

Cherwell

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All work and no pay: Why Oxford students aren't allowed to have jobs

Emma Heagney in
FEATURES – PAGES 8-9



George Abaraonye's return to Oxford

Madison Garrett in
PROFILES – PAGES 12-13

Rhodes scholarships cut amid financial difficulties



- Endowment returns of 3.6% miss target
- International student fees up 37% since 2022
- Each scholar costs the Trust £85,000 per year

PETER CHEN

The Rhodes Trust has restricted funding for professional degrees, introduced tighter limits on doctoral study, and reduced spending on events for scholars at Oxford amid financial difficulties.

Scholars pursuing a Master of Public Policy, Master of Business Administration, or Master of Financial Economics will now be limited to one year of funding, preventing them from combining any of these qualifications with another degree. Rhodes recipients wishing to pursue a DPhil also face restrictions.

Under conditions of tenure published in September, scholars are formally discouraged from undertaking courses of study longer than two years. If a scholar wishes to pursue doctoral studies after selection, they must secure additional approval from the Rhodes Academic Review Board and prepare an alternative two-year course of study.

Places on the route combining a one-year master's with a DPhil are described as "very restricted" in the conditions of tenure. In general, doctoral study is described as "non-standard" and limited

to students for whom "undertaking the DPhil at Oxford at this stage of their academic and professional journey is a necessary next step towards achieving their long-term aspirations".

Previous conditions let scholars undertake professional degrees as part of a two-year programme with another academic master's degree, and contained no restrictions on direct DPhil entry.

The changes extend to social life at Rhodes House. In conversation with *Cherwell*, numerous new scholars have noted considerably fewer induction events. *Cherwell* understands that alcohol will no longer be provided at House events.

"It's a stressful situation," explained one Rhodes Scholar who is planning on doing a DPhil next year. "There's a lot of uncertainty." Another scholar said that it was "disappointing" to see that the Trust had ended the Global Constituency, which provided opportunities for students from countries not previously eligible.

The measures narrow the academic options available on one of Oxford's oldest scholarships. Established in 1902 through Cecil Rhodes' will, the Rhodes Scholarship is one of the most prestigious in the world. Currently, it awards scholarships at Oxford to over 100 students per year. Previous Rhodes Scholars include former US President Bill Clinton, astronomer Edwin Hubble, and singer Kris Kristofferson. The scholarship has been subject to much scrutiny in recent years due to Rhodes' colonial legacy.

Continued on pg. 2

Rare Bodleian material used to train ChatGPT

STANLEY ARLIDGE and MAIR ANDREWS

A pilot scheme, launched in 2025, allows OpenAI to use materials from the Bodleian Library to train its models, documents obtained by *The Guardian* and seen by *Cherwell* show.

The University of Oxford announced its partnership with OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, in March 2025. A key part of the collaboration, which includes access to new ChatGPT models for researchers, is the digitisation of texts from the Bodleian Library using OpenAI's software. When announcing the partnership OpenAI said that it would make "centuries old knowledge searchable by scholars worldwide".

However, neither party's announcement mentioned that the digitised material

would be used to train OpenAI's models. AI companies need large volumes of human-created data to train models to recognise patterns in language and 'learn' by processing large amounts of data to produce sentences and perform tasks.

Minutes from a meeting between the library and OpenAI in 2024 show that "populat[ing] the OpenAI training set with knowledge that uses under-represented data on the open web" is a key aim of the partnership between the Bodleian and OpenAI.

Whilst websites become increasingly saturated with AI-generated language, developers require human-made data to train large language models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT. Consequently, competing companies are turning to physical documents and book collections. Anthropic, a leading AI company behind the chatbot Claude, has spent tens of millions on 'destructive scanning', a technique which slices the spines of books to make scanning easier.

Continued on pg. 2

Analysis: Oxford's college access gap is widening again

ANISHA MOHAMMED

The gap between Oxford colleges' state-school intake has widened for a second consecutive reporting period. Oxford's first Annual Admissions Statistical Report, published in 2018, found a 47.1% gap between the colleges with the highest and lowest state-school admissions. Mansfield admitted 88.2% of its students from state schools, while Trinity admitted just 41.1%.

The gap in state school intake has fluctuated, widening in recent years. The gap fell to 37.1% in 2021-23, then widened again to 38.1% in 2022-24, and 43.4% in 2023-25. Oriel is now at the bottom at 51.3% of students from state school backgrounds compared to Mansfield's 94.7%.

The college sitting at the bottom of the table has changed repeatedly: Trinity, Christ Church, St Peter's,

New, Pembroke twice, and now Oriel. No single college has held the lowest position.

Investment to no effect?

The colleges at the bottom of the table have all tried to increase state-school admissions and run substantial access programmes. Oriel has a dedicated outreach officer, publishes an annual widening access report, and runs targeted programmes, including a scheme that reimburses travel expenses. Pembroke, meanwhile, has a dedicated full-time academic post for access work and a multi-region outreach partnership with OxNet, alongside a research unit set up to make its access strategy evidence-based. Pembroke's state school intake, at 53.7%, is the second-lowest in Oxford.

Christ Church and Trinity, also historically near the bottom of the

table, tell a similar story. Christ Church runs Aim for Oxford, a programme for state school sixth-formers in the North East delivered with Trinity and St Anne's, alongside Christ Church Horizons for state schools in Barnet. Trinity has a full access team, runs Oxford's outreach programme for Oxfordshire's non-selective state schools, and publishes an annual impact report.

However, it isn't the fact that outreach does not work. Near the top of the table, Wadham College built the first dedicated access facility at any Oxford college and says it aspires to become "a beacon of fair access and academic excellence"; its state-school intake is 70.5%, nearly 17% higher than Pembroke's. Mansfield markets its state-school percentage prominently, and leads Oxford on it outright.

Continued on pg. 5

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Unsilenced: I reported Damian Howard too

OPINION – PAGE 7

The rise of pop girlies: Mediocrity or feminism?

CULTURE – PAGE 18

An accidental archive: The same seat, the same drink

LIFESTYLE – PAGE 20

The 204-mile punt for Alzheimer's

SPORT – PAGE 23

Rhodes Scholarships cut amid financial difficulties

Continued from Page 1

The restrictions come amid pressure on the Trust's finances. Its report for the year to June 2025 recorded £27.7 million in scholarship expenditure, with an average annual cost of approximately £85,000 per scholar once overheads were allocated. It identified cost inflation, including university fees, stipends, and staffing, and outlined the trustees' intention to reduce withdrawals from the endowment. Rising overseas student fees are a particularly significant drain on the Trust's finances. A 2025 *Cherwell* investigation revealed that international student fees had risen by 37% from 2022, with fees on some courses rising by over 60%.

The financial pressures follow the £38 million redevelopment of Rhodes House, which was completed in 2023. The Trust reports approximately £800,000 in annual interest on a bond issued to finance the building project, alongside income from commercial events and accommodation that contributes towards operating costs.

Investment returns have also fallen short of the Trust's goals. Most of its endowment is managed by Oxford University Endowment Management (OUem), which returned 3.6% in the year to June 2025, far short of its goal of inflation plus 5%. OUem has consistently

missed this goal in the short and medium term.

The latest restrictions follow the suspension of the Global Scholarships in April 2026. This programme provided a route for applicants ineligible to apply through existing geographical constituencies, including those from many African countries. The Trust's public notice attributed the suspension to "shifting strategic priorities".

Rhodes is not the only international scholarship programme to cut back recently. In August, the Jardine Foundation announced the end of its scholarship programme for undergraduate students from Southeast Asian countries to study at Oxbridge after 44 years, focusing instead on regional institutions.

In a statement to *Cherwell*, the Trust said that it is "in a solid financial position". At the same time, it said that "the University of Oxford has dramatically increased international postgraduate course costs in recent years, and costs are expected to continue rising", which "will inevitably affect some future options". It states that previously approved study plans will be honoured.

Image Credit: Tillman2007 CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



Botley Road reopens two years late

ORLA MCMAHON

Botley Road, which has been closed since April 2023 to accommodate expansions to Oxford railway station, reopened to the public last month.

Originally scheduled for August, the reopening was pushed back to 20th September due to repairs to the gas network under the road. The road is now open to both pedestrians and vehicles. The reopening also includes improved bus services and a new walkway and cycleway that run under the rail bridge.

The road serves as a main passage into the city centre. It spans from Botley, which sits on the A34 to the west of the city, to Frideswide Square, near Oxford railway station and next to the Said Business School.

These developments form part of the Oxfordshire Connect programme. According to an information pamphlet provided by Network Rail, this infrastructure project seeks to build "a bigger, better station for everyone" and add "additional rail capacity for the future". Plans include a new line linking Oxford and Cambridge and the reopening of the Cowley branch line. Network Rail estimates that the total cost of this scheme so far is £237.4 million, well above the initial estimate of £161 million.

Oxfordshire Connect justified their decision to close the entire road, rather than just one lane, with the intention to

complete construction before the end of 2024. However, construction was delayed multiple times due to unforeseen circumstances, including the discovery of a Victorian brick arch under the road and complications with utility infrastructure.

Local residents have previously expressed their frustration at these delays. Following the closure of the road in 2023, many local businesses reported that their trade was negatively affected. Layla Moran, MP for West Oxfordshire and Abingdon, took the issue to Parliament and met with Minister of State for Rail Peter Hendy in 2024 to discuss the ongoing closure.

In response to the reopening, Layla Moran told *Cherwell*: "Whilst I feel relieved that the Botley road has reopened, it has come at long last after three and a half years of terrible disruption to the lives of my constituents...I promise to push for accountability, having requested that the National Audit Office carry out an investigation into why the cost of the project has now soared to £237.4 million".

Network Rail have released a statement upon the road's reopening which acknowledged that the road closure had a "significant impact" on Oxford residents and that they are "sorry for the disruption and the frustration it has caused".

Although no date has been confirmed, the station renovations are expected to resume at a later point.

Image Credit: Roger Andrews for Cherwell.

Exeter college funds data centre in Oxford

STANLEY ARLIDGE

Cherwell District Council will decide next month whether to grant permission for a controversial £900 million data centre development funded by Exeter College.

The development, named EXOq, is located next to Oxford Parkway station in Kidlington and aims to be a "home for global research innovation and education", with a particular focus on AI and quantum computing. The plans include a large data centre to provide computing infrastructure, alongside an innovation hub aiming to bring together researchers, government institutes, and investors.

The plans also include a conference centre, 180-room hotel, and a further education college that focuses on "equipping the young people today with the skills to be the workforce of tomorrow, working in and supporting newly emerging technologies linked to EXOq". Construction would begin in 2028 with an expected completion in 2040.

Exeter College finance and estates bursar, Nicholas Badman, told *Cherwell*: "EXOq is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Oxford and the region. Exeter College is uniquely placed to deliver the sovereign High-Performance Compute infrastructure the country, and the Oxford ecosystem, needs to compete in quantum computing and AI".

The University of Oxford's Vice Chancellor, Irene Tracey, said that "fundamentally, EXOq fits very well with the university's needs and it has my full backing".

Exeter's plans come alongside a government drive to grow the UK's compute infrastructure. The government's 2025 UK Compute Roadmap forecasts that the UK will need three times as much data centre capacity by 2030 to keep pace with AI developments.

The plans also tie in with the government's ambitions for the Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor, which it has dubbed "Europe's Silicon Valley". An economic impact assessment produced in support of the application suggests that the gross value added could reach £1.4 billion and create 7,000 jobs total, of which at least 4,600 would be in the local area.

Local residents have criticised the planned development. Kidlington Councillor and Leader of the Green Party on Cherwell District Council, Ian Middleton, has publicly objected to the proposal, while more than 35 local residents submitted statements opposing the plans during public consultation. One resident urged the council to "be courageous and stop letting the colleges dominate the whole area" while another labelled the development "huge, unwanted, and unnecessary".

Local campaign groups, such as the Oxfordshire branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, have raised environmental concerns including the development's impact on the green belt separating Oxford from Kidlington and a nearby ancient woodland. One objecting group, Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum, explicitly references noise problems caused by data centres in the US in a letter opposing the site.

In response to queries about the project's environmental impact, Badman told

Cherwell: "The College understands local concerns and is committed to making EXOq an exemplar of sustainable data centre design." Mr Badman noted that the plans include on-site solar power and would reuse waste heat from the data centre through a low-carbon heat network serving both EXOq and the surrounding area. He added that the College is exploring off-site renewable energy and working with electricity generators and is "committed to ensuring EXOq's demands will not conflict with local energy needs".

The most significant local challenge to the project surrounds the provision of golf courses. In 2025, the 118-year-old North Oxford Golf Course, owned by Merton College, Exeter College, and the University of Oxford, closed to make way for a housing project. Greenway, a group set up by former members of the club, told *Cherwell* that "the college gave assurances that Frieze Farm [the land upon which EXOq would be built] could be used if necessary as a replacement for the golf course". Such a use is suggested in the Cherwell District Council Local Plan 2031.

Regarding the potential golf course, EXOq states that "evidence submitted to the Local Plan highlighted that the popularity of golf is declining nationally, and there is insufficient demand locally to justify the EXOq site as a replacement course". In a statement to *Cherwell*, Greenway have labelled these statements inaccurate.

A decision is expected at the start of next month after the council's independent golf need report is complete. The report will be the third golf need survey attached to the application, after Exeter and Greenway submitted their own competing surveys.

Rare Bodleian material used to train ChatGPT

Continued from Page 1

Data privacy, particularly for storage and later use in AI training, was a key concern when signing the University's wider agreement with OpenAI. An internal audit report on AI said: "When staff or students use personal ChatGPT accounts for University work, they may unintentionally expose sensitive information... This creates both legal and reputational risk, particularly if data is retained for model training or exposed to third parties."

According to internal documents seen by *Cherwell*, the digitised texts cover only out-of-copyright material and the Bodleian retains the rights to the scans. The Bodleian

The project is digitising over 3,500 dissertations from 1498-1884, which the University said "demonstrates how the Bodleian is using AI to imagine a library for the future". Meetings discussing further texts for digitisation proposed the personal archive of Nobel Prize-winning scientist Dorothy Hodgkin for inclusion in the Bodleian's digital archive.

Similar deals have been made with US universities, including the University of Michigan, MIT, Caltech, and Boston Public Library, under an OpenAI consortium called NextGenAI. Oxford is the only UK university included in the initiative.

According to its website, NextGenAI brings together 15 institutions who are "dedicated to using AI to accelerate research breakthroughs and transform education". Launched in March last year, the partnership involves \$50 million in research grants and compute funding. It aims to empower AI fluency and strengthen connections between academia and industry. It is not clear whether all these deals include giving OpenAI training data.

Richard Ovenden, the Bodleian's director, told *Cherwell*: "The collaboration between the University of Oxford and OpenAI serves several purposes. It provides students and faculty staff access to research grant funding, enterprise-level security

and cutting-edge AI tools to enhance teaching, learning and research.

