, but I attribute it mainly to British colonialism and the British policy of divide and rule and the British choice of the Jews as a scapegoat after the nationalist revolt of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani."

This event was traumatic for the Jewish community. In his memoir *Three Worlds*, Shlaim argues that Arab-Jews were caught between Zionism and nationalism.

His own family, however, firmly belonged to the mainstream, which was non-nationalist and non-Zionist. Shlaim recalls once asking his mother, who always "loved talking about the wonderful Muslim friends we had in Baghdad", whether their family had any Zionist friends. She responded: "No, Zionism is an Ashkenazi thing. It's nothing to do with us."

For Shlaim, his family's attitude was "very typical and representative of the mainstream attitude towards Zionism". His family were "Iraqis who were happy to stay in Iraq" and "Zionism was something alien", something which "didn't have the slightest appeal" to his Iraqi-Jewish family or community in Baghdad.

Shlaim says the alienation went both ways: "The leaders of the Zionist movement looked down on Arabs as backward and primitive", and they also "looked down on Arab-Jews as part of a backward and unenlightened society." Indeed, his memoir opens with a scene from his childhood in which he feels embarrassed speaking to his father in Arabic in front of his non-Arab-Jewish friends.

In *Three Worlds*, Shlaim challenges the idea that Israel was a haven rescuing Iraqi Jews from antisemitism. "I say that the Zionist movement was a ruthless and exclusive movement that only cared about Jews and didn't care about Arabs, and that the state of Israel, the Mossad, played a part in uprooting Arab-Jews from their homes and bringing them to Israel."

He tells me that his family's migration from Iraq to Israel was not something they actively chose: "My parents didn't really understand how we were catapulted, how we were uprooted from Iraq, where we were very happy, and landed in this European-style country." His mother found the transition from Iraq to Israel "really traumatic" but later recovered. His father never did.

He makes it clear that the encouraged migration was not a humanitarian mission nor noble support for Jews in trouble. Rather, it was intended to serve the interest of the newly born Israeli state, which was "very short of manpower". When asked what his evidence for this claim was, Shlaim spoke about his research, which found that three out of five bombs that went off on the streets of Iraq between April 1950 and June 1951, which targeted Jewish gathering places and a synagogue in Baghdad, were instigated by the Mossad through Jewish Zionist activists. This led to panic-driven urgency to leave Iraq, and helped accelerate the exodus of roughly 120,000 Iraqi Jews through Operation Ezra and Nehemiah.

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He also tells me about an elderly friend of his mother's, Yakov Kuli, who worked in the Zionist underground, and confessed to forging documents and paying bribes to encourage Aliyah, the immigration of Jewish people to the land of Israel, and named a colleague, Yusef Basri, as a Mossad controller in Iran. Basri and another Mossad operative who planted the bombs, Shalom Salih Shalom, were convicted and executed by Iraqi authorities in 1951.

Shlaim's Zionist critics instead argue that the main reason for the exodus was not Operation Ezra and Nehemiah, but persecution of the Jews by the Iraqi government after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. In response to these claims, Shlaim says: "I don't deny that there was persecution, but the bombs on Jewish premises was another factor that has to be taken into account." He also says that even if not one Iraqi Jew had left because of them, he would still condemn Israel: "Israel wasn't created in order to make life for Jews in the Arab world unsafe."

I ask Shlaim how he, as an Arab-Jew himself, explains why many Arab-Jews look down on other Arabs, or reject their Arab identity. Shlaim replies that while the Zionist narrative says that Arab-Jews were hostile to Arabs because they lived with them, "because they 'knew what they were like', because 'the Arabs only respect the language of force'". He rejects the premise that it grew out of their experience of life in Arab countries, saying "the experience, certainly, of my family's experience, was not a negative one. It was a very positive one, living with Arabs".

The hostility, he says, was learned later, when Mizrahi Jews in Israel were "indoctrinated to see the Arabs as the enemy and to hate Arabs". He felt it himself at school, where he was only taught the Zionist narrative of the conflict: "I never learned anything else... we were only taught the history of the Jews in Europe." His education in Israel involved "an attempt to erase Arab roots, to erase Arab history, to systematically de-Arabise anything that was Arab, including

the language". Shlaim points to Arab and Iraqi Jewish writers such as Sami Michael but says they "never entered the canon of Israeli literature", as well as noting that there are "endless memoirs by European Jews and American Jews," yet by comparison, "there are very few memoirs by Arab-Jews like mine". As a result, his memoir became a way to "assert my right to write our history as I understand it". Shlaim would like all people, young and old, to understand from his memoir that "Zionism changed the course of Middle East history".

The rich history of the Arab-Jews is certainly absent from not only the Israeli school textbooks that Shlaim encountered, but from political and historical discourse, especially with regard to the creation of the state of Israel. When asked whether the history of this community is misunderstood, Shlaim is quick to respond: "The whole history of the Jews of Iraq prior to 1950 is not just misunderstood. It's completely absent."

When asked why the history of Arab-Jews has received very little attention in wider discussions of the creation of Israel, Shlaim explains that European Jews were dominant in the making and identity-building of the state of Israel, "they gave it a Eurocentric identity". "They didn't want to be part of the Middle East, but they regarded Israel because of its values and its culture as part of the West".

Regarding his own personal schooling experience in the newly established state of Israel, Shlaim recalls carrying "a big chip on my shoulder and an inferiority complex for being an Iraqi boy," something that governed his relationship with Israeli society and held him back at school. He did not challenge or rebel against this social order; instead, he "accepted it as a fact that I was inferior at the bottom of the pyramid".

The change in his internal beliefs about his Arab-Jewish roots only came when he left Israel for England at the age of 15. "I could see Israel in perspective, and I could see that I wasn't inferior", he says. It was also his move to London that allowed his love for history to blossom. He credits this to his secondary school history teacher, who was a "classic example of one teacher who believed in me and encouraged me," and he says that this was why he chose to study history at Cambridge University.

I ask Shlaim about his sense of identity today and whether he feels more Iraqi, Jewish, Israeli, or British. But I quickly realise that this question is itself reductive and an oversimplification of his broad and multi-faceted, multi-layered identity. "It reflects the complexity of the notion of identity", he tells me.

"In my case, it was Israeli society that shaped my identity as a Zionist. So I grew up as a Zionist", but this was not an identity that Shlaim would choose for himself. Through *Three Worlds*, he has sought to "reinvent [himself] as an Arab-Jew". When asked how he explains an Arab-Jew identity to someone who considers it a juxtaposition, he tells me: "I don't see the contradiction." Linguistically and culturally, he says, his parents had "much more in common with other Muslims throughout the region than they did with Jews in Eastern Europe".

Shlaim is proud of his Arab-Jewish identity, though he acknowledges that "the genocide in Gaza has made me distance myself more and more from Israel, and drawn me closer to Jews". For him, the core values of Judaism are "truth, justice, and peace". "The essence of Judaism is nonviolence," he says, describing Netanyahu's government as the "antithesis of these core Jewish values".

Near the end of our conversation, he tells me he is "proud of being a Jew, and equally proud of being an Arab. The hyphen in Arab-Jews doesn't divide Jews from Arabs; it unites Jews and Arabs".

Image credits: Avi Shlaim, with permission.



OXFORD SPOTLIGHT



Gavriella Epstein-Lightman speaks to Naomi Lightman on life as a woman at Oxford in the 1960s

The year Naomi Lightman came to study at Oxford – 1962 – was the first in which women were allowed to become members of the Oxford Union.

Four years earlier, the five women's colleges had finally been granted equal status with the men's colleges. Six years before that, the quotas limiting the number of female students at Oxford had been abolished. Forty-three years previously, women had been allowed to obtain degrees for the first time. And 84 years earlier, in 1879, 21 women entered two cloistered halls of residence – the newly-founded colleges of Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville College – and were the first female students at Oxford. Much remained to be done, but change was already under way.

Naomi Lightman (née Claff), my grandmother, was born in September 1943 in Blitz-ridden London into a Jewish family. In her early days she was put under the kitchen table to keep her safe from the relentless wartime bombings. Soon after, she moved with her mother to Ayr, a small town in Scotland, to escape the Blitz. Her father was a Navy doctor in Scotland. "He was very deeply affected by the very high casualty rate," Naomi tells me. "It had a lifelong psychological effect on him."

Naomi turned two just days after World War Two ended. The war that had defined her earliest years now existed not in bombs or evacuations but rationing and ruins. Postwar London was a site of rapid reconstruction as thousands of evacuees returned to what had once been the site of enemy attack.

But school was not trouble-free. Bullied at her previous school, nine-year-old Naomi was sent to a recently opened Jewish girls' school: Hasmonean High School. The following year, she took the eleven plus exam to apply for a grammar school. Her English paper was one of the best, but "the maths paper was the worst they had ever seen, so that was the end of that".

With less than a decade having passed since the Holocaust, many of the students at the Hasmonean were the children of survivors. But the Holocaust was never mentioned. "This was the 1950s. People were so traumatised they didn't want to talk about it or pass on the information to their children," Naomi tells me. "I had to learn about it myself. I heard girls in the corridor whispering to each other."

As sixth form approached, Naomi says that she "had every intention of staying on to the sixth form". The only problem was, there wasn't a sixth form. In previous years, very few girls stayed at Hasmonean past 16; many left to attend secretarial college and then get married. "As far as they were concerned, they had no desire and no incentive to carry on, and the school didn't provide any incentive either," she tells me.

"A friend of mine, Freya, wanted to stay on too, and so the school had to create a sixth form for us," Naomi recalls. "Because she was doing different A-levels to me, I had private lessons for two years, and I was very fortunate that there was one outstanding English teacher."

During the first year of her A-level studies, the teacher said: "I read English at Oxford. Why don't you have a go at it?" The teacher suggested she apply to Somerville College in particular, rather than any of the other women's colleges, as it was seen as more inclusive – accepting of women who had not attended prestigious private schools like Cheltenham Ladies' College or Roedean. "Of course the Hasmonean would have been totally alien, not only because it was not recognised by the Ministry of Education, but because it was a very new school and it was also a Jewish school", Naomi notes. She was one of the first Hasmonean students to even apply to Oxford.

She then found out she had been called to interview. "I had never been away from home before", she tells me. "I hadn't even been on a train on my own before. I really was inexperienced in every respect."

Naomi remembers the trepidation she felt as she sat waiting to be called into the interview, surrounded by "very sophisticated young women". "When I got there, all the girls were sitting there wearing little black suits, high-heeled black shoes, and very smart handbags, and they all had cut glass accents."

The interviews themselves were no smooth affair. The first interview saw Naomi appear before a panel of people all wearing black gowns. "Very intimidating", she remembers. "They shot questions at me, and I had never been in a situation like that before." Her second interview was with the Somerville College Principal, Dame Janet Vaughan, a woman who was both warm and dignified. Naomi describes vividly how, upon entering the cavernous interview room, she was unable to spot Vaughan. "You're supposed to sort of walk into a room and look vaguely confident. But for me, it was the exact opposite. I spent some time trying to see where she was, and then eventually she put her arm up and said, 'I'm here, dear'". Naomi felt that Vaughan was "quite interested" in her, as she was "an unusual candidate from an unconventional background". Years later she discovered that Vaughan, a haematologist, had been sent to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp after its liberation in 1945 to aid in efforts to feed survivors suffering from extreme starvation.

The result of her Oxford application came by telegram, or rather, "a man on a bicycle". "To my absolute and everybody else's astonishment, I got a scholarship." But Naomi felt she could not accept the offer. "I was an only child, and my mother and I were very attached to each other. She and my father had a very difficult relationship, and I thought it would upset her very much if I lived away from home for three years. So I decided on my own to turn the scholarship down."