"The partnership also includes a pilot research project to digitise public domain materials held in the collections of Oxford University's Bodleian Libraries, which will make the material searchable and accessible for students and researchers worldwide. It has also provided an opportunity to influence the way that generative AI operates and improve the quality of its outputs, through providing trusted and provenanced training data."

The Digital Head of Boston Public Library, Jessica Chapel, has similarly defended NextGenAI: "OpenAI had this interest in massive amounts of training data. We have an interest in massive amounts of digital objects. So this is kind of just a case that things are aligning."

Others have expressed concern over the impact of deals regarding AI training data. Leo Lo, a librarian and AI literacy specialist at the University of Virginia, argues that: "Once archival data enters an irreversible model, the original source cannot be isolated, attributed,

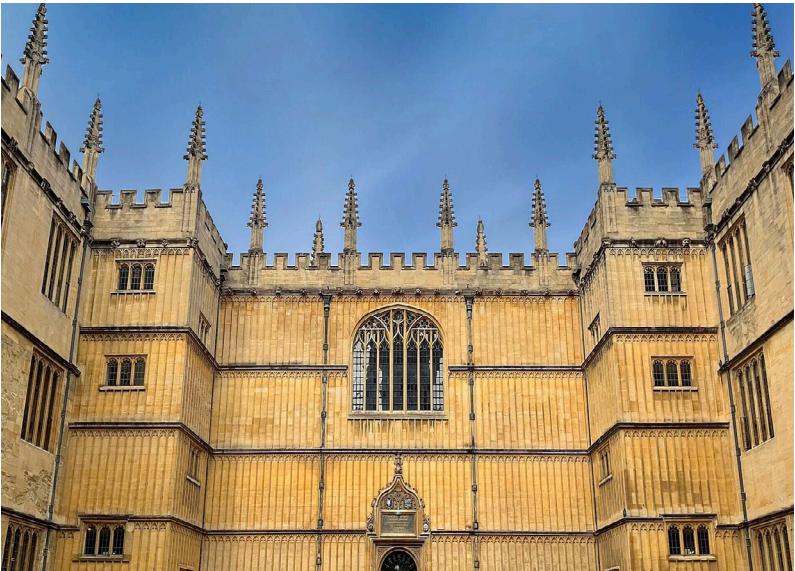
or removed. That is a permanent loss of provenance."

Staff at the Bodleian library also raised multiple "reputational concerns" surrounding Oxford's partnership with OpenAI, documents seen by *Cherwell* show. Academics have previously voiced concerns about the kind of language, particularly racially outdated terms, included within the specific data.

In response to these concerns Ovenden told *Cherwell*: "We recognise that AI raises important and complex questions for our staff and wider academic community. As with any emerging technology, we are engaging with these issues carefully and responsibly, with appropriate regard for ethical and environmental considerations."

Documents seen by *Cherwell* indicate that, while the Bodleian and OpenAI discussed expansion beyond the theses digitisation project, the pilot-projects continuation is subject to a series of evaluation criteria agreed in March 2025.

Image Credit: Honcques Laus, CC0 1.0 Via Flickr.



Antisemitism at UK universities is 79% higher than before October 7 attacks

GAVRIELLA EPSTEIN-LIGHTMAN

CW: Antisemitism

The University of Oxford was among ten universities to record five or more antisemitic incidents from 2024-2026, a new report on antisemitism at UK universities shows.

The Community Security Trust (CST), a UK charity which monitors antisemitism in Britain, has published a report tracking recorded antisemitic incidents affecting Jewish students, academics, university staff, and campus organisations between 2024 and 2026. Its executive summary warns that “the 7 October attacks ha[ve] resulted in a baseline level of antisemitism that is significantly higher than before”.

Last year saw 95 reported incidents across UK universities, a 14% increase on previous years. This figure remains below the “unprecedented” 272 incidents recorded during 2023/24 but is 79% higher than the last academic year before the Hamas attacks on 7th October.

CST’s report shows that the city of Oxford had the joint seventh most incidents of University antisemitism in the UK. Of the five incidents reported in Oxford, the majority occurred online. The report also references an incident in October 2024 where a swastika was drawn on a sign for the David Slager Jewish Students society on George Street.

A significant proportion of antisemitic incidents concerned Israel, Gaza, Hamas, the October 7 attacks, and the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. A reported 62% of incidents “contained such references alongside anti-Jewish language, motivation or targeting” while 55% of incidents “demonstrated explicitly anti-Zionist motivation alongside

antisemitism”. References to Hitler, the Nazis, or the Holocaust appeared in 26% of incidents.

The CST findings follow the Union of Jewish Students’ (UJS) ‘Time for Change’ report, published in March 2026, which found that “antisemitism on campus is normalised”.It urges universities to “make clear the difference between anti-Israel speech or activity, and antisemitism – and enforce this difference through disciplinary action when students, staff or societies cross the line”. The charity also suggested that educational institutions “make reporting of incidents accessible and worthwhile” in order to “build trust in university processes”.

In response to the report, a spokesperson for the Oxford Jewish Society told *Cherwell* that they “value the continued engagement of the University with the Jewish community to resolve issues of antisemitism”. However, they said that “the collegiate structure of the university and the unaffiliated nature of key institutions means that there is a deficit of accountability across the University”.

“Jewish students should not have to become less visibly Jewish, less openly Zionist, or less willing to speak in order to

feel comfortable at university”, the society added. “Antisemitism does not cease to be antisemitism because it is expressed in the language of anti-Zionism. Hostility towards Jewish students because of their real or assumed connection with Israel is not legitimate.”

A spokesperson for the University of Oxford told *Cherwell*: “Oxford is unequivocal: there is no place for antisemitism, harassment, or discrimination within our community.

“The University condemns, in the strongest possible terms, any form of racial hatred, including any actions or language urging violence against groups of people.”

When asked about measures taken to counter antisemitism at Oxford, the University spokesperson highlighted efforts to promote racial and religious inclusion. These include an annual Student Racial and Religious Inclusion Forum, first held in March, which brought students together to share their experiences. The University also said its Equality and Diversity Unit has facilitated antisemitism training from the Union of Jewish Students for student-facing staff.

Image credit: Stanley Arlidge for Cherwell.



Oxford offer holders ‘speechless’ after court rejects challenge to visa brake

MAIR ANDREWS

A high court case by four women prevented from studying at Oxford by the government’s visa brake was rejected in August, with an appeal pending.

At least 15 students offered places at Oxford have been prevented from taking up their places this October after the government introduced a student visa “brake” on nationals of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar, and Sudan. The policy, introduced in March, was challenged in the High Court by women from the four affected countries, including Oxford offer-holders.

The Home Office introduced the measure following an increase in asylum claims from people who had initially entered the UK through study and work routes. Measures are intended to “prevent abuse of the visa system” and ensure that study and skilled-worker routes were used for their “proper purpose”. The government estimated that the policy would prevent around 4,300 student visas being issued over 18 months, while reducing asylum claims from people on student visas by around 1,300.

Claimants challenged the process by which the four countries were selected and alleged that the Home Secretary failed to consider or investigate the discriminatory impact of the student visa brake on women.

Zeinab Mohamed, a current Sudanese student at Somerville College, attended the court case. She told *Cherwell*: “For many of us, this case was about more than visas. It was about whether students from countries already going through war and crisis would still have a fair chance at an education... The visa brake closes one of the few doors that were still open.”

The Court recognised that the policy had “dashed the hopes and expectation”

of students who had secured places at prestigious universities, including students who had received or been shortlisted for scholarships.

Safar Amin, a student from Afghanistan who had an offer to read an MPhil for development studies, told *Cherwell*: “For me, Oxford represented a possibility: the belief that, if people with the fewest resources are given an opportunity, they can become catalysts for change within societies that have endured decades of war and violence.” His offer has now been withdrawn. He told *Cherwell* that there was no option to defer it because the visa brake is expected to remain in place for at least 18 months, into the next application cycle.

Another affected offer-holder, Afghan human rights activist Aisha Khurram, had planned to read for Mst in Diplomatic Studies in Oxford this October. Khurram told *Cherwell* that studying her offer to study in the UK was part of a life-long plan: “I somehow wanted to pursue the dream I had left off in Afghanistan which was this diplomatic studies in Oxford.”

She told *Cherwell*: “Studying in Oxford is a dream in itself, but also a dream that started in Afghanistan. I wanted to take it to the next level, I would have been studying in Oxford.”

Alongside her studies, Khurram has piloted an e-learning programme providing university-level, certified education to women in six Afghan provinces. She said she had hoped to use her time at Oxford to expand the programme through the University’s networks. “One of the reasons I also wanted to join Oxford was to bring that idea into that network and expand it with their support,” she told *Cherwell*.

The Court acknowledged the “appalling systemic eradication” of women’s and girls’ access to education in Afghanistan, but ruled that the Home Secretary was not legally required to consider the impact of an

immigration measure on gender inequality overseas. Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021, women have been barred from secondary and higher education.

She added that she was “quite speechless” about the court’s resolution: “People have been finally able to survive the Taliban, then they are faced with policies that are only based on a prejudice that excludes them from opportunities or from their right to stabilise themselves and have a dignified future, just because they have a certain passport, not because they are not qualified.”

Image credit: Becca Chesworth, with permission.



Oxford at lowest-ever level in The Times rankings

MAIR ANDREWS

The University of Oxford has placed fifth in *The Times’* 2027 UK university rankings, falling from joint fourth with the University of Cambridge last year. This marks Oxford’s lowest ranking in the guide’s 33-year history and only the second time the University has not been in the top three.

For the third year running, the University of St Andrews and the London School of Economics (LSE) topped the ranking, achieving first and second place respectively. Imperial College London rose from sixth to third in the most recent ranking, marking the first time that Imperial has overtaken Oxford or Cambridge. Imperial College London is also named University of the Year 2027 by the paper.

Helen Davies, editor of *The Times* and *The Sunday Times Good University Guide*, said that this year saw “an emphasis on preparing students for future careers. Universities have tailored their campuses to suit hands-on learning... But, for this next generation of students and the higher education sector at large, this is a challenging time with institutions struggling with their own finances, and the toughest graduate jobs market in more than a decade.

“There are hard questions to ask: can I afford it? What will I get from a degree? Is it worth it?”

A supplementary guide containing “An analysis of the rising cost of higher education and its long-term value” and “Is Oxbridge losing its prestige?” was published alongside the rankings.

Despite ranking poorly in *The Times’* national survey, Oxford topped the paper’s league table of all South East England universities (not including London). *The Times* also named Oxford Runner-up for University of the Year for Scholarships and Bursaries 2027, behind Manchester Metropolitan University.

The annual guide produced by *The Times* ranks universities based on factors including academic achievement and employment prospects. Based on each category, universities receive a total score that informs the overall ranking.

In *The Guardian’s* UK rankings, Oxford retained its top spot, ranking first since 2025. In the same survey, St Andrews dropped from second to fourth place, while Cambridge gained a spot coming second. Different metrics used by papers can produce differing rankings.

NEWS SHORTS

Hip hip herpes!

A new survey has revealed that Oxford has the fifth highest STI rate of any university town in the country. The data shows that Oxford’s STI rate has climbed by 11.2% this year, recording 674 cases per 100,000 residents. Despite the similar student populations, this is 66% higher than C*mbriage. Oxford students really will do anything (anyone) to best ‘the other place’.

Been there, flushed that

Enough wet wipes to build ten ‘Big Bens’ are flushed into the Thames Water sewer network each year, costing the company over £21 billion a year. To counter the problem, Thames Water has launched Unblocktober. The company will remind users to only flush the three P’s: pee, poo, and paper.

Hold your horses

Film crews for *Slow Horses* were spotted kicking up a fuss outside the Bodleian Library and Turl Street. The crews are understood to be filming for a new series of the hit Apple TV show *Slow Horses*, starring Gary Oldman and Jack Lowden. Oxfordshire County Council charges £3,500 per day for premium filming locations.

Oil be damned

Just Stop Oil Activists who poured paint on the Radcliffe Camera in 2023 were found guilty in Oxford Crown Court. The sentences include over 16 weeks in prison, a two-year suspension, 120 hours of unpaid work, and payment of nearly £2,000 each. Protesters from Defend Our Juries stood outside the Court with placards.

CROSS CAMPUS

RIP pub

Students at King’s College London held a funeral for Dover Castle, a pub host to the University’s Wednesday sports nights. They took to the streets to raise their final glass. Despite needing to empty the barrels, drinks were, unfortunately, not on the house. *Cherwell* is not concerned about Kings students’ chances of finding a new, overpriced pub for socials in central London.

Oxford (?) goes down

Oxford Brookes University fell 41 places in *The Times* UK university guide. The Headington University has fallen from 69th in 2026 to joint 110th in 2027. Brookes’ fall is one of the biggest of any institution in the national league table, alongside 13 other institutions who fell by over 20 places. Brookes’ catastrophic fall was not the largest, at least.

Reform and Green societies register for Michaelmas

STANLEY ARLIDGE and MAIR ANDREWS

The University of Oxford has new Reform UK and Green Party societies, as both attempt to register with the Proctors. After a six-month wait for approval, the Reform political society announced its official registration with the University in an Instagram post. The society’s President, Lincoln Hewitt, told *Cherwell*: “Our overarching aim is to open up Oxford to new ideas and debates ideas that students have had nowhere to discuss but a quiet pub corner, debates that the Union would not host.”

Though previously operating as the Oxford University Reform Society, they are officially referred to as the Oxon Universities’ Reform Society due to University rules on the use of the University trademark by new clubs. The extent of the society’s official relation to Reform UK is unconfirmed.

The Oxford society’s registration comes amid a surge of Reform-affiliated groups at UK universities. In November 2025, the national party set up Students for Reform, a network of Reform UK groups in universities across the country, to champion Reform-supporting students. A recent Instagram post by Students for Reform celebrated Reform societies at 13 of 24 Russell Group universities.

Increased Reform presence on campus has caused controversy at multiple UK universities. Over 400 students and staff at the University of York protested against a Reform UK speaker event in November, while other Reform societies have faced hostile campaigns from left-wing groups and petitions against their affiliation. Earlier this year, a confrontation between Reform students and left-wing protestors at St Andrews University prompted Suella Braverman, a former Conservative MP who defected to become a spokesperson for Reform UK, to release a statement condemning both the university and the “political violence” of the students involved. A poll from the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) in January showed that 35% of UK students believe Reform should not be allowed to speak on campus.

While unregistered, the society hosted a Restore-Reform Britain debate and an event with historian David Starkey. The President of Reform Society told *Cherwell* that “the resources at our disposal and the University’s freedom of speech protections will permit us to run the full complement of events expected of an Oxford political club”. A forthcoming term card promises an “extensive programme of speaker events including members of parliaments and public figures”, the President added. As a fresher’s event, the society hosted a pub

crawl including a ‘remigration rouge’ team.

Regarding the new society’s role in the student politics landscape, the President told *Cherwell*: “Students on the right can expect to find their home and their voice.” President-Elect of the Oxford University Conservative Association, Aarav Desai, told *Cherwell*: “Oxford University Conservative Association will always remain the greatest home of conservatism in the University, with our esteemed history of fostering debate, free speech and conservative ideals... There will be no defectors to Reform society here”.

Alongside the Reform society, a Green Party society is in the process of registering for Michaelmas. The society will offer weekly ‘lemonade and leftism’ events to rival similar events hosted by Oxford’s other political societies. Mothin Ali, the Green Party’s Deputy Leader, will visit the society at an event later this term.

Nidal Shah, the society’s president, told *Cherwell*: “Oxford Student Greens hopes to offer a real alternative on the left to students who feel disenfranchised with the status quo. We aim to create a safe space for the debate and discussion of green policies and current events as well as running speakers events to allow students to hear from those on the left in a way that they haven’t been able to before.”

Controversial St Peter’s expansion is approved

OSKAR DOEPKE

Oxford City Council’s sale of 11 New Road to St Peter’s is set to go ahead, despite opposition from local campaign groups and Green councillors.

The Council-owned building, a mixed-use property on the edge of St Peter’s estate, houses a six-bedroom flat leased to the College and three other businesses: Castle News, Classy Barbers, and American Nails. Under the College’s plan, it would convert all but the ground floor into 24 student rooms and add an extra floor.

The Council’s Cabinet voted on the building’s sale on 16th September. Following this, Green councillors “called in” the decision to the scrutiny committee, raising concerns over “inadequate consultation regarding the decision” and argued that “the sell-off of public assets will simply cost the Council more in the long term”.

This committee examined the decision on the 30th September, choosing to uphold the decisions to sell.

Green Councillor Alfie Davis told *Cherwell*: “The lack of consultation and notice given to those most affected by this sale is appalling... Losing community spaces like these will be a loss to everyone, town and gown alike. Although these may be commercial lets, community exists in all kinds of spaces, including small local businesses, and it is clear from the public outcry these shops have a significant

community value.”

The campaign group Save Our Spaces has opposed the sale, and its petition, launched on 11th September, had gathered nearly 500 signatures by the time of publication. A spokesperson for Save Our Spaces previously told *Cherwell*: “Once again, the City Council is selling off community space to serve the University’s land grab. These three businesses serve thousands of local people and are much loved by the local community. But they have been treated with total contempt by the Council and St Peter’s College, who have been drawing up plans behind their backs to kick them out.”

The spokesperson added that selling a publicly owned building that brings in “well over £100,000 per year in rent” is “an incredibly short-sighted strategy”.

The Council told *Cherwell*: “St Peter’s College... approached the Council with a proposal to acquire the property, and terms have subsequently been negotiated. The decision to dispose of the freehold title will generate a capital receipt that can be used to support the provision of investment in and services for communities in Oxford which otherwise would not be affordable.”

They added that the sale would “remove future liabilities associated with the property”, as a “significant future expenditure would be required” if it kept the property. It also disputed “misinformation” and claims that have “circulated online about the loss of community space as a result of the sale”,

as the building is part of its commercial portfolio and has only commercial tenants.

According to the Council, two of the three businesses would continue to operate, as St Peter’s is “proposing modifications to the upper floors and basement, not the retail on the ground floor”. St Peter’s similarly told *Cherwell* that it “plans to retain the business tenants, Castle News and Classy Barbers, occupying the ground floor of the building”. However, the floor occupied by the third tenant, American Nails, would be converted into student accommodation.

St Peter’s added that “this project is in line with the College’s strategic commitment to increase the amount of College accommodation available to students who would otherwise be out on Oxford’s private rental market”. The intended purchase follows St Peter’s recent expansion on New Road, including Castle Bailey Quad, a 54 en-suite room Passivhaus development, which the College opened in 2024.

The College’s plan is the latest in a series of disputes over college and University developments in Oxford. In February, residents objected to Oxford University Development’s plans for redeveloping 25 Wellington Square, which houses several independent businesses. In April, the Council rejected Regent Park’s plans to convert the Oxfam Bookshop on St Giles’ Street into its Middle Common Room.

Image Credit: Save Our Spaces with permission.



Oxford ‘growth corridor’ falls behind global competition

GAVRIELLA EPSTEIN-LIGHTMAN

The Oxford-Cambridge “growth corridor” (OxCam) is falling behind its global rivals despite its world-leading research output, a report warns.

A recent report by a public consultancy and industry leaders found that the region produces more scientific publications per resident than any other global innovation cluster, but lacks the infrastructure, talent retention, and transport links needed to turn its research strengths into economic growth. According to the report, OxCam “does not yet have the scale or depth of a top-tier cluster”. It warned that Britain is “competing in a global innovation race that is only accelerating”, adding that “we cannot lose focus or slow down now”.

The Oxford-Cambridge region has become a major focus of the government’s growth agenda after former Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced plans to “unleash the potential” of the region to create “Europe’s Silicon Valley”.

The report argues the government needs to “go further and faster”, warning that “if OxCam moves too slowly, more of the firms and talent nurtured in the UK will move abroad”. The report describes addressing these constraints as “one of the clearest routes to long-term national renewal and economic security”.

One of the five constraints identified as holding back the growth corridor is talent retention. Around two-thirds of unicorn companies founded by Oxford and

Cambridge alumni are not headquartered locally, while one in five has left the UK. Infrastructure was also identified as a significant barrier to growth, with industrial electricity costing over 60% more in OxCam than in Paris and Boston.

The region also suffers from poor connectivity between its two university cities. Travelling between Oxford and Cambridge by public transport currently takes three and a half hours.

East West Rail, which is intended to connect Oxford and Cambridge by train has faced repeated delays. The route’s first part, connecting Oxford and Milton Keynes, was due to open by December 2025. However, it has only been used for training runs and freight services, and in August, operator Chiltern Railways could not provide a date for the route opening.

The government announced over £500 million to unlock private sector investment as part of its commitment to the corridor last October. They estimated that developing the Growth Corridor could add £7.8 billion to the UK economy by 2035.

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government told *Cherwell* that the growth corridor “has huge economic potential for our nation’s growth prospects”.

“We’re unlocking this potential by exploring plans to go further than ever to create growth in the area, so we can boost the economy and put more money in people’s pockets,” they added.

Image credit: Anne Irving for Cherwell.

Traffic filters trial replaces Oxford congestion charge

ORLA MCMAHON

Oxfordshire County Council has introduced a traffic filters trial in Oxford to replace the congestion charge.

The scheme began on 28th September and can run for up to 18 months. Like the previous congestion charge, it aims to reduce traffic in and around Oxford.

Drivers will no longer be able to pay the £5 congestion charge when travelling into the city. Instead, any drivers who pass through the traffic filters without a permit will be liable to a fine of up to £70, reduced to £35 if paid within 21 days. For the first six months, drivers will receive a warning without a fine the first time they travel through the filters without a permit.

The traffic filters only apply to cars and motorhomes. Oxford residents, including students, can apply for permits allowing 100 days of travel through the filter zone, while Oxfordshire residents can apply for a 25-day permit. Some groups, such as blue badge holders or community health and care workers, are exempt from the traffic filters scheme.

Filters have been installed at the same six points across the city as the congestion charge: Hythe Bridge Street (near Said Business School), St Cross

Road, St Clements Street, Thames Street, Marston Ferry Road, and Hollow Way. All parts of Oxford can still be reached without passing through a traffic filter, due to the reopening of Botley Road.

The new scheme will cost £6.56 million and is funded by the government. Under UK law, any money it raises must be invested into local transport initiatives.

Councillor Gareth Epps, Cabinet Member for Transport at Oxfordshire County Council, told *Cherwell*: “The county council’s transport policies are designed to make it easier for people to travel into and around Oxford and make the county a better place to live, work and do business.”

To help determine the success of the traffic filter scheme, Oxfordshire County Council has opened a public consultation,. In the consultation residents can give feedback by completing an online survey. When asked whether the traffic filters will continue after the trial period, Councillor Epps told *Cherwell*: “The council’s future decisions about traffic filters will be influenced by many factors, including monitoring data, feedback from the six-month public consultation, the costs of operating and maintaining the scheme, legal advice, and relevant local and national policy.”

Analysis: Oxford's college access gap is widening again

Continued from Page 1

As a result, the scale of outreach does not predict a college's state-school intake.

State-school figures don't tell the whole story

The state school percentage has become the default shorthand for 'access' and is the most widely reported figure, but it covers everything from a struggling comprehensive to a highly selective state grammar school. However, two more measures also exist: Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility, which is based on household income, and the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), which measures the deprivation of an applicant's home area.

In its Access and Participation Plan, Oxford set itself a FSM target of 10.7% by 2028/29, up from a baseline of 7.6%. Two years in, the figure has instead fallen to 6.6% – below the baseline. The plan's other measure, IMD, is on track. Representation stood at 20.9% in 2025, level with its milestone for that year against a target of 23.0% by 2028/29.

Cherwell's analysis of data for all undergraduate colleges found only a weak relationship between state-school intake and FSM eligibility, and a similarly weak relationship with the proportion of students from the two most deprived IMD quintiles.

If state school intake reliably tracked disadvantage, colleges would order in roughly the same order on all three measures. This, however, is not

the case. Mansfield is the exception: it tops all three measures. But Oriel, Oxford's lowest college on state school percentage, is in the middle of FSM and IMD intake rankings: 15th of 30 on FSM and 21st of 30 on IMD. A college can be an outlier on the state-school measure frequently used, while averaging out on measures that more directly track levels of disadvantage. The gap between Oxford's best and worst colleges is 43% on state-school intake, but under 10% on FSM and about 12% on IMD.

The colleges with the lowest FSM or IMD figures are not the colleges with the least state-school students. They are spread across the state-school admissions range, rather than clustered at the bottom.

For example, at 80.7%, Brasenose College's state-school intake is among the highest in Oxford and well above the University average. But on the IMD, it has the lowest representation of any Oxford college. Its access and outreach programme concentrates on Yorkshire, running school visits and hosting thousands of visitors at its open days, and recently expanded with a £6,000 grant from the Jack Goldhill Charitable Trust. In Brasenose's case, reaching more state-educated applicants has not led to reaching more applicants from the most deprived areas.

For years, the headline figure for university access has been the share of students from state schools. But at college level, that number is loosely connected to what it is often used



to show: whether disadvantaged students are getting in. On a more direct measure, FSM eligibility, Oxford is missing its own target and has fallen, against a baseline that says it should be rising.

Why this happens

FSM and IMD data are published but rarely reported or compared across colleges, unlike state-school percentage – so the weaker measure is the one that circulates. Outreach programmes, meanwhile, are typically evaluated by colleges themselves using activity metrics, such as event counts, attendance, and satisfaction scores, rather than by tracking whether that activity changes who is later admitted. Admissions scale also affects FSM and IDM variation. An Oxford college typically admits a small number of UK undergraduates a year, so even a well-run programme reaching hundreds of pupils has to convert into a much narrower number of admissions decisions before it moves the headline percentage at all.

Asked about the widening gap and the differences between measures, a University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “Oxford's access priorities focus on measures including eligibility for Free School Meals and socio-economic disadvantage, rather than school type, as more direct indicators of disadvantage. In 2025, 21% of UK students admitted to Oxford came from the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas and 6.6% were eligible for Free School Meals... We recognise that patterns of representation can vary across the collegiate University, and we continue to work collectively to widen access and share effective approaches.”

Meanwhile, Erica Holt-White, the research and policy manager at the Sutton Trust – an educational charity aiming to improve social mobility and address disadvantage – told *Cherwell*: “While those who attend a private school are more likely to be from a high-income family, state schools still serve pupils from a wide range of backgrounds, so a combination of factors should be considered, particularly free school meal eligibility, area deprivation and area participation... The renewed gap between colleges is concerning. While some have made strong progress in widening access, students from disadvantaged backgrounds should have the same opportunity to succeed

at every Oxford college.”

That measurement point holds up at the college level too. A spokesperson for Oriel, currently the lowest of any college on state-school intake, told *Cherwell*: “Oriel prioritises multiple measures of socio-economic and educational disadvantage... We continue to expand our outreach activities, including by introducing a second full-time outreach role in 2025.”

The College added that its own FSM and IMD figures – at 7.2% and 18.7% respectively – sit close to the college-wide averages of 7.4% and 19.9% across the 2023–25 period covered by the college data. The College also added that in 2025/26, its outreach office worked with 6,513 students across 158 events in partnership with access charities such as Generating Genius.

Oxford is missing its own target and has fallen, against a baseline that says it should be rising.

A spokesperson for Pembroke told *Cherwell*: “Pembroke's approach to access focuses on tackling regional inequality in this country, aiming to promote education for the common good. Our work is regionally focused, with the majority of resources invested in the North West and North East of England. Through collaboration with universities, colleges, schools and other organisations across England, our programmes seek to raise academic resilience, confidence and curiosity in pupils from Year 5 to Year 12 from underrepresented backgrounds, encouraging and equipping them to apply to the UK's top universities. We are pleased to see these pupils go on to receive offers in their chosen subjects from a range of top colleges and universities.

“Every year we receive approximately 800 applications to our access and outreach programmes and engage with hundreds of pupils in year-long academic programmes. That these pupils do not all come to Pembroke does not detract from the commitment of the College to extend opportunity to the widest pool of

talent.”

Further, Freyja Madsen, the Senior Tutor at Brasenose, told *Cherwell*: “Brasenose works very hard to encourage the best applicants from all backgrounds, and despite our great successes over the last few years, we know that we still have many challenges.

“We are pleased that the proportion of our students from state schools broadly reflects the state-to-independent school ratio in UK post-16 education. At the same time, measuring success in outreach needs to take account of many factors, and the proportion of state school entrants is not a formal target for the College or the University. At Brasenose, we know we need to do more to increase representation from the least socio-economically privileged backgrounds, and we are firmly committed to working to improve this.”

A spokesperson added that it does not “regard the figures highlighted by *Cherwell* with complacency” and is “concerned by the disparity” between colleges. It also added that, in its most recent admissions round, the proportion of FSM applicants increased, and that the College has two full-time outreach staff working on partnerships across the UK alongside the University's UNIQ and Opportunity Oxford programmes.

What this means

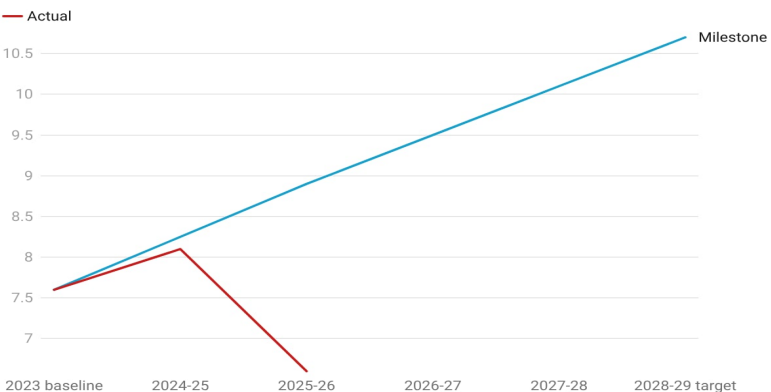
This analysis does not necessarily suggest that any individual college's outreach programme has failed. Colleges have limited control over the wider factors that shape who applies and what happens next: outcomes depend on far more than any one college's own spending. But for prospective applicants comparing colleges, and anyone reporting on access at Oxford, it is reason to treat the usual story – that of state-school intake – with caution. The gap between Oxford's colleges has not closed after a decade of outreach efforts, and the number used to track it is only a loose proxy for disadvantage.