Read the full article at cherwell.org

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The artifice of theatre: On the 'unworthy scaffold'

***Saul Grenfell** reflects on the immersive power of theatrical effects and how far we can buy into them*

Picture this. It's 1599 in London. You're at the new Globe Theatre. Or perhaps at the Curtain Theatre. Historians can't decide. Let's say you're a groundling – it's more fun that way. You've got a bag of peanuts in hand, or the early modern equivalent. It probably smells. Then, the chorus shuffle onto the stage. They're met with expectant hushes. Out of silence, they emerge into steady verse. The lofty iambs you hear invoke "a muse of fire", yet they also ask a crucial question: "Can this cockpit hold the vasty fields of France?" Absorbed, the chap next to you whispers 'Yes, yes it can'. But you can't help but think, well no. Not really.

I am aware this is the wrong answer. Shakespeare's false modesty ("this unworthy scaffold" – come off it!) demands that you think, 'oh, of course it can'. This wooden 'O' can in fact cram the very casques that did affright the air at Agincourt. Yes, I will make imaginary puissance so that when you talk of horses, I'll see their proud hoofs. And generations of lit crit sycophants have given their nodding assent.

But let's be honest for a moment. Even the most ardent enjoyers of the stage must acknowledge that theatre is, to an extent, always a little dire.

I'm reminded of this in the opening of *The Tempest*. I always smile to myself as I wonder how theatre-makers will construct a storm onstage. How an actor has to stumble across stage, yell 'Boatswaaiiiin!' and stumble back off to the wings, only to hold his head in his hands knowing all too well that this in no way resembles a storm. I love those little arm-flailing dances and staggering sidesteps meant to show the rising and falling of the deck. There's something of the primary school nativity play. It's pathetic and tragic, and neither in the literary sense.

Of course I'm being facetious here. Some theatre is remarkably skilful, and some lopsided limb-lurching is more impressive than others. Splendid set pieces and cutting-edge special effects of sound, rain, and wind can create real spectacle. Yet it often remains woefully unconvincing. We can only imagine the Emperor's new clothes for so long before the public indecency gets a little off-putting. So at times we may wonder: it's the 21st century. Film can faithfully represent the stories we wish to tell. What need have we for theatre?

If the thought often attributed to Ovid is correct, that *art est celare artem* (true art is to conceal art), then theatre is pretty poor art. You ain't fooling me into thinking that's a storm. A friend of mine makes this point, although strangely never to our director when he's casting the plays. Yet I have to remind myself that this is a silly question. I have to imagine that a century ago I've come out of a particularly awful exhibition at a gallery. What, I ask myself, is the point of painting when we've a camera that's a far more faithful representation?

Perhaps cinema is to theatre what photography was to painting. Whilst more photorealistic forms may tend to conceal their own art – as Ovid would praise – this surely doesn't entail their superiority. Faithfulness cannot be the metric of good art. A high-definition photograph of flowers is not by definition greater than a Van Gogh. Likewise, a believable cinematic storm is not automatically better than some wacky wobbling and foot-floundering onstage.

There's a paradox in that the artifice of art is all the more compelling if we have a glimpse of it. This is part of the tantalising appeal of behind-the-scenes footage, and why it's always so thrilling to glimpse actors' true personalities and relationships as they take their bows. Think how we're so captivated by the possibility of Paul Mescal and Daisy Edgar-Jones or Emma Stone and Andrew Garfield.

Two film representations of the prologue to *Henry V* are particularly delightful in this respect: they tease us with the illusion of theatre. Laurence Olivier's Technicolour 1944 version begins with an aerial shot of Elizabethan London, which pans across from the Tower to the Globe Theatre, and into a deliciously evocative scene of crammed-in groundlings and the atmospheric accoutrements of a lady selling apples, before trumpets sound and our play begins *within* the theatre. At the opening of Act II, we shift our scene to Southampton, as the illustrated ocean vista on the theatre's curtain dissolves into the real thing. The play ends with a zoom in from the opulent palace onto the newlywed royals taking their thrones, and a zoom out onto the Globe itself. Cue riotous applause. Kenneth Branagh's 1989 take is wonderfully meta too, as Derek Jacobi speaks the prologue whilst wandering through a film set, and the epilogue straight down the lens. Both embrace their medium's very artifice.

We never return to painting and theatre for



their nonchalance. The joy is the artifice. In painting, each brushstroke tangibly intimates the brush, the hand that held it, the mind that led it, and the heart behind it. In theatre, it's to look into a man's eyes and try to discern where man ends, and Hamlet begins. It's to see those horse's proud hoofs when that actor's feet are firmly planted onstage. It's to watch the curtain's waves melt into that furrowed sea itself.

So theatre must draw attention to its own artifice. Hence the perverse appeal of Bertolt Brecht's desire that the actor "must not go so far as to be wholly transformed" into a character; we've got to resist the full 'method'. This is essential for an art form that's ironically *real*, immediate in the physical distance between actor and audience, and immediate in its emotions. The messiness, the unpredictable, the implausible – all happening this very moment – are why we return to the stage. In the age of digital smoothness, we return to the awkward artifice of live performance.

It must be said that embracing grittiness is not unique to theatre. Of course, the *Henry V* productions above are themselves films, and Richard Ayoade delightfully talks of doubling down on the unreality of cinema, using a handheld camera to draw our attention more to the cameraman. But theatre can't hide its seams as cinema can. The theatre is unrepeatable and live: we can't ignore its bizarre unreality. Wood must transmorph into fields, actor into king, and wobbled arm-jerks into a ship in storm.

This is why I ultimately can forgive Shakespeare for the prologue to *Henry V* (I'm sure he's relieved by my approval). It's annoyingly brilliant. It walks a fine line between downplaying and exaggerating the power of theatre. It veers neither into self-indulgence nor disillusionment. I know the stage isn't much, he seems to say, but join me.

So fine, William. I'll happily indulge you. If you my humble patience pray, I shall gently hear, kindly judge, your play. Although if you're doing a storm onstage, tell me now. I might need to grab some mead at the interval.

Image credit: George Oates, CC BY 4.0 via Flickr.

'Burning Down the House' at the Schwarzman: A review

JOE HAYES

During the odd 'in-between' space that is Week 0, I searched for a show to give me something to do, amid the random dilly-dallying and the odd collection currently occupying my time. It was in this rather dull moment that the Breach Theatre and Schwarzman Centre production, *Burning Down the House,* stumbled across me.

Upon assessing the general idea of the piece, I was hooked; Professor Kirsten Shepherd, fellow of St Catherine's College, approached playwrights Ellice Stevens and Billy Barrett in 2021 with the idea of merging academic research and theatre. It is this play which aims to uncover the untold, previously neglected inspirations for Henrik Ibsen's prolific *A Doll's House.* Admittedly, I sat down in the Schwarzman Centre with certain expectations. The space used for the performance, after all, was the very same space used for my own lectures, and so my mind had already associated the show with academic excursions and a research-informed uncovering of the past. Seems relatively straightforward, no? Yet what unfolded onstage was something surprising, striking, and altogether a performance that left me with more questions walking home than I had entering the theatre. What was initially, for me, a historical recovery became, instead, an investigation into the instability of storytelling itself and how, throughout history, artistic endeavour has come at the cost of violent exploitation. For a production concerned with uncovering the past, *Burning Down the House* had a remarkable way of forcing the present into uncertainty.

The production began with a rather rusty Henrik Ibsen, played by Peter Clements, ambling onto the stage and taking a seat to tell his own story. The slight foggy mist traipsing through the air hinted at what would come next, a literal interruption. Laura Kieler, played by Jacoba Williams, burst into the theatre, unsettling the audience with a reckoning scream. Clements' Ibsen halted whilst Williams' Kieler was confrontational and ultimately unforgiving. Already, my attention darted around the stage, and it was chaotic – yet it is within this chaos that Barrett begins to push the questions onto the audience. Kieler's interruption, whilst theatrical, also removed the authority from Ibsen's own narrative control.

From here, shocking truths unravel as competing versions of history collide, subsequently separate and clash once more before the eyes of the audience. In a small physical space, the intensity of the performance was consistently astonishing and played with the audience's own sense of stability in the theatre. One narrative seemed to establish itself, and then another emerged to challenge it. Throughout this Punch-and-Judy process, I was left little chance to comfortably settle into any single version of events, and it was this perpetual uncertainty that I found most compelling.

As the abstract house structure shifted around the stage, repeatedly constructed only to be manually dismantled once more, I became increasingly aware of the deliberateness of storytelling, in that the stories we inherit are carefully shaped by those with the power to tell them. The actors moving the house around the stage became, to me, a metaphor for the forces through which historical narratives are built, often at the expense of those who they claim to represent. Ibsen refused to call himself a feminist, which now feels disturbing after witnessing the devastating immobility of Williams' Kieler. She stood helpless amid the relentless movement, her stillness exposing the painful contradiction lying at the crux of the production: the woman who inspired Ibsen's arguable magnum opus can no longer control her own story. Indeed, the visible presence of the actual crew during this made it feel much more visceral, suggesting how the narratives we inherit are continually founded, broken down and then reshaped.

An aspect of the performance I found to be especially intriguing was that of Sophie Steer. Throughout the production, though she mainly played Suzannah Ibsen, the wife of Henrik Ibsen, she also mastered multiple other roles. Steer told *Cherwell* that "it felt like the show had a brilliant bedrock", which is certainly true. The way in which Shepherd's thorough research informed the foundations of the script, in my opinion, allowed it to become more experimental and, at times, almost surreal. Steer's performance was simply magnetic; her capabilities as an actress held my attention, even though the production seemed to depend on erratic movement and consequent disorientation. Her rendition as both Kieler's Uncle and baby was poignant in what she referred to as the "nightmare section". It is within this scene that instability climaxes – reality becomes warped, and meanings become somewhat meaningless; thus, it becomes hard to gain a sense of what is going on. Language could no longer communicate effectively, but rather primal noise operated within this medium of theatrical disorder, as though the characters' experiences were too overwhelming to be captured by ordinary speech. This resulted in Steer flickering between both the enraged uncle and the bewailing child in a moment of culminating tension during Kieler's labour. For Steer, her method was to go in "strong and wrong", and she told *Cherwell* that she "found" the uncle and the high scream of the baby. It's almost ironic, since within a production centred on Kieler's lack of agency, Steer's audacious performance was rooted in her own creative freedom. The result of such a show was truly arresting. In a moment's notice, Steer transformed herself from a figure of authority to one of complete dependence, shattering any distinction between power and vulnerability. Her incisive control over this felt particularly fitting within a production concerned with the denial of agency. It was here that instability became a feature of identity and not merely of narrative or staging of that matter.

Ultimately, *Burning Down the House* was far from what I had first expected. Barrett's production seemed obsessed with dismantling our conceived understanding of history; the chaotic staging, quickly shifting performances and refusal to offer certainty in any shape made for a deeply unsettling, yet equally fantastic, experience. In terms of what struck me most, I believe it to be how the production continues past just recovering a piece of forgotten history. Instead, it continues to question the very ways in which stories become forgotten, and who causes this to happen. That night, I left the Schwarzman Centre feeling truly befuddled, unsure what to really think – it was all quite bonkers to be honest! Yet I think that's where its brilliance lies. In telling the neglected story of Laura Kieler, who was denied any control of her own story, it left me wondering how this is not solely contained to the 19th century. After all, the forces that silenced Laura Kieler have hardly vanished – they have taken different forms.