For the University, however, the immediate question is its FSM target. To reach 10.7% by 2028/29, FSM representation has to rise from 6.6%, and its published milestones require an increase in both remaining admissions cycles. So far, the figure has moved in the opposite direction.

Image credit: Anne Irving for *Cherwell*.

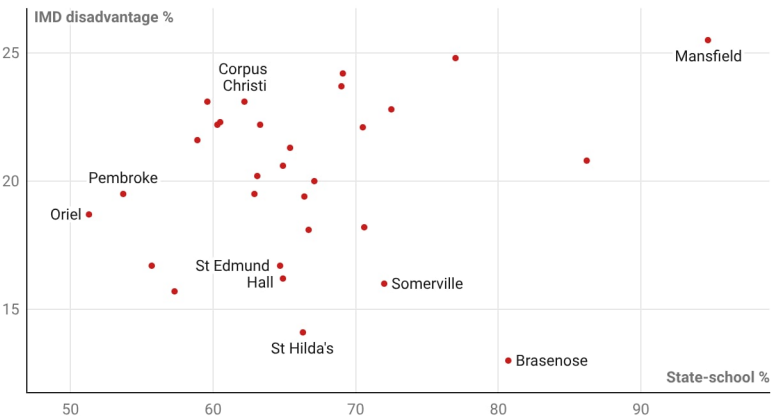
Oxford University is falling behind its own Free School Meals target

FSM eligibility rose to 8.1% in 2024, then fell to 6.6% in 2025.



State-school intake doesn't track Free School Meals eligibility or area deprivation

Each dot is one of Oxford's 30 colleges, 2023-25 aggregate. A genuine link between the two measures would show up as a rising line across the dots.



University rankings can be misleading

SABA AHMADZADEH NOUGHANI

When I came very close to rejecting Oxford for the University of Exeter, a non-British friend of my mother said to me: “I hadn’t heard of Exeter until now, but the name Oxford? I’ve known it since I was a child.” Another person remarked that “you can pick Exeter, but as good as it may be, Oxford’s prestige will never be taken away”.

The Exeter course of my choice, Middle East Studies, had for many years ranked higher than the equivalent course at Oxford. But since Oxford had been consistently ranked first overall for the past decade, I felt it would come across as foolish to reject what is often dubbed ‘the best university in the world’ for an institution that was, while outstanding, not ranked in the top ten globally.

Where I study, or who has studied there before me, has never been of any importance nor a source of pride for me, but it is widely accepted that some of the best writers, poets, scientists, and public figures the world has ever seen received an Oxbridge education. Therefore, Oxford and Cambridge being ranked outside the top three universities in the UK was not something I ever expected to read.

And yet, in this year’s *The Sunday Times* Good University Guide, Oxford was ranked four places below St Andrews, which came first.

Last year, the guide ranked LSE first in the UK, even though Oxford was ranked first globally by both the QS World University Rankings and *Times Higher Education* for the tenth consecutive year.

The most recent university rankings, published by *Times Higher Education* (THE) last week, place Oxford as the ‘number one for a record 11th consecutive year’. Oxford holds the longest reign at number one of any university in the history of the ranking.

Chancellor William Hague wrote on LinkedIn on Wednesday that “Rankings are only one measure of a great university, but to sustain this position for 11 consecutive years in an increasingly competitive world is a tremendous achievement.”

While *The Sunday Times* ranks St Andrews 1st in the UK, the QS World University Rankings place it at 115th, and the *Times Higher Education* places it at 185th worldwide.

In contrast, *The Sunday Times* ranked Oxford 5th in the UK, but the QS World University Rankings placed Oxford 4th globally, while *Times Higher Education* ranked it 1st.

These numbers may initially seem contradictory and confusing on the surface, but asking which

university is the best in the UK, or globally, simply depends on who you ask and which factors they consider.

The Times and *The Sunday Times* UK ranking is first and foremost designed around the undergraduate student experience and prioritises factors like student satisfaction, teaching quality, graduate prospects, entry standards, research quality, and more.

By contrast, both the *Times Higher Education* and QS World University Rankings assess global university performance and place greater emphasis on global academic position and research standing. They prioritise academic reputation, employer reputation, research citations, global research networks, international students and staff, and research productivity.

While one ranking is concerned with the undergraduate student experience in Britain, the global rankings, which consistently place Oxford among the top five universities globally, place more weight on a university’s global academic influence and profile.

When comparing St Andrews to Oxford, it is important to recognise that St Andrews is a relatively small and undergraduate-focused university. Oxford, by contrast, is a large, internationally oriented institution with considerably greater research output and global influence. I would not necessarily expect Oxford to rank first in rankings that focus on the day-to-day undergraduate experience.

In fact, the current *Sunday Times* ranking explains Oxford’s fall to fifth place partly by pointing to its

student feedback performance. *THE* has no direct student-satisfaction measure; instead, it considers research environment and quality, industry knowledge and transfer, and reputation surveys.

It is therefore not surprising that St Andrews, despite not dominating global research to the same extent as Oxford, has scored highly on the factors that a UK undergraduate league table like *The Sunday Times* prioritises, such as student satisfaction.

As someone who also initially applied to St Andrews before withdrawing, and later accepted an offer from Oxford, St Andrews now being ranked first in the UK by *The Sunday Times* does not make me regret my choice because I understand what that ranking was primarily measuring. It does not focus on global academic reputation, research influence, international standing, or fully capture the breadth and scale of research.

Oxford’s reputation is built upon nine centuries of academic history. Its rival, Cambridge, was founded by former Oxford academics. Yet despite St Andrews ranking first as the UK’s best university, I doubt we will see an influx of students rejecting their Oxford offers for St Andrews overnight.

In fact, when I once told a former teacher that “Oxford is just a name”, they replied: “A name that holds power in so many rooms.”

St Andrews attained 1st position according to one particular ranking and its specific set of criteria, but even if, for the sake of argument, THE did not rank Oxford 1st, I would feel no different. No ranking table that can erase Oxford’s institutional reputation and traditional prestige.



Image credit: Ian Coates for Cherwell.

We should hate more

ANISH VEDANTHAM

Oxford students hate C*mbriage. Or at least, we’re supposed to. We call them Tabs, occasionally ‘shoe’ them, and inherit a rivalry as soon as we matriculate. There’s only one problem: most of the time, nobody seems particularly bothered.

The Varsity matches between Oxford and C*mbriage began with men’s cricket in 1827, followed by the first men’s Boat Race in 1829. Today, Varsity takes place across 50 sports and involves thousands of students.

And yet, 200 years later, the rivalry rarely escapes the sporting world. Sure, we shout “shoe the Tabs” during the Boat Race and teams feel similar disdain when facing ‘the other place’ on the water, pitch, court, or track. But, aside from particular Varsity matches, the so-called hate seems a bit...lacklustre.

Oxford beat C*mbriage 110 times last year and has recorded more wins than the Tabs in Varsity competitions for the past six years. Did you know? More importantly, did you care? We have two centuries of competition and two institutions obsessed with tradition. It should be impossible to manufacture a better rivalry.

And yet much of it happens unnoticed.

Contrast this with American university rivalries. Harvard and Yale are perhaps the closest equivalents. Their American football match is simply “The Game”, and the rivalry stays with students throughout their lives. And of course, that rivalry is tame compared to the heavy hitters.

Duke students tent (camp outside the stadium) for weeks to win tickets to the game against the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. And it’s not just for the ultra sports fans; some years “more than 2/5 of the student body [have] attempt[ed] to earn a spot” tenting at the most difficult level. The Michigan - Ohio State rivalry presents another classic

rivalry, where, during “hate week”, the Ohio State community crosses out every single “M” on campus with red tape.

Of course, these rivalries are a peculiarly American phenomenon and would feel forced here. But Britons do not lack tribal thinking. Think about football derbies. North London. Merseyside. Manchester. Fans invest emotional significance in beating one particular club that massively exceeds the significance of the result. There are uglier manifestations, but there is also wonderfully pointless taunting.

Rivalry operates through agreed irrationality. In 2024, some Tottenham fans even hoped they would lose to Manchester City to prevent Arsenal from winning the league. We don’t need to import the American capacity for hatred. Britons have perfectly good hatred at home.

This is especially crucial at Oxford. For much of everyday life, Oxford isn’t one community. It’s dozens of colleges. We eat separately, live separately, and often socialise separately. It begs the question: what exactly is an Oxford student?

The collegiate structure is wonderful at producing college identity. It is considerably less good at producing Oxford identity. What exactly defines us? The University administration? The Rad Cam? A seal containing a Latin motto? It can be difficult to work out what a PPEist at Somerville, a Philosophy and French student at Hertford, and a Classicist at Merton have in common. Fortunately, C*mbriage provides an answer: none of them are Tabs.

Oxford does not necessarily need more spirit. It needs something around which spirit can crystallise. That’s where C*mbriage comes in.

An ‘us’ becomes much easier to define once there is a ‘them’, and C*mbriage makes an unusually convenient ‘them’. It’s a collegiate university built around small-group teaching, formals, gowns, eight-week terms, and an impenetrable vocabulary – only with supervisions instead of tutorials, Easter instead

of Trinity, and enough minor alterations to maintain the pretence of originality. A good rival, after all, must be similar enough that beating them matters and different enough that you can pretend it proves something. C*mbriage fills this role perfectly.

More importantly, there is a liberation in caring so much about something that matters so little. Oxford life offers no shortage of consequential competition: exams, internships, jobs. Hating C*mbriage offers the opposite. There is no rational reason why any of us should care. That’s exactly why we should.

Of course, the rivalry plainly isn’t dead. Rugby matches feature heckling, chants, and a crowd united around shoeing the Tabs. The Boat Race turns London into a sea of dark blue and light blue shirts. The rivalry, however, should not require a fixture.

We should hate C*mbriage more comprehensively. Stop calling it C*mbriage: it is ‘the other place’. Call its students Tabs without really knowing why. Their shade is not light blue; it is an unfortunate failure to commit to a proper colour. Treat every league table on which Oxford finishes higher as vindication and the rest as methodologically suspect. When a friend announces that they are visiting, offer your condolences. In short, be petty.

Perhaps, then, we should be grateful for C*mbriage. Every good protagonist needs an antagonist. They give our insults somewhere to land, and dozens of colleges something to agree upon. They can even make Oxford feel like one university.

That is a valuable public service. Obviously, we should never tell them. Instead, regard light blue with suspicion. Be partisan. Whenever you compare us to them, come to the completely dispassionate conclusion that Oxford is better. And if you happen to meet a Tab, be perfectly pleasant. They made a rough decision when they were 18. We’ve all been there.

C*mbriage has spent eight centuries giving Oxford somebody to hate. It would be rude not to take them up on their offer.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Splitting stats and splitting hairs

Despite Ms Garrett’s claims (‘If Westminster won’t offer reparations, Oxford should’), in 2021 the black fraction of each group was as follows: UK population, 3.7% (census); 18–24 year olds, 5.3%; university students, 10.5% (OfS); Oxford admissions, 3.5%. Black Oxford admissions peaked in 2024 at 3.8% but fell to 3.2% in 2025. The cited UUK report discusses an attainment gap, which may exist before university and thence rationalise Oxford’s lower rate.

Individual colleges establishing specific scholarships is ill-considered and would undermine the unity of the central University’s funding structure and exacerbate disparities. The wealthiest already make larger contributions to bursaries and have greater outreach budgets, which would be more effective for assisting home students than sponsoring overseas schools.

The implication that the lack of mental health provision uniquely affects black Oxonians is confusing when students of all ethnicities take their lives every year and innumerable others would benefit from improved support: colleges must invest in counselling and welfare.

John Frame, Chemistry, *Christ Church*

The complexity of Oxford life

Reading Priya Burrow’s article (‘An accidental archive: The same seat, the same drink’) was a breath of fresh air from a picture-perfect Oxford that so often feels detached from reality. Over the summer it is easy to reminisce on Oxford life as if looking back on a distant fairytale, but after being plunged back into the university routine suddenly the crushing chaos of deadlines, nights out, and the ever-present imposter syndrome kicks in.

This article was able to perfectly sum up the paradoxical love-hate relationship that Oxford can foster, with an emphasis on finding calm within the storm. Heading into a new year filled with excitement, we must all remember that highs and lows are inevitable; and from them progress flourishes.

Make sure to be kind to yourself this term in how far you have come, and take time to reflect – whether this be in a cozy tearoom, along the riverbank, or on the cobbled streets of the city that is our home.

Freya Robson, French and Philosophy, *Hertford College*

THE COMMENTS SECTION

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

The door of stupidity opened, and the Oxford *Cherwell* stepped forward, plunging down the elevator shaft of meaningless gestures (‘If Westminster won’t offer reparations, Oxford should’)

teemurrrphy via Instagram

IMO there’s nothing wrong with scamming rich foreigners to prop up college budgets for the real education they provide their undergrads (‘Academic tourism: Oxford University and its summer schools’)

jimmynick via Instagram

Pack it in guys we’re not gonna make it now (‘Oxford falls to lowest-ever spot in The Times UK University Guide 2027’)

srishtsinghchandi via Instagram

If even the Union won’t host it, it must be mental (‘Oxford Reform Society registers for Michaelmas’)

cluanach86 via Instagram

Bills cannot be that high dawg (‘Oxford partnership allows OpenAI to use rare Bodleian texts to train ChatGPT’)

backward_short_leg via Instagram

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Unsilenced: I reported Damian Howard, too

ALEXIS POINDEXTER

When looking back on abuse cases that have plagued the church, some of the most common questions centre around whether there were early warning signs, whether something was missed, and most importantly, whether we can prevent this from happening in the future. The answer to each is wrapped up in a simple, yet difficult proposition: we need to start encouraging and listening to those who speak up and stop blindly trusting those in power.

A few months before Father Damian Howard, my former Senior Chaplain at the Oxford University Catholic Chaplaincy (OUCC), was removed under obscure circumstances, later revealed to be due to a sexual abuse complaint, I filed a non-sexual complaint against him. I had recently gone to Damian for spiritual support, explaining that I was struggling with my faith. In response, he spent the better part of an hour mocking me, belittling me, and – just for good measure – rolling his eyes at me. While I came away from the conversation upset, it was not until I spoke with family, friends, and an academic dean that I realised his responses and behaviour, given his position, were inappropriate. At the suggestion of my dean, I opted, hesitantly, to file a complaint.

At the time – late January of last year – the safeguarding officer of the chaplaincy community was, in fact, Damian. While I now realise this was a failure to properly safeguard the community, I thought little of it then, and simply opted to file a complaint with the Jesuits in Britain’s safeguarding officer, Julie Ashby-Ellis. Julie had previously worked as the safeguarding officer under Damian’s provincialate, as he was the prior leader of the Jesuit organisation in Britain; however, considering the asininity of reporting Damian to himself, she was my closest hope of ensuring any impartiality.

Ruled as a ministerial complaint – and not safeguarding – by Julie, a designation meaning that my complaint, according to her judgement, did not meet the criteria of abuse, my complaint landed in the hands of the current British Provincial and organisation’s leader, Father Peter Gallagher. In response to my complaint, the provincial immediately prohibited Damian from having any further contact with me, a response that inadvertently prohibited me from worshipping at or taking part in the chaplaincy community for over six months, while Damian carried on with his life as usual. He also reprimanded Damian, assigned him to be retrained and “closely watched”, and finally promised me that this sort of behaviour would never happen again, a promise that sadly ended up broken in late July – within the span of six short months.

Only after the alleged abuse became public, months after the initial abuse allegations, did I find out what led to that promise being broken, while I was gone from the chaplaincy. The Jesuit Provincial,

with some prodding from me, informed me he had assigned Damian to speak once a week with two Jesuits from Campion Hall and once a month with a Jesuit psychotherapist, during which Damian simply told them that he was overworked and overtired. He did not disclose to them the conduct later alleged by another student about him, including allegations that Damian encouraged the student to remove clothing and get into bed with him, a fact I only later found out after media-publicised reports of the alleged sexual abuse and institutional cover-up this past February. And while the provincial-appointed training was focused on “inappropriate language and underlying negative attitudes”, there was no actual supervision, like a safeguarding officer or trained professional, to keep an eye on Damian and to ensure he was improving, in the aftermath of my complaint, as the provincial opted not to inform the two safeguarding representatives underneath Damian at the chaplaincy of my complaint. To the Jesuits, whatever Damian said was sacrosanct.

While the provincial later expressed deep shame for the inadequate supervision of Damian at the chaplaincy for those six months, this was not the first time I came away from an interaction feeling that Damian’s truth was greater than mine. And in the months since, I have firmly come to believe that the key to stopping abuse in the church might be found in examining the why.

Power and status, in the Catholic Church, are construed as markers of integrity and character. Priests are placed on a pedestal, separated from the rest of the Catholic population and are believed to be good by virtue of their position, not by virtue of their character. This erroneous conflation of power with goodness results in a church that trusts only her priests as mouthpieces. This proxy additionally, and adversely, causes anyone who speaks up to learn that silence, and the obedience and deference to power needed to achieve that silence, might as well be the church’s cardinal virtues.

Unquestionably, this culture was evident in the provincial’s blind trust of Damian for six months, but that alone does not even scratch the surface. There was the time I confided in a fellow Catholic about my experiences with Damian. He insinuated that I was lying, since Damian was the former provincial of the British Jesuits, and as a priest in good standing, simply could not have done anything I claimed. And there was the time I sought advice from another Oxford Catholic chaplain, months after Damian’s removal, over whether to file a second complaint about a comment he said that was likely sexualizing – “If you had a partner, you’d be spending a lot more time with your partner than with God, right?” The chaplain dismissed me, believing that Damian was a good person who just said a bad thing. Or, the one that hurt the most was the social isolation I felt after being shunned by a number of students who linked my return to the chaplaincy to Damian’s disappearance. Moments like these, sadly, worked to

make me doubt my own perception and silence my own voice, all the while the conduct another student would later describe as abuse was happening right under the nose of the Oxford Catholic community.

While the culture of the Catholic Church hammers in the virtues of obedience, silence, and blind deference to those in power, a darker reality is haunting: those in power are aware of this. To illustrate, for months, Damian became a master of duplicity, pretending to become a better person under provincial-appointed supervision, all the while allegedly engaging in abusive conduct with a student behind closed doors. No one questioned Damian; everyone was blindly trusting him. The culture was working exactly as it was supposed to, and all he had to do was take advantage of it.

In the months after media reports of Damian’s sexual abuse allegations surfaced, I felt uncontrollably angry, due to the widespread belief that the abuse came out of left field. That was never the truth. I, for one, should know. I kept trying to speak up. It is just that the Catholic community fostered an environment in which my voice never mattered, and by virtue of his position alone, my priest’s did. While it has been said a thousand times over, hopefully, this will be the last: the key to preventing abuse in the Catholic Church must be to make sure that this never happens again.

In response, Jesuits in Britain told *Cherwell*: “The Jesuits in Britain take concerns raised with us seriously.

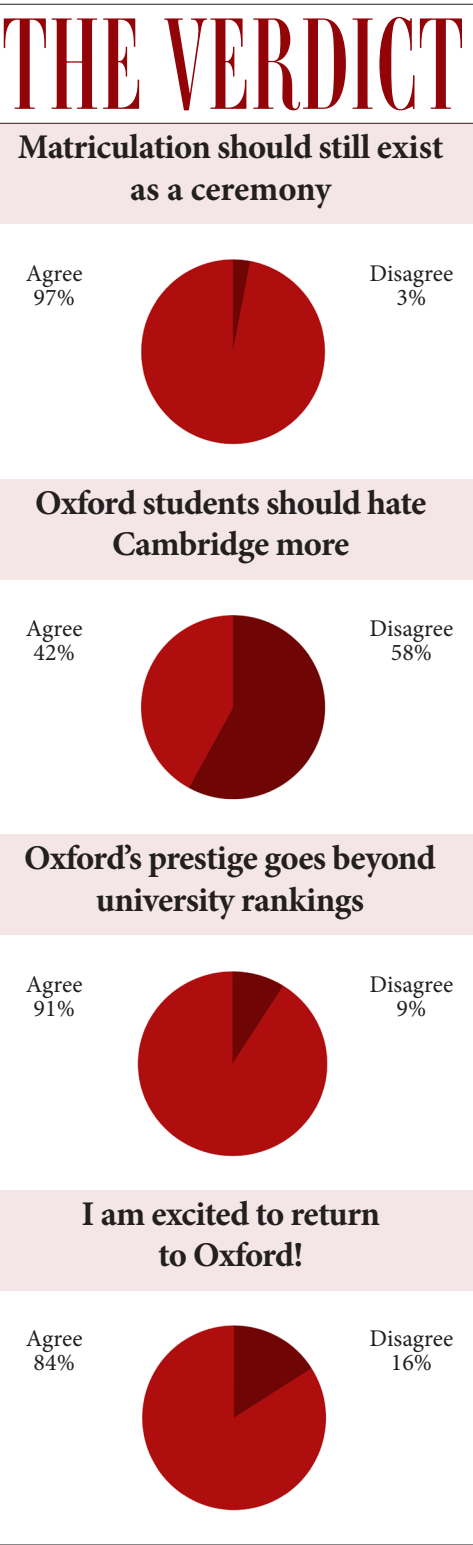
“The written complaint from Ms Poindexter concerned a pastoral interaction with Fr Damian Howard SJ. She described feeling that her concerns had been minimised and dismissed, and that she felt invalidated by the response she received. It did not allege that Fr Howard had mocked her. We did not receive an allegation of abuse.

“The complaint was received by our Safeguarding and Professional Conduct Coordinator and assessed in accordance with our policies and procedures. It was then dealt with directly by the Provincial Superior, Fr Peter Gallagher SJ. As the major superior and head of the Jesuits in Britain, the Provincial has responsibility for the leadership, governance and oversight of the Province and its members. His direct involvement reflected the seriousness with which the complaint was taken.

“The Jesuits in Britain recognise that Ms Poindexter experienced the response to her concerns as unsympathetic and dismissive, and we are sorry for the experience she had.

“Our Safeguarding and Professional Conduct Coordinator, Julie Ashby-Ellis, provides a clear point of contact for anyone wishing to raise a concern. She is responsible for receiving and assessing concerns, advising on the appropriate response and overseeing matters in accordance with our policies and procedures.”

Read the full article at cherwell.org



THE DEBATE CHAMBER

Ben Woodward and Elizabeth Millett debate whether matriculation should still exist as a ceremony

BEN WOODWARD

I vividly remember being part of a colony of penguins (or so a distant observer would be forgiven for thinking), shuffling behind the Dean of Degrees as we made the long trek from St Hugh’s College to the Sheldonian Theatre, all bleary-eyed from an early wake-up. We lingered outside for some time, stood in the beautiful theatre, and were talked to in Latin, before filing out again with the expectation, I suppose, of drunken revelry in Christ Church Meadows. And such is Oxford tradition, apparently. I can’t help but think it lacks the magic that such an event promises, and stands as a rather old-fashioned debacle in a university that wishes to forget the town-and-gown divide.

Every year, Oxford Class Act and the Oxford SU collect old sub fusc, recycling it to freshers before matriculation to make up for the fact that students are expected to fork out around £40 (not including the suit!) simply to afford the dress to enrol at their university. The entire process seems entirely futile: Oxford conditional offers are given in January, confirmed by August, and students have already completed a full week by October. In a place where imposter syndrome flourishes, such delayed acceptance into the institution seems deeply impersonal and utterly

superficial, besides being a financial burden after Freshers’ Week.

The tradition itself is treasured in the Oxford collective memory, not to mention immortalised in films such as *My Oxford Year*, and yet I think we must ask ourselves: did it live up to expectations? I remember the confusion of what to do after coming out of the Sheldonian, the cynical question of ‘is that it?’ in my head, and standing in the depressing October weather as the subject of countless curious tourists’ photographs. Even my college’s official matriculation photograph, available framed to anyone with £100 to spare, is half-full of graduate students I don’t recognise.

And finally, matriculation is rooted in the art of exclusion. From excluding non-Anglicans by forcing the declaration of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, to forbidding women the honour until 1920 (and even then they weren’t allowed into the Sheldonian for the ceremony), matriculation marks those of us lucky enough to have passed the Oxford admissions process from our peers at other universities. Having thousands of dazed first-years wandering the city in gowns does not help the University’s image as a welcoming academic institution for all. And, as the University looks to stop traditions harmful to its image (such as trashing), perhaps matriculation should be next on the chopping block.

ELIZABETH MILLETT

The continued tradition of Oxford University’s matriculation ceremony is relatively easy to argue against, if one desired to be antagonistic. It’s a screamingly obvious target in what appears to be a flurry of current attempts to berate the ‘archaic’ practices inevitably found in an institution with nearly a millennium of history. Sub fusc, born from a 17th-century clothing code that mandated dark academic clothing, practically begs the question of whether we continue outdated practices that are irrelevant to the modern University. Not only does our academic dress originate from the plain robes of medieval monks, but the process of matriculating used to involve taking religious oaths and pledging allegiance to University statutes, the monarch, and the Protestant faith.

Frustration often comes from the notion that we’re mindlessly re-enacting the traditions of our academic predecessors. However, not recognising any contemporary meaning as if we’re in one big game of dress-up ignores why the ceremony continues. It symbolises each student’s admission into an institution that strives for academic integrity and love of learning. We are told on that October afternoon in the Sheldonian Theatre that the painting above our heads symbolises truth in academia and the supremacy of knowledge. As much or as little you

care for the ceremony, the buildings it is held in, or the tradition it involves, there is nothing anachronistic about the values that matriculation projects.

I don’t mean to invalidate the sentiments of those who feel intimidated or out of place in participating. An association of matriculation in recent decades with prestige and private education is common, and it is being increasingly recognised that it is potentially off-putting for many. I am rather advocating for a change of mindset on what the modern matriculation ceremony means for us as students of equal value – if anything, requests to abolish the ceremony on these grounds would entrench these potentially negative associations further, rather than giving new meaning in an ever-changing institution. Matriculation is an opportunity, not an expired ordeal.

It’s almost disappointingly predictable to argue that we should not continue this practice due to its obviously defunct administrative purpose or potentially antiquated origins – it’s a completely reductive view of the modern ceremony. Whilst admission to the University has clearly changed drastically from the times of Latin entrance exams and swearing oaths, what the ceremony represents is irrefutably valuable today. A dislike of a ceremony that places value and expectation on the shoulders of those who participate is worrying – if the values matriculation stands for are undermined, Oxford ceases to be the place of learning and growth that it was founded to be.

All work and no pay: Why Oxford students aren't allowed to have jobs



Oxford prohibits undergraduate term-time employment to protect students' academic focus. But amid soaring living costs, many are left caught between financial necessity and the University's strict rules

EMMA HEAGNEY

In the periods between the regular read-plan-write cycles of an Oxford term, a student is free to relax, travel, and, most likely, procrastinate on revision for next term's collections. Strangely enough, however, the 'vac' is also the only opportunity for an Oxford student to work, not through problem sheets and essays, but in the most fundamental sense of the word. The University of Oxford maintains a controversial policy that largely prohibits undergraduate students from taking up paid, part-time employment during term time.

The stipulations of this policy are rather unclear. Accessible information is scarce, with most online advice directed towards graduate students. In all fairness, the University does set out defined limits on the amount of paid work a graduate student can undertake: encouraged forms of employment include teaching, research assistantships, and working as a junior dean for a college. Graduate students are "advised to undertake no more than 8 hours of paid work per week, and to discuss this work with their supervisor beforehand".

However, for those who work in hospitality, retail, or other non-academic industries, this cap provides little opportunity to earn enough to meet Oxford's living costs. An eight-hour shift worked once a week at the Oxford Living Wage amounts to £449.92 per month, while the average rent for a one-bedroom flat in Oxford is £1,353 – this wage covers just a third of such a large expense, without accounting for bills, groceries, and other costs. To supplement this income, the University advises graduate students to contact former and potential future employers, as well as to request funding from companies with corporate social responsibility aims.

For undergraduates, the University's recommendations are few and far between. Perhaps the most substantial source of information can be found on the Careers website, which states that "term-time employment is permitted only under exceptional circumstances and always with the explicit agreement of your tutor and senior tutor". Exactly what these "exceptional circumstances" may be is unclear, leaving room for flexibility.

The University's main priority seems to be that students treat their studies as a full-time job. Granted, it makes sense – Oxford is infamous for its intense workload across all subjects, as well as the short terms which cram up to 16 essays or problem sheets into just 8 weeks. Balancing such an intense workload with a part-time job could prove incredibly difficult and certainly could threaten the academic development of Oxford's brightest.

When asked about the purpose of the policy, the University told *Cherwell* that its "approach to paid work during term time is intended to enable undergraduate students to focus on their studies and make the most of Oxford's intensive academic terms."

"We recognise that students can face financial pressures during their studies. The University provides a range of support for students experiencing financial difficulty, alongside substantial bursary provision for those from lower-income households. This includes Crankstart Scholarships and other targeted support, as well as financial assistance for students who experience unexpected difficulties during their course."

Even during the vacation, when students are supposedly free to work a part-time job or internship, the University states on the Careers site that "during the vacations you will have academic work, and this should take priority

among your other commitments". In the long vacation, for example, undergraduate students are prohibited from undertaking an internship in the Summer Internship Scheme longer than eight weeks.