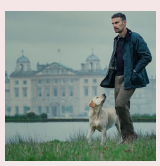
FILM & TV

What's Oxford watching?



Rüya at St Hugh's recommends *Practical Magic* (1998):

"The scene where Nicole Kidman drives back home after drugging her evil boyfriend, smoking and singing along to 'A Case of You'... absolute cinema."



Eugene at Magdalen recommends *The Gentlemen* (2024):

"Aristocracy meets drug-dealing: How far will the eponymous gentleman go to save his estate? Come for Theo James, stay for action, and mostly Class A drugs."

Image credits: 'Practical Magic' and 'The Gentlemen' via imdb.com

A jarring Mann: 'Fatherland' reviewed

***Freddie Lewis-Hedley** on German political developments reflected on the screen*

Recounting celebrated Modernist author Thomas Mann's return to a Germany in wreck and rubble, *Fatherland* deals with great personal malaise against a backdrop of great political unease. The year is 1949 and Mann is giving a reading tour through East and West Germany, at least ostensibly hoping to edify and uplift his war-traumatised audience. It is clear, though, that Mann's grandiloquence will not conjure a better order into being. Some of the brightest shots illuminate gaping expanses of rubble between the town halls and churches where Mann holds forth to packed crowds, and after these addresses, drunken candour and old wartime songs abound. All of this is observed by Mann's daughter Erika, played by Sandra Hüller, who does a good job of balancing critical winces and bitter-sympathetic smiles as she is dragged between events, silent except in her capacity as an interpreter for Mann's interviews to a cloying international press. She also acts as the family's moral conscience. Her brother Klaus, played by August Diehl, is profoundly depressed and not in touch with his haughty 'magician' father, and when, after a devastating incident Erika also loses contact, the daughter-father drama intensifies until emotional release is forced in the film's last moments.

I watched *Fatherland* shortly before the tense mid-September Berlin elections where the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and far-left Die Linke party both gained significant ground, so at least the atmosphere, if not the specifics, of the political turbulence depicted in the film was of a piece with my surroundings. The Kino International venue, huddled near the centre of the dreadful, looming Communist concrete of Alexanderplatz also put me in mind of the East-West tensions strikingly portrayed in the film by the story's progress eastwards, across checkpoints and into sparser rural space; my interest was primed for a scintillating political piece.

Instead, though, I found the personal drama far more compelling than the film's political commentary, which often felt simplistic and lacking in the former's emotional intelligence. The first scene, a study of Klaus in strikingly focused despair over a literary and personal crisis of meaning, shows the 30-something's lithe, sinewy torso in exposing, crisp black-and-white. There's a shadowy, blurred one-night-stand in the background above the bed (Klaus was gay but, intriguingly, the long-haired lover is genuinely androgynous), and as they move passively, perhaps indifferently, Klaus writhes about in angst and indecision while on the phone to Erika. It is one of the longest scenes of the film, and the camera's static, steady character

> I watched *Fatherland* shortly before the tense mid-September Berlin elections where the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and far-left Die Linke party both gained significant ground, so at least the atmosphere, if not the specifics, of the political turbulence depicted in the film was of a piece with my surroundings.

study reminded me of some of Bergman's best psychological work in *Scenes from a Marriage.* Klaus' initiating scene casts an ironising shadow over the ensuing bourgeois soirees on his father's speaking tour, and his brief screen presence conveys as much character as Zischler manages to in his role as the main Mann.

I always admire when cinema makes political events moving; films as diverse as *The Battle of Algiers*, *Paths of Glory* and Steven Spielberg's *Munich* have all brought me to tears with visually eloquent set pieces set in war or its aftermath. *Fatherland* is not so articulate. Pawlikowski relies on easter egg quasi-gags to poke fun at history's villains, including Gustaf Gründgens, a Nazi-era thespian (though no Leni Riefenstahl; the remarkable Gründgens is a prime case study for the 'art versus artist' dilemma) and friend of the Manns who is portrayed as a charmless, bigoted representative of the postwar German intelligentsia in a brief, brusque interaction with Erika. I refer readers to Uncle Max in *The Sound of Music* for a complex, queasily likeable Nazi sympathiser, and to *Mephisto* for a nuanced confrontation with Gründgens himself.

Other objects of political criticism are crass, materialist American propagandists in the West and, more interestingly, a slimy, Mephistopheles-quoting Soviet general and his East German underling from the culture ministry. This last official follows the party line with Mann, but his sometimes faltering, conflicted manner concisely betrays all the sorrow, uncertainty and daunting weight of his countrymen's past and future. Occasionally, the cinematography achieves the same political poignance: in a devastated West German town, the camera lingers on a bleach-white empty church hall, suggesting false innocence and secular angst.

Indeed, black-and-white is deployed to great effect. Many mornings on the road are shot through with searing sunlight turned eerily silver and cold by cinematographer Lukasz Zal, and the sombre aesthetic somehow enhances a closing burst of Bach from the organ of an almost-abandoned East German church, the site of Mann's much belated emotional unloading – a scene which, albeit, has by my reckoning somehow more bathos than pathos.

I would almost venture to say that *Fatherland* much more resembles a certain kind of cosy, historical dramedy than a serious political piece. Mann appears too hapless and bumbling to offer us a protagonist apt to deal with the ongoing turmoil within his family and fatherland. Well-paced and clocking in under 90 minutes, it goes down enjoyably, though maybe too comfortably, but its occasional flashes of emotional incisiveness are to be commended.

How cinema has taught us to see autumn

AMALIA DASGUPTA

Every October, as the days rapidly shorten and the need for layers starts to become a hassle, many of us find consolation in the familiar promise of a 'cosy autumn film'. Everyone has their favourites, from nostalgic rom-coms like *When Harry Met Sally…* and heart-wrenching classics such as *Dead Poets Society* to the spookier feelings of Hocus Pocus. But what do all these autumn specials have in common? Many seasonal rewatches do not actually take place in autumn. For instance, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* perfectly captures that 'fall feeling', but does not mention the season at all, and many consider the *Harry Potter* franchise quintessential autumn films although they span entire years. So, what is it about these films that makes you want to curl up at home while the leaves fall outside?

Film has manufactured a recognisable autumn colour palette, perhaps the most obvious tool filmmakers use to signal the season. Burnt orange, deep burgundy, and highlights of gold are integral to autumnal scenes, flashes of warmth as the weather gets colder. Wes Anderson's adaptation of *Fantastic Mr. Fox* is bathed almost entirely in these colours, with the greatest ode being the colour of the main character's fur. Similarly, the most easily remembered scene from *When Harry Met Sally…* is the iconic Central Park sequence



where the characters are surrounded by autumnal oranges and yellows. Autumn in England is often depressingly grey – looking out of my window in Oxford at this time of year is disheartening and a reminder that the time for shorts and flip-flops has well and truly passed. Seeing a dead leaf on the ground, however, somehow has the opposite effect of reminding me that summer is dying, instead bringing me a warm feeling and a desire to eat a pumpkin. This romanticisation of decay lies at the heart of the autumn we see on screen, where the bright colours of a tree's swan song are saturated to the maximum. This use of colour in film is thus perhaps not a reflection of autumn as it is but rather one of an autumn that is bearable to its viewers.

Texture and lighting play a similar role in creating an autumn feeling. Scenes that convey an autumn feeling are unusually tactile, full of tweed, dusty pages and wood panelling. The costume designers of *Dead Poets Society*, for instance, leaned into the East-Coast prep school aesthetic with heavy blazers, coats and patterned knitwear, which pair nicely with the woody interiors and old books created by the set team. The low natural light means that much of the film is aglow with candlelight and warm lamps, which push the warm autumn colouring even further. The scene in the cave, lit entirely with candles, is a clear example. This desire to create warmth indoors is perhaps innate to us, and films reminiscent of this season call on this instinct, reminding us to make our homes a respite from the dreary outdoors.

The true warm feeling we get when we watch a beloved autumn film, possibly for the tenth time, cannot, however, be explained by aesthetics alone. There is something inherently nostalgic about this season, which returns us to our familiar routines and environments, while the year comes to a close. This intersection of change and continuity lends itself well to nostalgia, making us conscious of time passing while trying to recreate the experiences of years gone by. Returning to Oxford unsurprisingly makes me want to watch *Harry Potter* just one more time, a series which reminds me of my childhood and beginning a new school year at my own Hogwarts. Autumn is clearly a time for comfort and reflection, a fact the film industry has learnt very well and pumps into new releases at this time every year. Hollywood understands just how profitable this feeling of nostalgia can be.

The commercialisation of seasons has been growing as a business. Any supermarket at this time of year will have an array of autumn scented candles, knitted throws, and three aisles of Halloween decorations. The palette, texture, and candle-lit glow of autumn films are accessible to your own home with a single shopping trip. These films did not give our society a hankering for warmth in the cold, but they provided the way this warmth should look, and this look can now be sold to us. *Hocus Pocus,* which has now become a cult autumn classic, was initially a commercial and critical flop upon its release in 1993, losing nearly $17 million. With a poorly timed July release date, a tone watchers found awkward, and poor reviews, there was no way to tell what it would become when it was released. Its status as a fixture of this season was built through repeated TV airings and its presence on streaming sites, demonstrating that the industry can manufacture tradition through pure determination. Similarly, across social media and streaming sites, companies and individual influencers create autumn watchlists and vision boards, pushing us to build these films into our seasonal routine. This cycle of creating an on-screen vision of what autumn should be, whether teary, romantic, or spooky, and then providing all the tools to recreate it for ourselves, is perhaps the strongest reason for an endless list of films that fit the 'autumn genre', an intangible feeling that filmmakers have managed to manufacture. I'm not immune to this, having my own watchlist for this season and a preference for autumn-flavoured coffees, but it may be worth wondering whether our vision of autumn is our own or one cinema has ingrained in our memories.

Image credit: Anne Irving for Cherwell.

The return of the surreal

Sylvie Quick discusses how human psychology inspires contemporary artists

Mythical, dreamlike, phantasmagorical, and absurd: Surrealism, which took the art world by storm in the early 20th century, has enjoyed a huge resurgence in the past decade.

The original pioneers of the movement have been receiving new attention and admiration. Early this year, Salvador Dalí's painting *Bacchanale* sold for a whopping €254,400 at auction, and exhibitions displaying the work of Leonora Carrington were held in both London and Paris this summer. Contemporary artists have also been turning to themes of the irrational and the unconscious in their own work, producing a second wave of surreal artworks to be enjoyed and analysed. However, for a movement that was heavily intertwined with its contemporary science, politics, and culture, it's extremely unusual to see a huge resurgence a century after its creation.

Artist Paulo Nimer Pjota rose to fame recently with his summer exhibition *Encantados* at the South London Gallery, displaying eleven large-scale works, all depicting different mystical, mythological scenes, figures and animals against a number of magical, dream-like backdrops. Pushing the boundaries of traditional painting, he made the gallery space a part of his landscapes, painting a large-scale mural on all four walls, inviting them to physically step into his artworks, challenging the traditional limitations of the canvas.

He combined both modern culture, such as Brazilian hip-hop and rap music, and the images and styles seen in street art, with ancient myths and legends to create a unique painted landscape. His incredible exhibition displayed the new direction of contemporary Surrealism and reflects the interest and enthusiasm of the public towards this new wave of dream-like, imaginary images. With new art forms and media readily available and accessible, and the rapid changes of technology seen in the last decade, how will this modern renaissance of the surreal be different from its origins? What can we expect from the return of the surreal?