Instead, the University recommends a few alternatives. These may be useful, but are not realistic for everyone. For instance, it mentions "part-time or seasonal work supporting the running of the University and colleges" and "internship programmes... that you can work on

You constantly have to prioritise things it's materially impossible to prioritise: a job you really care about with deliverables and people relying on you, versus exams you worked so hard to get into.
– Silvia Andreoletti

during the vacations". Both are viable options, although Oxford-based opportunities may depend on students being able to secure vacation residence, provision of which varies by college.

One particular alternative, however, is commonly taken up by many undergraduates, and often seems like the only suitable way to earn money while abiding by the policy: "Ad-hoc work can sometimes be found by advertising your skills locally as a tutor, translator, or proof-reader." As students at one of the world's

most renowned universities, famous for its low acceptance rate and exceptional academic standards, many are well positioned to succeed as tutors alongside their studies.

For example, Anne, a Biology student at Merton College, has tutored throughout her entire degree. However, she has found that tutoring is not always an efficient source of income. "Having multiple students of the same subject definitely makes it worthwhile as it decreases the amount of time needed for research and preparation, but it's harder when that isn't the case, because you just aren't working enough hours a week for it to mean something." The financial gain from tutoring is very helpful, she says, mainly because it lets her have a good social life, which she otherwise might not have been able to afford. For international students, however, even a job as casual as tutoring is out of the question, with visa restrictions prohibiting freelance work.

Other students manage to bypass the no-job policy without the University ever finding out. Silvia graduated in 2025 with a degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) from New College – while working a corporate job in London at the same time. Although the logistical challenges were manageable, the mental burden of keeping such a huge secret from her tutors was especially taxing. Silvia told *Cherwell* that "you constantly have to prioritise things it's materially impossible to prioritise: a job you really care about with real deliverables and people relying on you, versus exams you worked so hard to get to and the outcome of which will (I thought) determine the direction of your life". For Silvia, it was often a struggle to perform basic daily tasks – "I had to make a calendar event on my phone so I made time to wash my hair" – while saddled with the dual pressure to work and revise.

Silvia managed to pursue her *Hannah*



Montana-esque lifestyle by simply not telling her tutors. Keeping quiet on LinkedIn, carefully scheduling tutorials, and even hiding her job from her friends allowed her to maintain the façade. Thankfully, her employer was more than supportive: “I genuinely think sometimes my boss cared more about the outcome of my exams than I did.” It is undeniable that the obligation to commute physically from Oxford to Waterloo multiple times a week was not compatible with the need to spend her spare time in the library, but Silvia’s workplace allowed her to be flexible with deadlines and even take time off for collections – “if only Oxford did the same!”

For Silvia, taking such a huge risk was worth it, particularly for the financial benefits. Perhaps the greatest result of her job, however, was the significant advantage it gave her when looking for another job. “I see so many recent graduates who are way more brilliant and accomplished than me struggle to get jobs because they’re only eligible for entry-level ones and they’re one of thousands of applicants. Working through university put me in a massively better financial and professional position in the long run, and despite the stress, I really had an amazing time doing it.”

Yet, she also sees value in Oxford’s ‘no jobs’ policy, in large part due to her concern that normalising employment would put pressure on students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. “I think Oxford should take on more of a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy – part of the difficulty balancing the two for me came from the fact that I had to actively hide I had a job, and the stress and fear of what would happen if I was found out. A better way would be if the University still strongly discouraged working students without punishing the exceptions.”

Naturally, the University of Cambridge, an institution with a comparable workload to Oxford, similarly restricts term-time employment. An overview of other British universities, however, reveals an overwhelmingly encouraging sentiment – King’s College London, for example, describes the benefits of part-time work as including “experience and exposure to different types of work which will provide you with valuable workplace skills, experience and confidence”. Some, such as UCL, even offer their own temping agencies, in which students can apply to work on campus. Where universities do

have limits on employment hours, they are often recommendations, rather than strict policies, and do not impose a blanket ban on part-time employment, as Oxford does. For example, the University of Bristol advises a cap of 15 hours per week.

For many students across the UK, a paid employment can make a degree accessible. Soaring living costs mean a student loan is simply not enough to live on at Oxford.

For many students across the UK, paid employment can make a degree accessible. Soaring living costs mean a student loan is simply not enough to live on at Oxford, and must be supplemented by help from family members, external (and fiercely competitive) scholarships, and part-time work undertaken while at school, amongst other things. For students whose families cannot readily make up that shortfall, a restriction on earning during term can therefore have a very different effect from one experienced by students with substantial parental support.

A student at Oxford whose parents both earn the minimum wage (roughly amounting to £24,784.50 a year each) may be eligible for £7,033 in government maintenance loans, which are also intended to cover the vacation periods. In addition, they would not be eligible for the Crankstart Scholarship. Say they are randomly allocated to Pembroke College, having been pooled from their original choice – their rent would cost anywhere between £5,453.53 and £10,716.81. This eye-watering sum is completely disproportionate to the maintenance loan they receive, requiring them to rely on the help of their parents, who already earn the minimum wage and have little room to provide up to £3,000 of support, excluding groceries and other living costs. The University’s own resources estimate nine months of living costs to total between £13,275 and £19,575 – the maximum

maintenance loan a student could receive at Oxford is just £10,830. Whatever the means, the assumption is that a student receives funding from somewhere else.

The University and its colleges do aim to provide plenty of financial support when a student needs it. The Oxford Assistance Fund, for example, offers grants of up to £3,000 to applicants in need, and up to £750 can be accessed from the Student Support Bursary. Several colleges have similar hardship funds, such as Merton’s Student Financial Support Fund, and many also subsidise expenses including food, books, printing, and travel. The principle is that, with the financial support available, you should not have to give up your time to work a part-time job, but this does not always mean that students can survive otherwise.

In fact, there are rare exceptions in which students can work casually for the University and its colleges, such as through working in their college bar or as a chapel officer. Perhaps most commonly, students are employed as student ambassadors, attending Q&A sessions and working through strenuous open days.

Céline, a recent History of Art graduate from Christ Church, worked for the University as an Undergraduate Admissions and Outreach (UAO) ambassador. She describes the job as flexible and casual, with her able to fit sessions around her studies, and she certainly found

secret from her college. “I sought out a job with few and flexible hours so that I could hide my job from tutors who often arranged tutorials one or two days prior”, she told *Cherwell*. “I would absolutely seek a job with more regular hours and pay if it were allowed.”

The vacancies available to students, although limited, do display an attempt by colleges and the University to provide paid opportunities. These vacancies are especially important in a wider job market that has seen a sharp decline in casual roles and employment rates for 16-24 year olds. Students restricted to vacation work must also find employers willing to hire them for only part of the year. Perhaps this is a greater incentive for the University to relax its term-time policy, giving students the flexibility to work both at home and in Oxford.

Nevertheless, working a part-time job at university is exceedingly common and often necessary, not just for financial stability but also to learn crucial life lessons. After three years of tutorials and socials, nothing has taught me more about the world and communicating within it than working behind a bar. Especially at a university so overpopulated by the most privileged in society, there should perhaps be more of an emphasis on encouraging the privileged to enter the ‘real world’, rather than simply expecting the working classes to assimilate into Oxford’s traditional, upper-class culture. At the end of the day, we are adults, and working a part-time job is often a necessary component of growing up – the need to ask your teacher for permission perhaps ought to be left in secondary school.

As I pull yet another pint for an endless stream of punters, I feel incredibly lucky to have a casual job that allows me to return to Oxford each term, even if it means doing the gross tasks that no one else wants to do. My job helps to keep me financially stable, and I only wish that I could work more, rather than feeling punished for needing to dedicate my time to my job rather than to my studies. Oxford students are known for working hard academically, but we rarely talk about the often mundane jobs that fill our vacations – perhaps we would, if they overlapped with our university terms, but as long as our workload remains so intense, any relaxation of the University’s policy is unrealistic.

Image credits: Anish Vedantham for Cherwell.

Balancing such an intense workload with a part-time job could prove incredibly difficult and certainly could threaten the academic development of Oxford’s brightest.

the work meaningful as she was able to make a difference in young people’s lives. However, the irregular shift patterns meant that it was never a primary source of income for her. She also had another job, working for an online tutoring company, and felt pressure to keep this work a

Feeling fresher: How to be casually healthy while going out in Oxford



Balancing Oxford's intense academic terms with a heavy party culture is no easy feat. Here is how to stay casually healthy without giving up the nightlife

BARBARA KEMPNY

Freshers' Week is drawing to a close, and the first lectures are rolling around alarmingly fast. The past week has been a cycle of pub, club, and grub alongside a whirlwind of people you'll spend the rest of your university time with. It'll have been a tough week – the first week away from home for many, adjusting to newfound independence whilst navigating the throes of Freshers' Week. With luck, you'll have come out with a few good stories and some budding friendships.

The toll of a regular party-going lifestyle may soon catch up with you. A lingering sore throat might have started developing during Freshers' Week – an omen of the famous 'freshers' flu'. Fatigue might start to catch up at the most inconvenient times – when sitting in the front row of crammed lecture halls. And the Hassan's cheesy chips that felt so right after THAT Bridge night might be starting to feel less inspired.

Partying and going out are important parts of the social scene at Oxford, and for most, Freshers' Week is only really a taste of the nights to come. Balancing an active partying lifestyle without completely compromising health is something I struggled with in my first year and something I'm determined to do better in my second.

Fully subscribing to wellness principles, especially as a student, seems onerous, tedious and, well, a little boring; after all, plenty of social bonding does come from drinking, smoking and just not sleeping. Yet, letting health completely slide can catch up with you well before the end of an eight-week Oxford term: you feel groggy, less energetic, and eventually less enthusiastic about going out at all.

Getting enough sleep, drinking plenty of water, and eating a balanced diet are hardly revolutionary advice. Yet, so much of the time in Oxford, they feel almost unattainable or unsustainable. Implementing micro-habits and small tweaks could optimise and enhance the party-going lifestyle, and make going out in university just that bit more calm.

Giving your immune system that 'Gasolina'

You can tell which lectures were recorded in Michaelmas from the orchestra of coughing harmonising with the lecturer: the soundtrack of students battling freshers' flu whilst still diligently making their daily pilgrimage to lectures (classic Michaelmas fresher behaviour). Freshers' flu is the catch-all name for the coughs, colds, and influenza-

like symptoms experienced after Freshers' Week.

Because Freshers' Week centres around thousands of new undergraduate students travelling from all over the UK and the world to one campus or small city, a melting pot of infectious diseases boils anywhere where groups of students gather. Communal swigs of bottles of wine and other drinks at pres certainly don't help. Neither do several nights of poor sleep and heavy drinking.

Some of the factors contributing to freshers' flu can't or really shouldn't be avoided: it is important to meet a wide range of people in one's first week at university, even at the cost of some respiratory irritations the following week. For a lot of people, going out, drinking, and sleepless nights are formative experiences in Freshers' Week. If you led a reckless lifestyle during Fresher's Week but still don't want to be completely wrecked by a bout of fresher's flu, there are small preventative measures that you could put in place.

Not sharing your drinks so liberally is a very easy, doable action. In first year, I struggled with this one – if someone did so much as look my way, I would be offering them a sip of my drink. Second-year me will rein in this habit: holding my drinks closer to myself, and just saying no if people I'm not too familiar with ask me to share. Not only does sharing your drinks put you on the firing line for fresher's flu, but oral herpes and meningitis sound very scary.

Small changes to your diet can also strengthen your immunity, preventing illness in the first place and speeding up recovery. Citrus fruit, like oranges and tangerines, are perfect options here. They taste good, make a perfect light snack at any time of the day, and are fairly cheap. They contain Vitamin C, an antioxidant critical for aiding the correct functioning of the immune system. Vitamin C cannot be made or stored by the body, and so external sources of this micronutrient, say from citrus fruits or even vegetables like bell peppers or broccoli, are essential, particularly when grappling with fresher's flu. It's comforting to know that ingredients common to most healthy-ish savoury meals, such as ginger, garlic and onion, contain antioxidants and other micronutrients important for good immune health.

Even drinking tea during the day can aid immune health. Green teas contain high concentrations of epigallocatechin gallate, a chemical which boosts the body's immunity, whilst both green and black teas contain flavonoids – very good news for the body's immune system. Studies have also found that milk benefits immunity – suddenly a cuppa sounds like the silver bullet for fresher's flu.

By the sounds of things, any food or beverage

that's fairly-ish healthy and not too processed could be the answer to a smoother ride through the oncoming Fresher's flu epidemic.

Disturbia-nces of sleep and what to do about them

Day after day of late nights can leave you feeling fatigued, groggy and very much sleep-deprived. There is no clever hack that replaces sleep, but there are ways to make the occasional bad night less painful.

Post the club and any afterparties, it can be helpful to have a quick post-night-out sleep routine. For example, drinking a lot of water and eating a light snack, like a banana, before bed. A warm shower and cleanse before bed can also help set a calming atmosphere. Although this might seem like a very long-winded process at the time, in first year I found that having this routine meant I had a better quality of sleep but also meant I woke up feeling a lot cleaner and nicer.

Running on two to five hours of sleep can make the next day tough, both for you and the people around you. This is where naps are really your friends. A short nap around mid-afternoon – around 20 minutes – can improve alertness without consuming half the day, although exactly how groggy you feel afterwards varies.

'Nappuccinos' can be incredibly effective. Drinking caffeine, for example, a latte, just before a nap means that you wake up feeling fresher, more awake and caffeinated. Caffeine from coffee takes around ten minutes for the first effects to be felt, with peak concentration typically being reached after forty-five minutes. This works perfectly with the timings of a nap and so can be an effective technique for working past the lack of sleep.

In reasonable quantities, up to 400 mg per day for a typical healthy adult, caffeine can be a good helping hand following a poor night of sleep. Too much, however, can instead leave you jittery, anxious, nauseous, or struggling to sleep the following night.

Coffee isn't for everyone, especially following a night out. In this case, teas are your friend. Green teas and matcha tend to have higher caffeine content, and matcha is often preferred over coffee due to more prolonged and smooth effects on energy – the caffeine in matcha is absorbed more slowly compared to that of coffee, due to the presence of an amino acid called L-theanine.

Although these tricks can get you through an occasional bad morning, it is also important to make sure that sleep deprivation does not become a constant throughout the remaining eight weeks of term at Oxford. Taking rest days, where you get

a proper night of sleep, and saying no to some late-night social events throughout the coming weeks will ensure that running on three hours' sleep per night is not your new baseline. Eventually, another night out stops being fun and starts feeling like an obligation. Sometimes the healthiest 'micro-habit' is simply saying no and going to bed.

I Gotta Feeling I've got a hangover

It's difficult to tell what symptoms of a hangover are and what is just pure exhaustion. Hangovers are typically characterised by vomiting, diarrhoea, headaches, sleep deprivation, amongst other symptoms. Interestingly, most hangover symptoms peak when blood alcohol concentration is back to zero.

This is likely the principle behind the 'hair of the dog' hangover cure, where one drinks more alcoholic beverages upon onset of hangover symptoms. Unsurprisingly, postponing your hangover by drinking more is not much of a cure.

Drinking lots of water both before going to bed and the morning after is a good idea, especially as alcohol suppresses vasopressin, increasing urination and contributing to mild dehydration. It will not magically cure a hangover, but it may at least address the thirst.

Some sort of kebab van novelty is the norm after a night out. While eating food following alcohol consumption can go a long way to easing hangover symptoms; however, fatty foods shouldn't really be the go-to. As boring as it sounds, eating healthy, fairly unprocessed foods is the way to go: oatmeal at 4am; eggs and avocado on toast as a 1pm breakfast; if you really squint, carrot sticks could almost be chips.

Finally rapping it up...

Term times at Oxford are notoriously short and notoriously intense, as first years will soon discover – and older students, by now slightly scarred, already know. Balancing a social life, a demanding workload, your health, and – for many – living away from home for the first time is difficult.

I know I put health and wellness on the back burner in first year. I'm not planning a monastic second year in response. If anything, I want to go out just as much – only without feeling completely destroyed by week four.

Being healthier at Oxford does not have to mean swapping Park End for Pilates and becoming evangelical about chia seeds. Drink some water. Stop sharing bottles with half the smoking area. Eat something vaguely nutritious. Take a nap when you need it. And, occasionally, accept that the best preparation for your next night out is a night in.

Image credit: Rüya Oral, with permission.

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NEWS
Mair Andrews and Stanley Arlidge with Jeremy Azzopardi, Isa Bojaj, Madison Garrett, Cara Hene, Miriam Ilderton, Vanisha Karna, Orla McMahon, Henry Nicholls, Kiera O'Carroll, Ilya Rosenbaum, and Hanna Siofra

INVESTIGATIONS
Ned Remington with Barnaby Carter

OPINION
Freya Robson with Aayah Aslam, Charlie Aspinall, Ti-Jean Martin, Elizabeth Millett, and Ben Woodward

FEATURES
Anish Vedantham with Rosa Baruch Harrison, Kiana De Bellaigue De Bughas, Amaan Effendi, Barbara Kempny, and Angelina Wu

PROFILES
Angelina Mirraslavska with Saba Ahmadzadeh Noughani, Natasha Drake, Leo Maudsley-Barton, and Alice Spender

CULTURE
Rüya Oral and Willow Jopp with Agastya Anand, Tom Cartwright, Amalia Dasgupta, Elizabeth Gammaidoni, Saul Grenfell, Joe Hayes, Romilly Ireland, Leandro Landolina, Freddie Lewis-Hedley, Ben Mason, Jas Mauj, Sylvie Quick, Abigail Riley, Alice Rubly, Zeynep Seçkin, Matilda Stanley, and Lara Solie-Tuluie

LIFESTYLE
Abigail Christie with Priya Burrow, Oliver Crosher, Jessie Jukes, Ellie Pemberton, Alice Sanders, and Eva Zielke

SPORT
Gavriella Epstein-Lightman with Cosmo Fasanya

PUZZLES
Zoë McGuire with Alessandra Edwards, Nat Elder, Ameya Krishnaswamy, Tim Fraser, and Robin Wopalenski

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ARCHIVES
Emma Heagney

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Whoever governs the Union, must have that iron in him, or give it up! Words uttered by our own Lee Kuan Yewsless. The termcard's contents may not reflect the sentiment, but in wrangling this term's crop of shameless LinkedIn goblins, LKY has put the "can" in "Canva". A Canva account which wasn't even used until the last possible minute...

Thanks to the help from our friends at Gimpos House, such a termcard couldn't even begin to be assembled until the very end of summer. Whilst graphic design may not be Lee Kuan Yewsless' passion, analysing handwriting certainly is the Rainman's, whose months of (unpaid) work rendered to us the stellar lineup we have today.

Indeed, this lineup is so stellar that we can't even seem to get rid of Big Steve's influence over the Union. Dershowitz' incessant rambling over all forms of social media over something (we're not sure what yet) has, ironically, been more interesting than the speaker lineup. It's even more interesting than the President-Neglect's trip to Paris, where his founding of the Boringdon Club could even put a DC panelist to sleep.

We may have finally achieved a



term of Peace and Love. About six months too late, but it's a start.

Carrie and Andy Burnedout have reconciled, after a nine-hour chat (we at Jevelyn pray for their neighbours). Carrie has joined a long, illustrious line of jobless uncs with no business in the Union – in the cursed lineage of Chief Advisors.

Andy Burnedout seems to be the only one with a slate this term, including Olaf, Fifty-One-May and Red Dull. The latter seems to be a controversial pick – with much of the slate wishing the drink really did give you wings – in the hopes he would fly the nest. In his place would be the Slatecrasher, who has an invitation from everyone except Burnedout and Carrie themselves.

Elsewhere, rumours are circulating that YoungSeccie Never Running Again will... run again. Is her PV "this big" or "thiiiiis big"? We'll never know, she pled the fifth to us. At least we know it's mostly plastic. And laminated.

Opposition lies on the road ahead for Andy Burnout. And no, it's not because he won't last until nominations. Blank Slate, with her blank slate, swears she'll never run. How many times have we heard that before?

EDITORIAL



Emma Heagney
Editor-in-Chief

Entering the role of Editor-in-Chief while also beginning my fourth year at Oxford is a slightly disconcerting experience – as a recent article in Lifestyle ("The elusive career paths of humanities students: Does the 'Oxford bubble' breed employment anxiety?") describes, the mounting pressure of finals and beyond is often at the forefront of my mind. So, what may otherwise seem like an immensely stress-inducing extracurricular has actually become my respite from countless essays on Aquinas, Augustine, and the like.

The work that has gone into this first print edition, as well as the Freshers' Guide, actually began before I had even finished my third year – from hiring a warm and enthusiastic group of Deputy Editors to enlisting the help of my beautiful college wife to take some beautiful photos for us. Oskar has also been a lifesaver in the months that have flown by, going to the ends of the earth (quite literally, while in rural Moldova)

to militantly enforce the *Cherwell* style guide.

So, in many ways, *Cherwell* has followed me throughout my degree, from joining the Fashion section in Hilary 2025 to now being Editor-in-Chief. In these six terms, I've dyed my hair, sat Mods, travelled the world, and ultimately, developed as a person. Yet, amidst all these changes, I've always found myself coming back to article trackers, InDesign files, and disorganised Google Docs.



Oskar Doepke
Editor-in-Chief

By this time tomorrow, I will have run the Oxford Half Marathon – or hobbled over the finish line with whatever dignity I have left. I'd like to say I came at least half-prepared, although a round of food poisoning, injuries, and (just a little) laziness might say otherwise.

Coming into my role as Editor-in-Chief this summer felt just the same: half-prepared. In *Cherwell's* Freshers'

Guide (which you should totally read), Emma described me as "a second-year with the joie de vivre that only comes with being fresh out of Prelims". It's safe to say that I didn't feel the same. Having been a Deputy Editor for just a term, stepping into an all-encompassing role felt, if anything, overwhelming.

In a place like Oxford, impostor syndrome can feel like the norm. Surrounded by, quite literally, a thousand years of history, as well as people you can't help but think are smarter than you, it's hard to know what to make of it all – and what to make of yourself.

A few days ago, I found myself on a call with a friend from high school. Among other life events, we talked about how it's been a year since starting university. Just over a year ago, I'd called her too – as a nervous fresher worried about what I'd do – agonising about whether to join *Cherwell* or another paper. Eventually, I landed on *Cherwell* (not least because I thought its print looked prettier), and spent much of Michaelmas writing for News.

It's so easy to get caught up in our insecurities and feelings that we forget to stop and enjoy where we are. Just last year, I couldn't have even imagined having the opportunity to be Editor-in-Chief. Looking back, I can't help but feel grateful for the time I've spent on this paper – for the countless hours I've spent on Google Docs, but also for the people I've met. Emma deserves a special shoutout: I couldn't begin to handle this term without her.

So, tomorrow, I'll be at the starting line, no matter how unprepared I feel. And I can say the same for *Cherwell* – there's something about the writing, the people, and InDesign that keeps bringing me back. Honestly, I can't wait to see what the rest of Michaelmas has in store.

ARCHIVES

FREE DRINKS (Membership cards required).	
Friday 28th October	Oxford Union, 1.00pm
THE RT. HON. SIR PETER BLAKER KCMG MP The new Chairman of the Conservative Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee and former Minister of State at the Foreign Office will address OUCA on Foreign Affairs.	
Monday 31st October	Lee Undercroft, Christ Church, 8.30pm
HALLOWEEN PARTY Cheap beer, live jazz, fancy dress encouraged. (Sponsored by "Ruddies" Brewery).	
Tuesday 1st November	Oriel-JCR Annexe, 8.00pm
UCA v CHERWELL DEBATE "This House believes Cherwell to be worse than The Sun" – A fun debate, with drinks served afterwards to help mend the damage.	
Wednesday 2nd November	
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS TEA PARTY A leading member of the party will be on hand to explain the ins and outs of the "Mother of Parliaments". Tickets only £3 (excluding coach). Contact Social Secretary for details.	
Friday 4th November	Oxford Union 1.00pm
THE RT. HON. JOHN BIFFEN MP The Leader of the House of	

Like the Oxford Union, the Oxford University Conservative Association (OUCA) seems to have been fond of an occasional comedy debate in past decades, with this particular 1980s fixture centering on a proposition that, of course, absolutely no one would ever agree with ("This House believes *Cherwell* to be worse than The Sun"). The debate was advertised in the Michaelmas 1983 term card, which rather fittingly features a portrait of Margaret Thatcher on the cover.

OUCA advertises the event as "a fun debate, with drinks served afterwards to help mend the damage". No details are known about the speakers or results of the debate, but I can only hope that the fair-minded OUCA members of the Thatcherite 1980s would have seen *Cherwell* for the esteemed and factual publication that it is, and would have voted accordingly. I have a feeling that this will not be the last time we hear of "OUCA v *Cherwell*", no matter the context.

‘If not me, then who?’: George Abaraonye’s return to Oxford

‘Stay firm in your convictions. You’re not a bad person. You made this mistake. But don’t let them paint you out as this person you are not.’



MADISON GARRETT

The jubilation in George Abaraonye’s demeanour matched my memory of our first encounter, coincidentally placed at the location where his university career may be defined: the Oxford Union. I first met the student – who has subsequently become a polarising figure among the politically conservative and a victim of online racial persecution approximately a year prior – at the Oxford African and Caribbean Society (ACS) meeting, Say It With Your Chest. Leading the event as then-Vice President, Abaraonye moderated the society’s annual debate meeting, posing questions on the legitimacy of Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch and offering his views on topics such as the definition of Black excellence. Ironically, he would occupy the hot seat months later for his political views, but in a much different capacity. Abaraonye’s ideology in the Oxford Union would instead make him the subject of intense, highly publicised scrutiny. Celebrating the shooting of right-wing podcaster Charlie Kirk in an internal WhatsApp group chat and on social media immediately upon the release of the news, the then-President-Elect of the Oxford Union would be ousted.

“I’m doing great, Maddie. I’m doing great. I’ve had a nice little summer, a nice little bit of time. Just relaxed. I’m doing good. How are things in New York?” Abaraonye said, appearing on our call in a New York Knicks T-shirt, seemingly fitting for a conversation organised from my Brooklyn bedroom. My icebreaker, “How are you?”, carried the expectation of unpacking much more than sentiments of a courteous greeting. The year Abaraonye experienced was an aberration from the routine of the typical rusticated Oxford student, to say the least. Much had happened since the controversy that ignited a media storm of right-wing publications, his widely reported removal as President-Elect of Oxford Union, and scathing tweets regarding his race, sixth-form grades, and clothing.

Now, preparing to complete his Oxford

degree amidst the one-year anniversary of Charlie Kirk’s death and racialised hostility towards Black academics in Britain, Abaraonye’s reflection on the past year appeared quite light. “I’m coming back to Oxford, and I’m excited. Oxford is ultimately a means to an end. It’s not the end in itself.” After a summer of reflection working for a film company in Cairo, Egypt, the weight of the controversy no longer appeared insurmountable. “Being in Egypt and not quite having that freedom, or having to know people in a certain district in order to go there, really made me appreciate why I grew up with the freedoms I had growing up. And it helped put things into perspective. It made Oxford feel very small in a sense. There’s so much more going on in the world, and it helped me reorient what was important.”

Yet, this was the tranquillity Abaraonye was trained to adopt. After losing the vote of no-confidence among members and alumni of the Oxford Union, he remained in Oxford as a rusticated student for the next few months, hounded by the press and unprotected by any authoritative figures, Abaraonye tells me. Reduced to a mere member of the public rather than a matriculated University College student, Abaraonye immediately received clarification on where he stood with his college. “Monday, October 19th, after my no-confidence vote, is when I had my panic attack... I had a really, really bad panic attack in Oxford. I remember being taken to college by two people, both in my college, and we spent the day at the University. I spoke to the senior chaplain and porters, and they set me up in a room with the agreement and understanding that I would vacate by Friday. They let me stay for a couple days, and then the porters kicked me out around 11am that Friday, like, on the door... They said, ‘You’re not allowed to come back to college because you’re a safety risk.’ I get it, but it felt very much like done and dusted. You’re not my problem anymore.”

Abaraonye faced boundaries that barred him from his familiar student life. “I had received an email from the senior tutor reminding me once my temporary accommodation had run

its course, I would not be able to reside in college or access college facilities without prior written permission. I was also told no extension to temporary accommodation would be granted, and no subsequent request for college accommodation would be considered while I was rusticated, and that if for whatever reason I did not vacate college premises, it would become a disciplinary matter.”

Friday morning, after being escorted from his college, Abaraonye received a final message from the senior chaplain: an email wishing luck and permission to “reach out” if needed. Apart from the Master of University College, Baroness

“Was my reaction time appropriate? No. Probably not. It didn’t need to be that quick and that public. It’s not to say that I hated free speech or I even hated Charlie Kirk.”
– George Abaraonye

Amos, Abaraonye said he was offered little mental health support. “At the time, the email from the senior chaplain felt a little harsh and, to some degree, did compound a feeling of not having any safe or neutral spaces during that scary time. In hindsight, I do understand where the college is coming from with a safeguarding duty... I am grateful for being allowed to stay onsite. It felt like I wasn’t too welcome back, especially with the whole news saga, but again I do understand why.”

Still, Abaraonye recalls that the loneliness caused by Oxford administrators remained with him. “There wasn’t much of a connection there, or if I wanted to, I could not really go to them and say, ‘I’m really struggling with this, I need

help’. There was no support, for example, for how to navigate the press or the press scrutiny or the news cycles or anything like that, which was arguably the most difficult thing... I was quite lucky that I have friends and people that, you know, could help me write statements... but Oxford provided nothing.”