It's impossible to mention this resurgence without acknowledging the influence of AI and the accessibility of dream-like, absurd images. In the last few years, the visual content we consume, whether in person or online, has been flooded with artificially generated images and videos, and as technology advances, it's becoming more and more difficult to differentiate between the real and the fake. The status of photographs as truthful reproductions of reality has declined, and roles such as graphic designers and illustrators are at risk. This influx of artificial images has divided the art world: some artists embrace technological advancements to advance their own techniques and support their creativity, offering a fresh medium for their art forms.

Artist Zach Blas has been exploring this intersection in his own art, navigating the new artistic possibilities provided by new technology, whilst simultaneously highlighting its potential dangers and downfalls. For example, his work *Icosahedron*, an AI chatbot residing in an electronic sphere, combines computer monitors with the familiar Magic 8 Ball toy, inviting visitors to interact with it, providing mystical answers to their questions or 'predictions' for the future, akin to a Tolkien-esque magic orb. However, through interaction with the artwork, the limits of the chatbot are revealed, shattering the illusion of an omniscient knowledge source and the availability of personalised algorithms and answers.

Surrealism is simultaneously an introspective art style, taking inspiration from personal experiences, emotions, and the psyche as a way of revolting against rationality, rather than just responding to external factors. By translating the unconscious activities of the human mind into dream-like visual scenes, Surrealism mainly aimed to engage with the unconscious mind and encourage artistic expression, often informed by the developing understanding of human psychology. However, knowledge of the human subconscious has advanced from the days of Dalí and Carrington, with greater understanding of how the brain processes information and the impact of culture on our psyche.

Contemporary artists have been using these psychological developments as inspiration. Artist and researcher Albert Barque-Duran combines his fields of study in cognitive technology with new media techniques as a way of showing the intersections of art and science. His research informs his art, infusing his images with his developing understanding of how the human brain works and understanding the mechanics of human creativity. He describes his work as offering a "reinterpretation-actualisation of the surrealist movement through contemporary knowledge", with his art depicting ordinary objects in bizarre combinations or eerily out of place.

In a similar vein, contemporary artist Julie Curtiss has also adopted modern psychological developments within her work, intertwining them with developing understandings of sociology and gender studies, including ideas of femininity, heteronormativity, and examining psychological theories in the modern world as themes for her work. She examines the position of women in society using distorted and warped depictions of everyday objects or familiar images. In theme, her work is similar to that of Carrington, working almost 100 years earlier. However, Curtiss, taking inspiration from pop art and illustrations, adopts modern techniques such as acrylic or vinyl to produce shiny, sterile, faceless figures in exposed positions. This physical barrier derails the viewer's gaze, pushing them closer to a voyeur than the central eye of traditional art.

Overall, this resurgence in Surrealism challenges the traditional conceptions of how we view and interact with art. While the subject matter, the absurd distortion of everyday objects, and the creation of dream-like irrational scenes and scenarios have largely persevered, the mediums in which art is created and the ways in which we are interacting with it are being changed and reshaped by contemporary surrealists. The art created embraces modernity, intertwining aspects of modern culture with ancient myth, and using new opportunities provided by greater knowledge and technology to inform their art, whilst simultaneously highlighting their faults, displaying the conjunctions and challenges in the current art world.

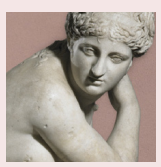
ART

What's Oxford looking at?



Willow at Christ Church recommends *The 90s: Art and Fashion*:

"A very stylish exhibition curated by former British Vogue Editor-in-Chief Edward Enninful, this exhibition is as aesthetically focused as a magazine spread, and is oozing with a cool nostalgia in every room."



Anya at St Cross recommends *Aphrodite: The Making of a Goddess*:

"A great exhibition which draws together a lot of different types of artwork from over thousands of years. All the artwork is extremely beautiful, and so interesting to see how our ideas of beauty have been shaped by figures like Aphrodite!"

Image credits: 'The 90s: Art and Fashion' and 'Aphrodite' via tate.org and ashmolean.org

Fashion trends: The illusion of choice

NANCY PIERRE

Did society collectively decide to stop wearing 18th-century ball gowns, or 1920s flapper dresses? I doubt it. We love to dress up for Halloween and enjoy how we look and act in outfits that are no longer deemed socially acceptable. Yet fashion trends and societal norms keep us from wearing 'costumes' on other occasions. These outfits, such as a ballgown, a flapper dress, or medieval armour, represent a bygone era. By acting as costumes, there are fashion trends that we imitate without fully acknowledging how essential these were in their respective times. The question, therefore, remains: are these only trends that we imitate on specific occasions – Halloween or bops – instead of an everyday outfit? I find it quite hard to believe that there was a categorical shift in 'personal style' throughout the ages. Instead, our fashion choices emphasise how our individual styles are limited by the available market, and what fashion magazines and brands declare as 'in style'.

Clothes declared 'trendy' are pushed on society, particularly on women. Although it may not have always been described in these terms, this expectation to wear 'trendy' clothes is certainly something that has always existed, continuing to thrive today. Living in an age in which (Western) women have more choice on a social, political, and economic level, it is clear that this does not equate to total freedom in any regard. Despite being overshadowed by the range of women's clothing in the modern market, this is also true for fashion. Is it really possible to create your own personal style?

If you have ever seen *The Devil Wears Prada,* you'll know the scene where Miranda Priestly explains to Andy Sachs the process of how her 'throwing on an old sweater' went through so many branches within the fashion industry. This is because everything we wear, even casually, goes through an extensive process before it is available to the public. In the film, she describes the trickle-down effect within the clothing industry, in which a runway design influences brands, which then produce similarly styled garments. She details how these styles travel from high-end brands into department stores and local shops, where they are picked up by us. This perfectly demonstrates the illusion of choice, as what we choose to wear passes through a long line of executive decisions that are not our own. In buying a new pair of jeans, for example, you make many choices: the choice of shop or brand, then the choice of the jeans themselves, among many more. However, these are likely the shops close to you, or that deliver to your area (and within a certain price range). These jeans have gone through this process in the industry, and their style is pushed in magazines and social media as 'cool' or 'trendy'. They are designed to succeed in the market, not to be bought by an individual as a single expression of personal style.

The reliance on trends has been enhanced by the growth of social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram. I have seen dozens of people expressing their 'likes' and 'dislikes' about clothing items, and, on the whole, they are largely the same. That said, there are many different algorithms and aesthetics, and yet, even within these, there is a standard type of dress. The 'clean girl' aesthetic, grunge, and indie styles all contain their own distinctions, but we can still understand which is which based on appearance. Fashion trends often fit within a style category, often one that exists on some side of social media, from which people derive inspiration. Nevertheless, on these different 'sides' of social media, the manner of dress somewhat resembles each other.

I find that this was particularly true in certain periods of time – most obviously seen since 2020. There are many specific items of clothing that I still see people wear today, and they transport me back to the pandemic. The oversized green-blue knitted sweater, white tennis skirts, turtlenecks, and other aspects of the 2020 'indie' style retain their cultural and social link to this



period. The pandemic exemplified a dependence on social media in the world of fashion, since this was the only way in which we could gauge fashion trends, as streetwear became virtually non-existent.

Since then, we have returned to microtrends, vintage clothing, and thrifting. In this way, we feel we can express personal styles – with fashion trends that may have only 500 likes on TikTok, instead of 500,000, or things that are from the 90s, and judged to be a 'rare find'. But the general principle still applies: even where vintage or thrifted, these clothes travelled through a long process and are far from rare. Nonetheless, we believe that we have a choice.

Something I appreciate about the fashion trends of the 2020s is the rise of crafts, such as DIY, crocheting, and sewing, as an individual take on what we see online. While social media emphasises trends, myriad videos show people making their own clothes. This is exemplary of choice and personal style. And yet, this is still not necessarily an individual's creativity. This is something of a trend – sewing, adjusting, or adding to clothes to make them your own. Most notably, the trend becomes clear when you ask, 'Where does the inspiration for this come from?' It often comes from social media – primarily, Pinterest. So, the idea of 'being unique' stems from both the internet and availability.

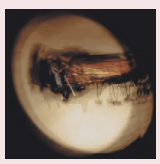
Consistently dressing in a completely original way is impossible. Making time to create unique ideas for, and sew or knit all new clothes in 2026 is an absurd concept. As a result, total innovation and imagination are very difficult to achieve. There is simply not enough time.

However, this only relates to creativity in its fullest form. This is by no means an argument that there is no imagination in fashion. While many of the fashion trends that we see online can only be defined as an illusion of choice, we each look distinct in the clothes that we wear. A dozen people could wear the same plain dress, but in a dozen different ways. Consequently, while choices may be dependent on the existing clothing market, autonomy does, in fact, remain within the fashion industry of today; we are not yet totally lost in the illusion.

Image credit: Halloween HJB, CC0 1.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

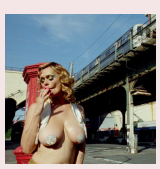
MUSIC

What's Oxford listening to?



Willow at Christ Church recommends *Live at Carnegie Hall*:

"An album which I feel so lucky to have been around for the release of. Cameron Winter is a generational talent (not glazing) and the way he plays the piano is mesmerising. Everyone should listen to this album and everyone will cry."



Dash at Wadham recommends *She's the Best*:

"An album which subverts expectations, as it moves away from the hornier music of Troye Sivan's past towards experimental introspection and even shome shoegaze here and there. More like the afters than the club."

Image credits: 'Live at Carnegie Hall' and 'She's the Best' via albumoftheyear.org

Beyond litter and emissions

***Leandro Landolina** on the environmental costs of loud sounds at music festivals*

The music festivals of the summer have packed up and moved on. Stages and sound systems have been dismantled, litter cleared, and land reseeded. While little now remains to suggest that thousands of festivalgoers descended on the outdoor spaces that host open-air festivals, a less obvious question lingers: what impact did all the noise have?

Many of the environmental costs of festivals are already widely acknowledged. With audiences travelling from afar and large sound systems and lighting requiring significant energy, festivals emit substantial amounts of greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. They also produce and send tonnes of non-recyclable waste to landfill. Similarly, camping equipment is often treated as single-use – for example, at last year's Reading Festival, over 55 tonnes of tents were abandoned.

The venues themselves can also suffer due to the pressures of music festivals. Heavy equipment and large crowds compact soil, reducing the water and oxygen that can reach roots. In fact, campaigners in Finsbury Park argued that the two hazardous trees Haringey Council felled in advance of the electronic-music festival Krankbrother in 2025 had reached such a state of ill health due to excessive trampling from previous festivals.

Yet there is a rarely discussed type of pollution without which music festivals simply could not function: loud sound. Though we can see speaker cones vibrating and metal fencing rattling, loud sound is sometimes overlooked as a pollutant since it is more or less invisible. However, as acoustic ecologists often point out, sound is an important part of our environments and can actively shape relationships between organisms, rather than simply being background noise. This, in turn, means that sound itself may disrupt ecosystems.

Of course, open-air festival sites are also habitats, and the organisms that inhabit them reside not only in the landscape, but in the soundscape too. In fact, scientific research suggests that the drastic changes to the acoustic environment that music festivals cause can be harmful to nearby organisms. For example, loud low-frequency sound has been associated with stress responses in some organisms, including those in aquatic habitats.



Further, loud music can significantly reduce bat activity, potentially fragmenting important habitats. Similarly, loud sound may reduce nestling survival rates, while one study suggests that the resulting reduction in biodiversity may persist even after an event finishes.

The tricky trade-off is that what drives wildlife away is part of what festivalgoers come for: the visceral thrill of loud music pulsing through the body. Indeed, festival sound systems are designed to enhance this very experience, comprising massive subwoofers capable of producing loud low-frequency sound. The challenge, then, is to preserve this experience while reducing its ecological impact.

Festivals have already begun reducing waste, improving public transport, and switching to cleaner energy. Noise should become part of that sustainability effort too. Moving forward, more research is required to identify which species are the most vulnerable and at what times of the year, which frequency ranges cause the greatest disturbance, how long effects last, and whether events of shorter duration are safer. With this information, festival organisers would be better equipped to stage acoustically sustainable festivals.

The solution, then, is not to cancel music festivals nor to strip away the powerful sound that makes them exciting. Instead, we must understand the effects of loud sound well enough to reduce unnecessary environmental harm, a particularly important objective since festivals take place in vulnerable ecosystems that are already under increasing stress due to climate change.

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

Why does everyone like 'East of Eden' so much?

ABIGAIL RILEY

In many ways, *East of Eden* is a special book. It is beautiful, for one, and loving too. John Steinbeck dedicated it to his editor and long-term friend Pascal 'Pat' Covici. In the preface, he describes *East of Eden* as though it were a box, a wrapped gift; for his dear friend, the author has packaged "the pleasure of design and some despair and the indescribable joy of creation", there is also "on top of these" "the love I have for you". Above that "gratitude and love," trapped with all the "joy" and "despair," is the empty space of human potential: "Still the box is not full."

Steinbeck was born in 1902 in Salinas; thus, an unmistakable personal nostalgia colours the voice of the semi-autobiographical narrator. "I remember my childhood names for grasses and flowers," he begins on the first page, "I remember where a toad might live and what time the birds awaken in the summer". Throughout, despite, or perhaps because of the various horrors the author explores, he always makes time for nature. In chapter eight we meet Cathy, one of those "monsters born in the world to human parents". Amongst the schemes of her girlhood, Steinbeck remembers to mention "the young grass" that "bristled under the sun" and "the yellow dandelions". In part, I think the explosion in *East of Eden*'s popularity is due to Steinbeck's affection for Salinas Valley. The compulsiveness of his characters is present, as always, so is his ability to render any landscape powerful, visceral in prose. But there is something, ironically, lapsarian about *East of Eden*: it is a relic of the author's own childhood.



Everyone enjoys beauty; a beautiful book, written in a determinedly readable style, is bound to become popular, not to mention the endless power of nostalgia. But there is something else in *East of Eden*, I believe, that has catapulted it from the fame of every book-tok influencer's favourite lists to a multi-million dollar Netflix show. I read the book in 2023, perhaps a little ahead of the curve – if that's possible for a book published in 1952. Since then, I have recommended *East of Eden* to everyone who asks. But, I would not say it is my favourite book; it might not be in my top five. Rather, I recommend *East of Eden* in the same way a film buff recommends *Good Will Hunting*. It's feel-good; it's the ultimate feel-good book because it tells you that your life is your choice. Be good, be bad, be a little bit the one and a little bit the other: just don't imagine for a second that it is not under your control to be so. The message emerges slowly over the first few hundred pages, but arrives suddenly at the forefront in chapter 24, through the voice of Lee, a Chinese man who cares for Adam Trask's boys when both father and mother have abandoned them. Trask, of course, embodies his biblical namesake as husband to the 'monster' Cathy, and father to the Cain/Abel parallel, Cal and Aron. Lee describes the arduous process of translating Hebrew with four elderly Chinese gentlemen who live in San Francisco, smoking opium and solving whatever problems people bring them. After two years, he and the four elderly gentlemen can translate the passage – thus resolving a discrepancy in English translations of the Bible. "The American version orders men to triumph over sin… The King James translation makes a promise… But the Hebrew word, the word timshel – 'thou mayest' – that gives a choice," Lee concludes, "It might be the most important word in the world". Regardless of whether or not Steinbeck's Hebrew translation is correct, which it likely isn't, he's right that 'may' is the most important word in the world: it is the belief in choice, the hope at the bottom of the jar, the empty space in the box that is "still not full".

> *East of Eden* is a book like Pandora's Box. It is well written, beautiful to look at. Inside, the author examines what he sees as the fringes of humanity, our best and worst parts.

If it weren't couched in the natural beauty of Salinas Valley, or the fascinating moral drama of the Trask and Hamilton families, Steinbeck's message wouldn't work so well. That said, the message is central to the book. Whilst other authors of his period reach for obscurity, designing their work to be a puzzle, a dream that requires clever interpretation, Steinbeck teaches a lesson. He delivers an earnest sermon. *East of Eden* is didactic; it is a fantastic book, it has beautiful language and compelling characters, but it is ultimately didactic. People enjoy reading it because it gives them a sense of control: Netflix could gamble millions on its popularity because they knew it was something that made people feel good about themselves, something they would want to watch on the screen.

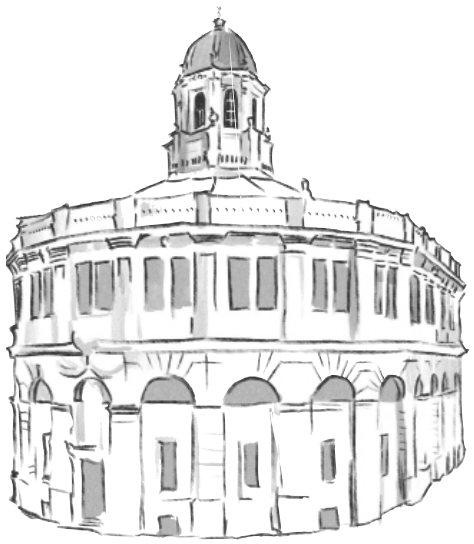
East of Eden is a book like Pandora's Box. It is well crafted, beautiful to look at. Inside, the author examines what he sees as the fringes of humanity, our best and worst parts: "Pain and excitement are in it, and feeling good or bad and evil thoughts and good thoughts." When all this has been discarded, when we think the box is nearly empty and the indomitable Trask lies dying, Steinbeck presents us with the final gift. It is the word timshel, the choice to be good or bad in our lives: hope.

Image credit: David Prasad, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

WHAT'S ON

STAGE
The Silence of the Lambs
New Theatre Oxford
19th-24th October

The Gang of Three
Oxford Playhouse
27th-31st October



MUSIC
Samayovo
The Wheatsheaf
19th October, 7pm

FILM & TV
Digger
Ultimate Picture Palace

BOOKS
Elif Shafak in Conversation
Sheldonian Theatre
23rd October, 6pm

ART
Aphrodite: The Making of a Goddess
Ashmolean Museum
Until 11th April 2027

Mike Nelson: Double Negative (The Clown)
Modern Art Oxford
Until 11th April 2027

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The Source

Argyll

The pier watches her starfish,
And holds her youth beneath the
Sun's morning weakness.

There's a distant, manly hum. A motor.
A low homely hum.
Foreign to the school below,

While the dinghy bobs along the shallows,
Fixed about its radius,
A naughty child placed in a pen.

And grieving above the boat and
Below the sunken hopes of the divers
Searching for gold,

A grey heron cuts the blue tension
And returns the waves to their
Favourite cèilidh songs.

The rain joins too, kissing the sea
And singing life back into
The sleepy shore,

Like a baby's first steps,
Pitter Patter,
Along the wet ocean floor.

Tom Cartwright, *Harris Manchester College*

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The art of reaching out to old friends

***Ilya Rosenbaum** explores the joy of rekindling an old friendship from childhood*

During the summer vacation, I decided to reach out to a friend I've known for more than seven years. We graduated from high school together, each moved to UK universities, and are both navigating the second-year experience of applying to internships, studying, and socialising. Yet, despite the parallels between our lives, I hadn't seen my friend since last December. We didn't text everyday or call very often. Our communication at university went no further than the occasional Instagram comment.

So naturally, when I asked them to meet up, a question nagged at my mind: "If we're not sending each other constant updates, are things going to be awkward?"

Coming to university, I realised that the stable, effortless reliability of my friends from home was, all of a sudden, precarious and difficult to maintain. As if turning off a light, the brightness of a friendship can abruptly dim when both of you are dealing with the hurdles of Freshers' Week, getting used to the workload, and settling into a new routine. Finding time to text can feel impossible, and, before you know it, you haven't talked in a month. Or two. Anxious thoughts creep into your head. Without even realizing it, you've managed to convince yourself that someone who was once a dear friend is now a complete stranger.

Then I met my friend. Jokes galore, laughs about, memories resurfacing, and promises to call more often. Talking with my friend, I realised that time and distance do not have to strain a relationship. Leading separate lives does not negate what you had in the past, nor does it define your future. Not only did our conversation go well, we even spoke about reaching out to more old friends.

I explained how it felt weird to call up a friend at a random time, in those moments where you're alone in your room and have nothing to do. Aren't I intruding into their personal lives? What if they're busy? Aren't I annoying them with my pestering? My friend's response to these worries changed my perception completely about reaching out: "When you get a call from an old friend, don't you get a warm fuzzy feeling inside?"

I am here to tell you to reject the thoughts of doubt. When you flip the situation, you realise receiving a text from someone you've known for such a long time is not just a welcome surprise; it's also one of those things that makes you wonder why you hadn't thought of it yourself. Speaking with my friend helped me realise how the barrier to reaching out is really just a mental one. Especially in our digital age, where sending a message is instantaneous, emotional distance to someone is only created in your own imagination. Making the first move then becomes a matter of experience. The more you do it, the easier it becomes to keep in touch.

Now don't get me wrong, it doesn't always work out. Sometimes you're left on delivered, or even worse, read. A change in mindset is what I propose: being left on read by a friend could be their own mistake! Assuming malice or ignorance is merely jumping to conclusions with little evidence,

"So naturally, when I asked them to meet up, a question nagged at my mind: "If we're not sending each other constant updates, are things going to be awkward?"

which, as Oxford students, we should understand is not always rational. If not, however, we've arrived at our worst-case scenario. Congrats! Rock bottom, as it turns out, is not so bad. Unfortunately, growing apart is a part of growing up. Not everyone you reach out to is going to rekindle a flame of friendship.

Rejection from one, however, does not equal rejection from all. To let one sad experience colour your view of how every instance of reaching out will go is a mistake. This leads me to my next point, which is: double texting is not the end of the world! In stressful times like the beginning, or even the middle, of university, it's not unusual for texts and calls to get lost. The art of reaching out includes being alright with the 'embarrassment' of saying "hi" multiple times, and to multiple people.

But when all seems lost, when a person insists on staying a brick wall to your texts, perhaps it becomes time to move on. This is alright too. Reaching out requires balance: being brave enough to poke a friend, but also recognising when your efforts should lie elsewhere. After all, you're at Oxford now! Seeking out new friends should also be a part of your goals. The interesting point about reaching out is that it also helps build your skills in finding friends. Just like meeting new people, breaking the silence requires confidence, acceptance that rejection is possible, and the chance to train a muscle everyone should build.

To end on a happier note, I am glad to say reaching out to my friend led her to visiting me in Oxford. My two worlds collided, and I couldn't be more excited about the way a balance could be created between my old life and my new one. This is a call to all Oxford students: reach out to your old companions, you might never know what could come of it.

Why are we so afraid of being bored?

JESSIE JUKES

We wake up, and our phone is immediately in our hand – we scroll, we text, we check the weather, the news, our emails. Then it's breakfast, which we eat while scrolling, tapping, and liking. We brush our teeth with a YouTube video on, walk to lectures while on the phone, eat lunch while watching TV. And then, when it's time to sleep, our phones are the last thing we look at. Every day is the same.

When this reality is spelt out, it does sound slightly dystopian. With hundreds of thousands of hours of content and entertainment at our disposal – all accessible whenever and wherever – there is little reason to ever feel bored. When there's a lull in the conversation, a queue to wait in, a moment of silence, we can pull out our phones and be instantly entertained. To us, boredom has become a gap to be filled, an empty space to be occupied with distraction. But perhaps, in our eagerness to fill these spaces, we have underestimated what they were doing for us.

Short-form content is everywhere on social media. A mere swipe-up on your phone can send you down the rabbit holes of TikTok, Instagram Reels, or YouTube Shorts. And sometimes, even the short-form content isn't short enough. Our attention spans have become so fried that we won't even watch the entirety of these 30-second videos, deftly scrolling after we've read the caption and seen the first 10 seconds. This quantity-over-quality style of media consumption, one which delays not only our having to feel bored but also our need to think critically, is having knock-on effects on all forms of media; even Netflix, famously designed for streaming long-form content, has a designated 'Clips' section now. Algorithms and media corporations have recognised that we are, in fact, becoming increasingly restless with engagement that requires patience or critical thinking.

Our unwillingness to accept boredom has not only changed how long we are willing to watch content, but how we watch it. I've noticed a tendency in modern films to use dialogue to over-explain – think exaggerated exposition scenes, where we are explicitly told how a character feels, rather than being clued in by context. Even the unnecessary inclusion of ostentatious, fast-moving action scenes is designed to draw our attention away from our phones. Films that present ambiguity or require interpretation can feel unusually demanding by comparison, and are thus often misconstrued. Engaging properly with films requires patience and active thought, but, faced constantly with media that immediately rewards us, we are becoming unfamiliar and thus uncomfortable with this. And it is not only that we are unwilling to actively engage with other media – a decline in media literacy has eroded our ability to do so.

As children, boredom was typically remedied with activities that required patience and creativity: drawing, writing, inventing. Now we have a whole generation of iPad kids who have never felt bored and likely will never have to. We, too, are now so uneasy with boredom and the gaps that it creates in our lives that we avoid it completely.

With this, though, we are losing access to the mental space that allows us to create our best ideas. We make our best decisions, have our best thoughts, and best understand the world around us when we allow ourselves the time to actually think, without a phone in hand or music in our ears. And nowhere is this discomfort with unstimulated thought more evident than when we have to actually concentrate on something.

When we try to study, we are forced to confront something that our phones have been shielding us from – the fact that not every moment will provide stimulation, entertainment, or immediate gratification. We have become so used to unthinkingly filling every idle moment that it can be a real struggle when it becomes time to switch our brains back on, especially after a long vacation spent without any academic stimulation.

At Oxford, despite a barrage of deadlines and collections and essays constantly looming over us, the ever-present option of unlocking our phones and not having to think is increasingly tantalising. And then a five-minute break becomes a one-hour scroll. I'll admit that I'm often the first to pull out my phone when struggling to come up with ideas, idly waiting in a queue or walking somewhere, but it is undeniable that sometimes we do just need to pause, to wait, and do nothing. It is precisely when we resist this urge, when we allow ourselves to feel and to sit in our boredom, that our brain begins to make important connections and create original ideas.

We've come to think of boredom as an inevitable but unpleasant gap between activities, or as space to fill, but we've stopped seeing that space as worthwhile in itself. Those 'lightbulb' moments where a crucial point suddenly comes to mind often occur in moments of inactivity, like when you're in the shower and a thought pops into your head, or when you're staring into space, struggling to write an essay, and an idea suddenly comes to you. It's when we allow ourselves to exist with this feeling that we do our best work.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

Image credit: Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.



HOROSCOPES



Aries

A new society is waiting for you…



Taurus

Don't skip that lecture.



Gemini

Your readings won't read themselves.



Cancer

I know you want that college puffer.



Leo

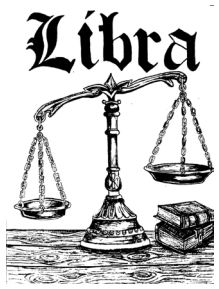
You did Freshers' Week right. Relax for this week.



Virgo

This week has been… interesting.

HOROSCOPES



An all-nighter is in your near future.



Give your quiet neighbour a chance.



Speaking to someone new this week would be an excellent decision for you.



It's still Freshers' Week, right?



Reconsider your next bop costume.



Now THAT is how you matriculate!

CHERWELL-FED

The only thing missing from this bean was chocolate

MINNIE MERTZ

If there were a smell I could capture, bottle up, and treasure forever, it would be the toasty and heartening smell of cacao roasting in the morning. Waking up at 5am for those frosty winter dawns was my everyday reality only a short while ago. Dragging myself out of bed, bundling up in thick jumpers, and traipsing through the soggy streets of Saffron Walden were the necessary tasks before entering what, in my humble opinion, could only be described as heaven. There is nothing quite like the sensory adventure you experience in a bean-to-bar chocolate-making room. Bean-to-bar production is, in essence, the process by which cacao beans are turned into that beloved end-of-day pleasure we love so much.

Before Oxford, I spent a year working at Hill St, a prominent bean-to-bar chocolatier, run by brothers Greg and Chris. It quickly became apparent to me whilst there that true bean-to-bar chocolate making was a remarkably rare undertaking in the UK. The process itself is not one for the lazy or impatient. Through the meticulous stages of roasting, winnowing, grinding, refining, conching, and finally tempering, a chocolate bar is born. Each stage of the process is its own tricky, time-consuming, and complicated task. This method forms a luxury made not only with arduous amounts of love, care, and time, but with sustainability, high quality, and uncompromising flavour at its tasty centre.

Upon returning to Oxford this Michaelmas, I was beyond excited to be reunited with one of my all-time favourite spots, an Oxfordshire staple: Missing Bean. This coffee establishment has become a second home, a place to catch up on essays and to fuel my brain for the day. A flat white with friends on Turl Street or an early-morning espresso at the Roastery in Cowley were pursuits I was so pleased to regain.

To my delight, upon checking their social media, I caught sight of a brand new launch: Missing Bean's first range of bean-to-bar chocolate! I knew I had to get in touch and have a chat with the founders leading this venture. So my impending visit was not only the return to my favourite blend of coffee, but the discovery of a promising world within a business I already loved.

My afternoon was led by the Head of Sourcing and the Head of Chocolate, Silviu Rad. What immediately struck me in our first few minutes was his passion for learning. There was no end to his desire to push the boundaries and create something incredible.

Since Missing Bean's primary expertise is roasting coffee beans, the transition into roasting cacao was as smooth as the very chocolate I was about to taste. Silviu's approach carried the same quiet obsession I garnered, and his refusal to produce merely what was necessary, and his determination to instead produce the best, was inspiring.

Standing in the roastery with Silviu as he talked through the refining process, the familiar waves of heated cacao wafted through the air. That familiar mechanical hum, jarring to some, carried such a wistful reverence to me. Having spent hours roasting beans myself and obsessing over getting that perfect taste, I know how incredibly difficult, but rewarding, a process it can be.

Silviu pointed me toward their impact report, which details how building direct relationships, supporting farming communities, and respecting the planet form the pillars of their ethos. He spoke about embarking on their bean-to-bar journey by attending European expos, using their refined palates to explore the world of cacao and, more importantly, allowing them to meet the growers themselves. When chatting about these groups, Silviu lit up as if talking about an old friend. The relationships formed were so much more than business; they were grounded in respect, care, and enthusiasm for the craft. Cutting out the middleman creates a kindred partnership, which not only provides better financial gain and support for those in developing countries, but ensures much higher quality chocolate.

This approach also helps growers protect biodiversity and maintain their environments. It was refreshing to see the importance of their sourcing, and to read introductions to the many members of the team that aren't in Oxford, but remain integral to the process, halfway across the world. Then came the exciting part: the tasting.

Their single-origin bars, presenting the cacao beans from Costa Rica, Peru, and Brazil, are plain by name, though anything but by nature. As someone who has snapped and tasted many bars over my time, I can honestly say that I was sucked in by the depth and the bright, complex flavours in these chocolates.

With this chocolate, every delectable molecule that dissolved on my tongue was not only absolutely delicious, but a further testament to the team's patient processing and care. Each detail, from the careful sourcing of ingredients to the packaging, which represented the colours of the countries of origin, was carefully considered and did not go unnoticed.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

Image credit: Abigail Christie for Cherwell.



Hidden in plain sight: The bakery behind Oxford's cafés

★★★★★

PRIYA BURROW

Though you may not recognise the name, you have almost certainly eaten Gatineau's pastry. If you have ever grabbed a flaky, buttery croissant at Tree Artisan before a 9am lecture, or rewarded a finished essay with something sumptuous at the Art Café, you have Gatineau to thank. For nearly two decades, this French bakery has quietly supplied many of Oxford's favourite independents, from Society Café and Colombian Coffee Roasters to Missing Bean, Branca, and Alfonso Gelateria. Its name rarely appears on the label, yet its pastry has probably fuelled more tutorials than any of us would care to admit.

Gatineau is the work of Hervé Gatineau, who began a pastry apprenticeship in Toulouse at 15 years old, honed his craft at Laurent Bakery in Sydney, and spent a decade at Maison Blanc in London, several years of it as Head of Pastry. He opened his Summertown shop in 2007, and the business now balances its wholesale accounts with a loyal following of customers who come straight to the counter. It is a bakery deeply woven into the life of the city.

It is also more accessible than you might think. For students who rarely venture north of the University Parks, Summertown can feel a world away, so Gatineau came to us. Since Trinity, it has run a pop-up café on Radcliffe Square, with garden tables looking out onto the Radcliffe Camera.

Still, it was the Summertown flagship that I was generously invited to visit, and there Gatineau's delectable desserts and sweet treats were restored to their original purpose: bringing authentically French patisserie to an increasingly diverse Oxford food scene. Arriving rather early on a drab Wednesday morning – the kind that usually calls for a meal deal and a library desk – I was greeted by a beautiful spread of pastries and breads, all baked that day. The cakes are made in the kitchen just behind the counter, reassuringly within view, and the whole shop smelled gloriously of baked goods. Warmly welcomed by the Gatineau team, we were soon presented with croissants, patisserie, chocolates, and madeleines: a small fraction of the full Gatineau range.

The croissant (£2.70) came first – the truest test of any French bakery. As someone who typically steers clear of anything quite so indulgent, I was pleasantly surprised by how light and airy it sat on the palate,

> Gatineau's delectable desserts and sweet treats were restored to their original purpose: bringing authentically French patisserie to an increasingly diverse Oxford food scene.

a testament to the French butter and flour Gatineau imports for exactly this purpose. Director Débora assured me that the vegan version is indistinguishable, which is welcome news for anyone whose college brunch options begin and end with toast.

The highlight of the morning, however, was indubitably the Paris-Brest Pistache (£7.95). Extra-crunchy choux is filled with a fresh pistachio paste made in-house and crowned with pistachio crumbs. The sweetness pairs perfectly with that texture, which leaves a slight savoury aftertaste. Be warned that it is generous: even split between two, it was more than filling, so treat it as a dessert to share rather than a snack to polish off alone.

Gatineau also offered the most undeniably French sweet treat, the madeleine (£1.50). It is the perfect size for a snack before a lecture or during a library break, and it caters to an array of palates: Madagascan vanilla, lemon, and Valrhona-coated. A florentine, with the classic lace of caramelised nuts and candied fruit, added a welcome crunch to the sweeter end of the table. The house chocolates came last, studded with macadamias, cranberries, and pistachios.

The same care extends to what is in your cup. The coffee is Mexican, chosen to complement the food rather than overpower it, and the beans on the shelf come from Missing Bean, one of the cafés at the other end of Gatineau's delivery round.

What truly sets Gatineau apart, however, is the ethics behind the pastry. As a wholesaler, it thrives on relationships rather than simple supply, and many of them run both ways. Alfonso Gelateria is a good example: its gelato is served at Gatineau's café on Radcliffe Square, while Gatineau's pastries sit on the counter of Alfonso's new shop on Little Clarendon Street. In a city centre increasingly lined with chains, that kind of mutual support between independents matters.

Its ethos extends well beyond Oxford, too. Débora explained that Gatineau sponsors chefs from Indonesia and the Philippines to learn the exacting, and often arduous, tradition of French patisserie, giving them rigorous training and a secure job within the city's wider community. Closer to home, fruit and vegetables come from local farmers wherever possible, so the patisserie counter shifts with seasonal produce, while the flour, butter, cream, and chocolate are imported from France for the sake of authenticity.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

RECIPE

Ginger noodle soup

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 5cm piece of fresh ginger, grated
- 1 red chilli, sliced (optional)
- 800ml vegetable or chicken stock
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- 2 nests of rice noodles
- 2 handfuls of pak choi
- 2 spring onions, sliced
- Half a lime

Instructions:

1. Heat the oil in a saucepan over a medium heat. Fry the garlic, ginger and chilli until fragrant.
2. Add the stock and soy sauce, bring to the boil. Once bubbling, reduce the heat and simmer for five minutes.
3. Add the noodles and cook for three to four minutes.
4. Stir in the pak choi until it has just softened.
5. Take off the heat, squeeze in the lime and scatter over the spring onions.
6. Enjoy!

Corn-ish at Oxford: A reflection on identity

OLIVER CROSHER

I first read the words "a Cornish childhood ends with the lights of Oxford" when I was lounging on a chair at Christ Church, surrounded by the dark wood-panelled walls of the room I had called home for the past year. It had been written by a proud Cornishman called A L Rowse, long before I had been born. The book was given to me by my wholeheartedly and unapologetically Cornish grandparents over a year ago, and had been silently waiting on my shelf to be read ever since. The afternoon on which I put the book at ease was a rare one: I had no impending essays, no readings to slog through, and no translations to hand in. I could count on only one hand the number of times I've found myself in such a situation at university, so I decided to seize this golden opportunity and read *A Cornishman at Oxford*.

A Cornishman at Oxford is an autobiographical memoir written by Rowse that details the dramatic change in the life of a working-class Cornishman when he begins his studies at Oxford in 1921. Cornish folk are few and far between at Oxford. As a Cornishman myself (albeit half Cornish), I can vouch for how little people know of our nation – aside from a vague awareness of St Ives or some other holiday town.

Few people are familiar with St Piran (Cornwall's patron saint), our folklore-rich stargazy pie, and traditional Cornish carols. Many are also quick to dismiss Cornish identity as trivial, without understanding that Cornwall was independent from England for centuries and had its own Celtic language (Kernewek), spoken as late as the 19th century. The fact that I grew up being told I was half Cornish and half English should tell you how seriously some consider the cultural divide to be, even to this day. This made reading the experiences of a fellow Cornishman during the 1920s all the more captivating.

Some may question why such a book would be important enough for me to feel obliged to write an article about it – after all, Cornwall is just another part of the UK. But this book is more than a commentary on Cornishness and studying at Oxford: it's about fitting in, standing out, and overcoming the challenges therein.

Rowse stuck out like a sore thumb amongst his peers, not only for his brazen Cornishness, but also on account of his working-class, state-educated background, and his homosexuality. Because of this, he dealt with a lot of insecurity surrounding his own intelligence compared with that of his fellow students, as well as a deep dissatisfaction regarding the conservatism that was rife in Oxford.

It is for these reasons that I find his story not only comforting, but also hugely inspiring. Rowse was among the very first to prove that those from disadvantaged backgrounds belong at Oxford. He even became the first person from a working-class background to be awarded a fellowship at All Souls College. As a result, his achievements simultaneously marked a turning point in academia and acted as testimony to the fact that Oxford is open to all, no matter their background.

There is no doubt that Rowse and I share a host of similar experiences. From the Cornish clotted cream and scones sent from the homeland (jam first, obviously), to a similar disdain for the theatrics of the Oxford Union, much is the same. It seems that even our predecessors enjoyed a 'Trinifree' lifestyle in the summer, with Rowse at one point commenting: "Oh, dear: work and the summer term at Oxford are rather incompatible."

Coincidentally, Rowse, just like myself, attended Christ Church. His descriptions of Mercury Fountain, Tom Quad, and the Meadows are seemingly evergreen. It's apparent that, despite obvious changes over the past 100 years, the enchanting charm of Oxford has remained much the same. Rowse's writing transports me back to the wonderment of my first year, and the amazement that he felt upon first discovering the city truly resonates with me. Our part of the world is more rugged, less ornate, and far quieter, making the shift to the Oxford lifestyle a significant one.

Among the pleasing similarities between our lives, reminders of our differences are peppered throughout. Though it seems odd to say, given the luxuries we all experience as students here, Oxonians of the past enjoyed comforts that we do not. Larger rooms, constant tea parties, and regular drinks with dons were frequent occurrences for students in the 1920s.

However, the contrast in our lives surrounding technology really struck a chord with me. The common doomscroll-induced guilt of the modern student simply wasn't a feature of Rowse's life, and the more I read about his personal pursuits, the more I began to envy the lifestyle he described. The Oxford Rowse presented seemed more close-knit, more passionate, and more creative. I realised that many of the same hours our predecessors whiled away with poetry, politics, and personal development, I now spend vacantly looking at my phone. Many of us are passively aware of the addictiveness of this element of modern life, but reflecting on this comparison is what really urged me to contemplate how I spend my own time. Though I'm far from perfect, after reading Rowse's work I'm now more likely to favour a book over my phone – I've even started to learn bits of Cornish in an attempt to reconnect with my roots.

Rowse, like me, came from a state school, and I find the way in which he navigated relationships with those from other backgrounds both familiar and reassuring. When reading about Rowse's return to Cornwall during the vacations and talks of his visits to local landmarks that I know all too well, I was left with a strong sense of nostalgia.

Whilst I've come to feel at home at Oxford, it's impossible to keep homesickness at bay forever. Though I'm sure others experience it more intensely, I'd be lying if I said I haven't felt like a fish out of water more than a few times at Oxford, both on account of my state comprehensive background and my 'country-bumpkin' mentality. Due to this, it can be all too easy to push reminders of home to the back of my mind: views of old Cornish engine houses that my ancestors worked in, trips to the beach with my family, and the stories of miners and other Cornish folk that make up the history of our nation.

But after reading this book, I was reminded of what I leave behind when I come here. Thanks to Rowse and his century-old writing, Cornwall no longer seems so far away from Oxford, and I feel a little bit more in the right place.

Image credit: Oliver Crosher, with permission.



OXFORD TINY LOVE STORIES

I met him in the winter and there always remained winter in him. He lived amongst the fields and the grey skies and the trees dancing to the barren rhythms of snow falling. Of him, I remember only this: him, running in front, stumbling over broken stalks, whooping, calling back to me. And I knew that I would leave him there, in that desolate field; that he would always run ahead and that one day he would forget to turn around. We had a winter love and by the spring it had melted and the skies were as grey as ever.

Darren Quek, *Lady Margaret Hall*

CHERPSE.

Oxford's blind dating

An evening at Jude the Obscure: will uncharted territory bring romance or friendship?



Miss Editorially Impulsive

First impressions?
She was wearing basically all black which I thought was really cool. May have accidentally insinuated she looked like a clarinet.

Did it meet your expectations?
Yes! I couldn't have asked for a better way to spend a Sunday evening.

What was the highlight?
Hearing her talk about her academic interests – we had a long chat about women's health and I loved how the conversation kept turning back on a recurring theme of feminism or political activism. It's so beautiful when people talk about things they're passionate about!

What was the most embarrassing moment?
I suggested 45 minutes into the date that we crash the *Cherwell* Editors' Drinks so I could pitch an article. We went for wine instead, so I'm very glad I didn't just turn up!

Describe the date in three words:
It was virtually impossible to condense: scary but brilliant.

Is there a second date on the cards?
I'm not sure if the vibes were romantic or platonic. I'd love to be friends first and see if anything happens.

Miss Pub-Crawler

First impressions?
Super friendly, sweet, and beautiful, but quite nervous!

Did it meet your expectations?
Yes, except we also had a lot more in common than I thought we would.

What was the highlight?
When she told me she wrote an article about political resistance and pubes. I was like... okay yes, we're definitely the same type of weird.

What was the most embarrassing moment?
Nothing hugely embarrassing, but I was nervously fiddling with my bracelet and dropped it, so I had to scramble under the table for it.

Describe the date in three words:
Relaxed, intellectual, funny.

Is there a second date on the cards?
I hope so! It was hard to tell whether there were romantic or friends vibes (classic wlw problem), but I'm definitely up for another date.

Record 15,000 runners participate in Oxford Half Marathon









GAVRIELLA EPSTEIN-LIGHTMAN

A record 15,000 runners took to the streets of Oxford to complete the annual half marathon on Sunday 11th October. Thousands of supporters lined the course to cheer the runners. Alex Miell-Ingram won the race in 1 hour, 7 minutes, and 21 seconds.

Many ran the half marathon for charity. Helen and Douglas House, the world's first children's hospice, was the headline charity partner, with 300 people running in support. The charity supports terminally ill children and their families in Oxfordshire. This year, it aims to raise £200,000, the cost of funding a hospice bed for one year.

Twenty people ran for Asylum Welcome, a charity that provides advice and support for refugees and asylum seekers living in Oxfordshire. Among them was the charity's Joint CEO Dr Hari Reed. The group hope to raise £10,000.

The Lord Mayor of Oxford, Chewe Munkonge, was among the 15,000 runners on Sunday. He ran the half marathon to raise funds for Sobell House Hospice, one of this year's charities, which provides specialist palliative care. Munkonge said he would not wear his mayoral regalia on the course: "This Sunday, I'll be swapping the mayoral chains for running shoes". "This will be my first half marathon, so there are definitely some nerves," he added.

Simon Lewthwaite, who has epilepsy, ran his first half marathon in an official NHS hospital gown to raise money for Oxford Hospitals Charity. He said that completing it with epilepsy would be "an even greater test of resilience and determination".

The Oxford Half Marathon began in 1988 and was won by athlete Bill Domoney in 1 hour, 11 minutes, and 14 seconds. The 51 Rotary clubs in the area organised the race to raise money for the PolioPlus campaign, a programme aiming to eliminate six killer diseases. People came from overseas to run past Oxford's landmarks, and the oldest entrant, veteran Arthur Stone, was aged 70 at the time. Oxford's Rotary clubs continued to organise the event until 1993.

> This year, the race sold out general entries in less than three weeks – three months faster than in 2025. This puts it ahead of wider industry averages, even as the half marathon industry is expanding overall.

The half marathon returned in 2011 with 1,800 runners. Just two years later, in 2013, it had 5,500 runners, and the number of runners and spectators has grown steadily year on year. In 2025, more than 13,000 runners signed up and places sold out in January. That year, the event raised over £1.5 million for more than 180 charities.

Cherwell spoke to students who ran the race. Ioanna Bezirtzoglou, a third-year DPhil student at Pembroke College, ran as part of Oxford Girls' Running Club and volunteered at the race last year. She ran dressed as a princess. "I love the fact I have a community as encouraging as Oxford Girls Running," Bezirtzoglou told *Cherwell*. "Having volunteered last year at the Oxford half, it's so exciting to be able to run it this year!"

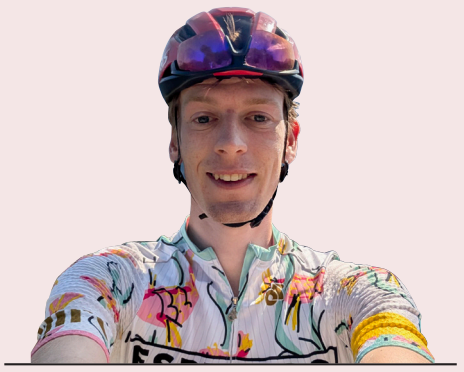
Dina Graham from Pembroke told *Cherwell* that "the energy from the crowd really carried [her] through and was a highlight throughout". "People stood outside their homes with bowls of sweets that you could grab," she added. Graham ran for Maggie's, a charity for people with cancer. "It was motivating to raise money to support them. It gave a purpose and a reason why I'm running."

This year, the race sold out general entries in less than three weeks – three months faster than in 2025. This puts it ahead of wider industry averages, even as the half marathon industry is expanding overall. The latest Mass Participation Pulse report shows events are selling out ten days earlier than in 2024, and almost a month earlier than in 2023. The Hackney Half Marathon, for instance, has also sold out its tickets faster year on year, having sold out in two days for the 2026 race.

With record popularity and turnout in 2026, the Oxford Half has now cemented its place in Oxford's sporting calendar. What was once an event with fewer than 2,000 runners has now become an unmissable fixture involving 15,000.

Image credit: [left, middle right, and bottom right] Anne Irving for Cherwell, [top right] Maryam Nawaz for Cherwell.

SPORT SPOTLIGHT



Gavriella Epstein-Lightman interviews Oxford University Cycling Club President Sam Fitzgerald

Sam Fitzgerald only took up cycling during his undergraduate degree, and yet he's now President of Oxford University Cycling Club. He first joined the cycling club at Cambridge, where he studied engineering, before moving to Oxford to pursue a DPhil in Renewable Energy.

Cycling at both Oxford and Cambridge offers the opportunity to explore the surrounding countryside – the club's weekly cycle rides take place between the Cotswolds and the Chiltern Hills. Cyclists enjoy venturing out into the countryside and exploring nearby villages.

Alongside these leisurely weekend rides, Fitzgerald tells me that the club trains for more serious competition. For the first time, it now has a club coach and is moving towards a more formalised training plan to prepare for competitions.

Fitzgerald's cycling journey has seen its fair share of unforgettable experiences. "I have been hit by a car crossing the road in Spain," Fitzgerald recalls when I ask if there are times things went wrong. "I had to try to explain to the police what had happened in broken Spanish."

A highlight for Fitzgerald was the Lincolnshire BUCS race last year. "In Lincolnshire you race with hundreds of people by the side of the road, playing music, like a party by the side of the road," he tells me. "Oxford was fourth overall – we came very close to getting a BUCS medal together."

But cycling races rarely have that festive feel. They often take place deep in the countryside, and while there might be people from nearby villages watching on, often "it is just you and the countryside", Fitzgerald says. He describes races as a mental struggle as much as a physical one. "You've got to be aware of who to follow, who to chase. You're also aware of the pain in your own legs as you catch up with those ahead." "Having the crowd there distracts you and allows you to push to a level that you didn't think you could," he adds. "In the Lincolnshire race, my power levels were higher than they have ever been before or since. That can only be attributable to the crowd support."

Oxford University Cycling Club was founded in 1873, making it one of the oldest student cycling clubs in the world. At the time, cycling was a new sport and a novel, exciting mode of transport: a technological invention which opened up new worlds for its intrepid adventurers. From novel Victorian invention to modern university sport, Oxford's Cycling Club has endured. Fitzgerald is excited about what is to come.

UPCOMING

Hockey

5:30pm 21st October
Men's Blues vs. Cambridge

Rugby

7pm 21st October
Iffley Road
Women's Blues vs. Brunel 2s

Rugby

2pm 24th October
Iffley Road
Men's Blues vs. Richmond RFC

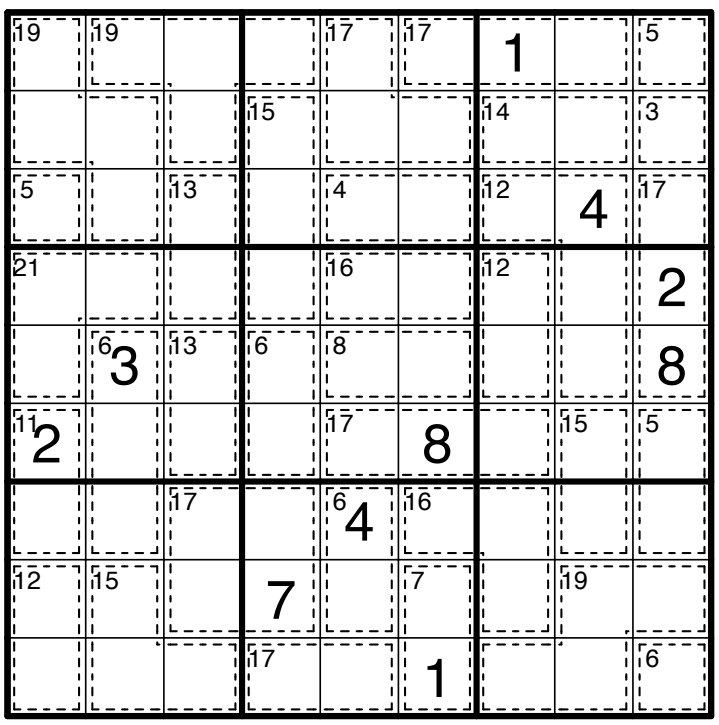
Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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

PUZZLES

Killer by ZOË MCGUIRE

Normal Sudoku rules apply. Within each cage, digits sum to the number in the top left.



Dropquotes by ZOË MCGUIRE

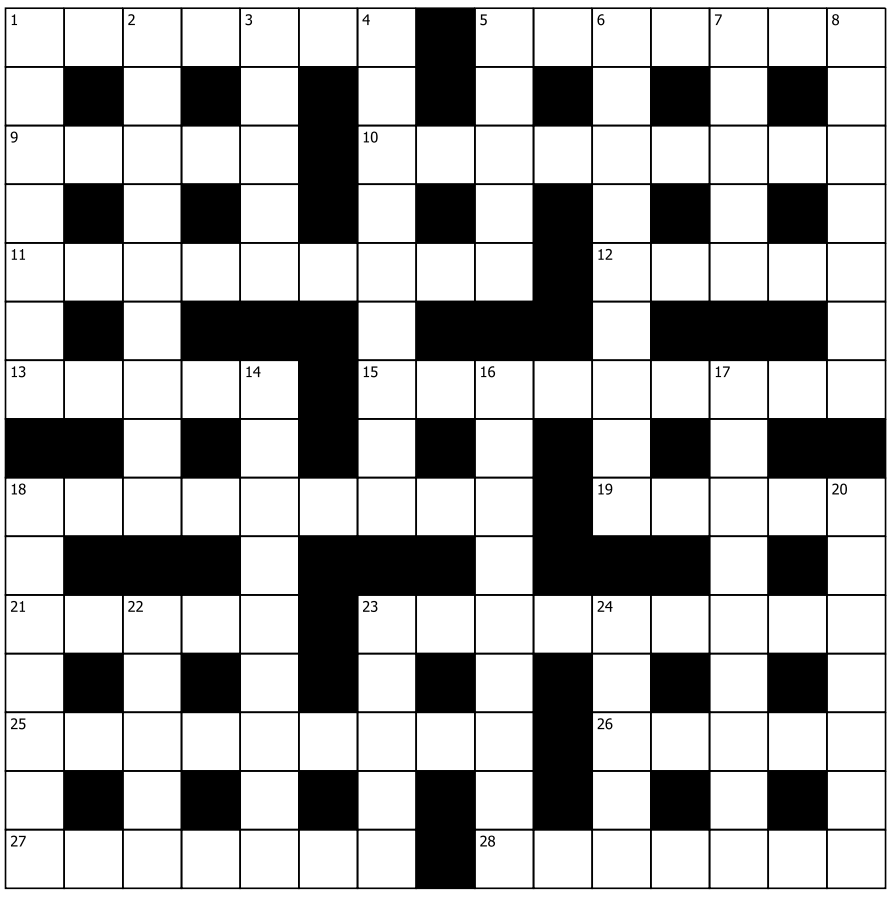
Can you "drop" the letters into their columns to uncover the original quotes?

E F	I T W	H N N O	E I O R	L S S	D D T	O O	C U X	B F I J	O O T T	H R Y	D I N	I S	I K N	E T	A H H T	A E H T	E S V
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Cryptic Crossword by EYUP

Difficulty: 3/5



ACROSS:

1: Hectic gift-wrapping hour by Queen's trooper (7)
5: Loner loses head about paparazzi, theoretically (2, 5)
9: Some starter is chilly? Touch something hot (5)
10: Mistakenly send it around everyone - it was set up! (9)
11: Hospital run by losers, make no mistake (9)
12: Bloke retracts AI hysteria (5)
13: Don't write first text to father inside man in a different country (5)
15: Little one interrupts stand up set around first laugh, which is a thinker (9)
18: Connection overshadows fiery situation with partner (9)
19: Caught central three Georges next to the first member of the royal family (5)
21: Finding other prisoners in block (5)
23: Consistently stretch and pop to begin scientific study of plates (9)
25: Dreamer's fizzy drink is backed by saint (9)
26: Unreliable, like pastry (5)
27: Succumbed to flutter of eyelid by daughter (7)
28: Rile up first lady to make you feel better (7)

DOWN:

1: Suspicious gathering in east England put underneath a lens (7)
2: Crack egg to find ring inside,then criticize husband with unknown physical characteristics (9)
3: Date interrupts tour around Elizabeth's house (5)
4: Concerning pronoun eat/eater - say that again? (9)
5: Oxford: a girl's haven (5)
6: Classless prat that consumes MAGA slop and ICE clip is "concerned with the facts" (9)
7: Pisa, first and only leaning tower (5)
8: Regulations and procedures of communist record (3, 4)
14: Vegetable halves rearranged within little sign from the future? (5, 4)
16: Popular half-hearted tyrant could be universal (9)
17: End Michaelmas perhaps by ordering eat-in (9)
18: Cheese attracts insect fleetingly (7)
20: Hip's silent cracking traps gassy bottom (2, 5)
22: Type of older neglected piece returns (5)
23: Throuple? Try listening nowadays (5)
24: Lost interest in Albert's strange cuts (5)

Week 0 answers:

Cell-Block Tango: ECHOLALIA; REPRIMAND; ISABELLA I; EXPANDING; REQUITALS; RARE BREED; OBSCENELY; SEMI-MATTE; CARL SAGAN

Cryptic Crossword: Across: FRESHERS WEEK; ANNIE; DAEGU; MIA; YACHTS; CHALKS UP; ERGO; ANON; SATE; BOMB; MARS; GAGA; EYESTALK; HURLED; SCR; OBAMA; ALIKE; CORNMARKET ST. **Down:** RUNIC; SCENTS; EDDY; STEPHEN FRY; EQUALISE; KAMA SUTRA; FRAPPE; EASYJET; ANIMAL FARM; GEOMETRIC; ABATTOIR; FAD DIET; JET SKI; BUTANE; LAIRS; FAIR.