In a final return to his London home after spending the remaining months of Michaelmas as a rusticated student in Oxford, his ultimate retreat was rest and he spent most of his days asleep. Abaraonye grew accustomed to the many stares by Londoners on public transport and being cold-approached by strangers of both political spectrums: “I remember a couple times being approached on trains, for example, and people, complete strangers, come up to me and ask: ‘Are you the Oxford Union guy?’ I remember being in the pub once with my cousins, and someone asked me to take a picture with us. I had some people come up to me and ask, ‘Why did you say it?’”

In context, the celebration of the death of a media figure who had expressed racial insensitivities such as “Happening all the time in urban America, prowling Blacks go around for fun to go target white people, that’s a fact. It’s happening more and more” is illuminated by Abaraonye’s past record as a self-described pro-Black activist. Born in London, Abaraonye attended a multicultural state academy with a majority of economically disadvantaged students who received free school meals, himself included. Starting as a transportation advocate at 14, speaking out about road safety and bike protections, his social activism soon followed. At 17, as deputy head boy, he and his fellow schoolmates organised a workshop on microaggressions, guiding school teachers on how to spot any racial bias they may hold. Further, as a sixth-form student, Abaraonye helped draft anti-racism guidelines for his school, supporting the creation of a complaint system that let students hold teachers accountable.

Past activism aside, Abaraonye admonishingly reflects on his reaction to Charlie Kirk’s death. “Was my reaction time appropriate? No.

Probably not. I should have taken a touch, guys. It didn't need to be that quick and that public... It's not to say that I hated free speech or I even hated Charlie Kirk or that I wanted to see this happen."

Yet, as Charlie Kirk memes occupy social media timelines, and viral skits by comedians such as Druski poke fun at the lack of emotions displayed by Kirk's widow, Erika Kirk, Abaraonye sees a racialised double standard in how he was treated. "I also think it would have looked very different if I wasn't a Black person who's debated Charlie Kirk. It feels disingenuous how strong the reaction was before, and now we have none of this energy for the general public who make the same jokes. I wouldn't call myself a martyr, but I do think people will look back in a couple years and think: 'Did we have to pop off on him like that?' I don't know, man. Maybe not."

While his personal feelings towards the Kirk family are not rooted in spite, he directs contentious feelings to the institution from which he was removed: the Oxford Union. The Oxford Union's vote of no-confidence sparked controversy. Grievances were raised regarding the Union's poll, including the ballot-counting process, admission of proxy votes, and accusations of intimidation. Abaraonye maintained he lost because of a "compromised" poll due to alumni participation rather than student engagement. Community assertions of a "racist witch hunt" would support Abaraonye, yet to no avail, as a presidential successor was subsequently elected.

"I still have a modicum of respect for the Oxford Union... but the Union is not doing anything productive right now, at least in my opinion." The Oxford Union, considered one of the world's most prestigious student societies and an institution with its own Wikipedia section on 'Allegations of institutional racism', is, according to Abaraonye, an organisation steeped in anti-Black sentiment. "Being Black, especially in the Oxford Union, places you in a box. You can't display yourself with truly radical ideas or even have the luxury of really making a mistake. Or you're punished, and you're punished tenfold." As the debating society has attracted much attention and protests due to the invitations of right-wing figures such as Tommy Robinson and Laurence Fox, Abaraonye argues that the Union's attempt at division is not only internal but external. "The Union seems more concerned in attracting attention by that division than by actually addressing issues with a level of attention needed to have a productive conversation... You will not catch me there during Hilary term. I'll tell you that."

So, what is next for George Abaraonye as he prepares to begin his final year? Well, for one, his activism continues. Recently penning a piece on the death of Cambridge Professor Jason Arday, who was alleged by self-identified race realist Nathan Cofnas to be a career fraud, Abaraonye found similarities between himself and Professor Arday were too great to ignore. Aside from the likeness of wearing locs and studying or working within elite UK universities, both Black scholars were ridiculed by right-leaning news articles, largely receiving racist comments from British audiences regarding their academic achievement in the slot of diversity, equity, and inclusion. "It was traumatising having to watch Professor Arday go through that this year. And it really motivated me. I feel like I should have perhaps said more when I was going through what I did. I feel like I should have said more now, when Professor Arday was going through what he did. The next time this happens, because I know it will happen again, I hope that I'll be able to stand up and actually say something," Abaraonye reflects. "Now, in the context of Professor Arday, I understand things could have gone very differently, and my story could have ended very differently."

As Black figures at England's most prestigious institutions continue to face accusations of incompetence – *The Spectator* declared the Black principal of Cambridge's Homerton College "not fit" to lead – Abaraonye asks institutions to protect the vulnerable from media scrutiny. "For us, as horrible, horrifying, and disgusting as the incident with Professor Arday is... I actually don't think anything would have been different if the Professor Arday incident had happened after the Kirk controversy. We're yet to see any institutional change come as a result. We have barely seen so much as an apology from Cambridge or the Vice Chancellor at Cambridge for how she handled the Professor Arday's situation, calling him an aberration, which is wholly inappropriate given not only was an inquiry still open, but so many of the kind of allegations against Professor Arday being completely falsified or untrue. Because we're so underrepresented, these spaces also don't

accommodate us, so we aren't given adequate support in terms of counselling. I've now seen a professor die at Cambridge, and these are clearly, for as much as we hold them up, these great institutions. They're clearly not safe spaces. Otherwise, people wouldn't be dying or... people wouldn't be dying as often as they are."

Unsurprisingly, Abaraonye's concerns about Oxford as an institution heightened his reservations about returning this October. Although he may attend a few Oxford events, interacting with tutors after his controversy raises anxiety, particularly as a report revealed that academics from the University of Oxford have signed the letter defending Cofnas in his investigation of Professor Arday. "Even though it's not my tutors [who signed the petition], that's the academic environment. I'm coming back into a level of complicity with what was essentially a murder, murder by the media. I can imagine, especially for a student of colour, if they're coming back and their tutor is on that list, it must be a really uncomfortable situation to be around someone who not only is in a position of power in regards to you, but then also has clearly come out in support of someone who would happily see a member of our community die."

More positively, Abaraonye said he has begun to receive more communication and support from the University: "My college Disability Advisory Services representative recently reached out to me, offering support and anything that I need coming back, which was nice. And my personal tutor also reached out to me in regards to the academic transition and coming back into university. So I had some contact with the University. And to be fair, in the last couple of months, in the summertime, I've not really needed much support from the University."

Acknowledging that his return to Oxford may be sensationalised by students and professors alike, he said that "it feels very much like a spectacle, as if you're engaging with me as a concept, as an idea. It feels less like you're a person in Oxford sometimes". Abaraonye does not plan to let his past controversy hinder his enjoyment of his final year of university, nor spoil his future professional ambitions. "If I was going to do anything, being a mayor would be a dream. That would be amazing. But, I think for me, it's not necessarily about the office. I want to improve people's lives. I want to improve my community's lives. I don't get the privilege of living a comfortable life, going home and taking that £110k a year by the time I'm 24 because that's done through the oppression and institutionalised harm of millions. Whatever I do, it'll be rooted in a lot of blackness. It'll be rooted in a lot of good people doing good things, and I feel like that's where I wanna be... If not me, then who?"

Asked if he has any regrets from the past year, Abaraonye offers advice instead. "Stay firm in your convictions. You're not a bad person. You made this mistake. Sure. But don't let them paint you out as this person that you're not, and don't let yourself fall into this idea that you won't go and do something with your life because you absolutely will."

In response, the Oxford Union told *Cherwell*: "Since 1823, the Oxford Union has upheld the principle of free speech through the exchange and debate of a wide range of ideas and opinions, presented by a diverse range of speakers – some inspiring, others controversial. We acknowledge that certain speakers may hold views that are regarded by some as unacceptable but nonetheless believe that it is more important to debate an issue in full rather than shy away from a difficult subject or to silence certain voices."

"Like any other member of the Oxford Union Society, Mr Abaraonye is entitled to voice his opinions. The Society maintains a variety of fora for its members to do this, including weekly meetings of the Consultative Committee open to all, public questions of officers at the Society's public debates, and termly elections. We look forward to Mr Abaraonye's contributions."

University College also told *Cherwell*: "At the time of this incident, Mr Abaraonye did not have accommodation in College. This was because he had already withdrawn from his studies for a year, at his own request, and therefore was not living as a student in Oxford. Mr Abaraonye subsequently requested and was given temporary accommodation in College on an agreed short-term basis. He vacated this temporary accommodation on the date which he had agreed. The College is committed to providing appropriate welfare support to its students, including both those who are on course and those who have suspended their studies."

The University of Oxford was contacted for comment.

Image credit: George Abaraonye, with permission.

OXFORD SPOTLIGHT



Stanley Smith speaks to Peter Beinart on Palestine, Purim, and the importance of changing your mind

Peter Beinart knows the importance of admitting when you're wrong. A professor of journalism and political science at City University of New York, a *New York Times* columnist, and Editor-at-Large of *Jewish Currents*, he has spent the last three decades as a leading liberal voice in the United States. But, unlike other pundits who pin their flags to the mast in order to pay the bills, Beinart's writing is characterised by subtlety, self-reflection, and a remarkable political transformation.

Nowhere is this more evident than in his latest book, *Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza: A Reckoning* (2025). In this slim volume, Beinart, a once outspoken advocate for Israel, makes an incisive intervention into the debate within his own community as to how to respond to the violence that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have unleashed on Gaza. To Beinart's mind, the killing of more than 70,000 Palestinians by the IDF necessitates deep reflection as to how "Jewish texts, history, and language" have been appropriated to justify "genocide and apartheid" in Palestine.

"The argument of the book", he tells me over the phone, "is that there are a series of interlocking stories about what it means to be Jewish that are very powerful in many Jewish communities around the world – particularly the United States – which situate Jews as the world's permanent, righteous victim; and also centre the relationship with the state of Israel as the ultimate test of Jewish loyalty and identity". Beinart, who observes Modern Orthodox Judaism, argues that such narratives overlook the clear warnings within Jewish texts about how his people, as no different from any other, have a capacity to do harm.

He gives the example of how the Purim story, which is typically celebrated as the heroic survival of Jewish people in ancient Persia from a plot to exterminate them, ends with the roles reversed and the would-be killers slaughtered. The issue, Beinart tells me, is that ignorance of these theological portents creates a notion that it is impossible for Jewish people to be the perpetrators of oppression. This belief prevents supporters of Israel "from reckoning with some very, very painful proof about what Israel has done to the Palestinians".

Beinart has lived a life that makes him uniquely attuned to these warnings. Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, his parents were Jewish immigrants from Apartheid South Africa, a state whose system of racial oppression Beinart likens to Israel's treatment of Palestinians. He completed his undergraduate studies at Yale, before coming to the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar to undertake an MPhil in International Relations.

When I ask Beinart about his time in Oxford, he hesitates for a moment. He begins to list the positives: the friendships he made, the merits of the tutorial system, the freedom to procrastinate

making career decisions for two years. But, after some reassurance that he's not obliged to say nice things about the University, he speaks more candidly: "Oxford was never a place where I felt as comfortable as I did at Yale in the US. There were ways in which its particular version of Englishness was hard to penetrate for me as an American, maybe as a Jewish American."

Yale in the early 1990s, he describes, "was an institution where public expressions of Jewish identity were very normal and routine". Oxford, in contrast, felt different: "There was more of a sense that identity questions were private affairs and that in public you didn't need to be waving those flags." He clarifies that he doesn't think it was antisemitism he was experiencing, citing instead the differing cultural attitudes towards religion on either side of the Atlantic. Nonetheless, during his time at the University he always felt somewhat "an outsider".

Beinart returned to the United States after graduating from Oxford, beginning as a managing editor at *The New Republic* magazine. When I ask him how he settled on journalism for a career, he tells me that he left education because he didn't think he had "the patient temperament to be a good academic". "I think I've always been a bit more dilettantish in the sense that I like to read and engage in academic ideas, but I think that I'm better at translating those ideas for a broad audience than actually producing those ideas by doing the first-hand scholarship."

Beinart quickly emerged as a stand-out talent, becoming editor of *The New Republic* in 1999 at only 28 years old, a post he would hold until 2006. It was during his editorship that the magazine supported the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Whilst an editorial the following year expressed "regret" that the "rationale for war" had "collapsed", Beinart continued to advocate for American interventionism in his first book, *The Good Fight: Why Liberals – and Only Liberals – Can Win the War on Terror and Make America Great Again*.

By the time he published his second in 2010, however, Beinart's views had changed dramatically. *The Icarus Syndrome: A History of American Hubris* was his attempt to reckon with how he had got his stance on Iraq so wrong, and demonstrated his new conviction to oppose US military adventurism. He also began to rethink his opinions on Israel, writing in 2012 *The Crisis of Zionism*, in which he called for an end to Israel's occupation of the West Bank. Eight years later, he went further, penning a piece in the progressive *Jewish Currents* magazine in which he declared that the "two state solution is dead" and called for a single state where Israelis and Palestinians would be equal citizens – a clear rejection of the main tenets of Zionism.

Read the full article at cherwell.org
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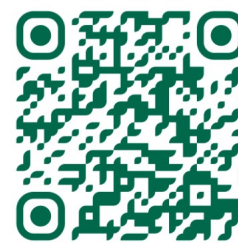
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‘What is a good life?’: ‘The Standard of Living’ in review

Eoin Ware uncovers the philosophy of ‘better living’ through the lives of economic theorists



What is a good life? This axiological question, asked earnestly in the opening lines of James Graham’s *The Standard of Living* – playing at Theatre Royal Haymarket until December 12 – is often overlooked by the fractured and hyper-specialised discipline of economics. Yet for John Maynard Keynes, whose ideas motivated the ‘Keynesian revolution’ towards government intervention into the economy during the mid-20th century, it was the core motivation underpinning his life’s work. To Keynes, this so-called ‘good life’ is one replete with art and human connection, wherein the value of work lies in the leisure which it affords.

Throughout, Keynes’ deployment of economic theory is portrayed as an act of profound artistic expression, akin to the literature of Virginia Woolf or the paintings of Vanessa Bell.

However, Keynes’ dogged refusal to accept the state of the world tells us that, perhaps more fundamentally, a ‘good life’ is one characterised by a radical imagining of what a ‘better life’ might entail, and a tireless striving towards its realisation.

This ethical framework seizes *The Standard of Living*, turning what might have become a dull affair about aggregate demand and the death of laissez-faire into a colourful portrait of a remarkable man. The play flits between Keynes’ bohemian life as a member of the Bloomsbury Group, and his attempts to influence the British government to intervene in the economy across two world wars and the Wall Street Crash. Throughout, Keynes’ deployment of economic theory is portrayed as an act of profound artistic expression, akin to the literature of Virginia Woolf or the painting of Vanessa Bell (fellow

members of the Bloomsbury Group). Keynes’ affinity to the arts, which saw him found the Arts Council of Great Britain shortly before his death in 1946, is reflected in the incorporation of paintings by Cézanne and Degas into the stage design. Additionally, the frenzied ballet numbers which mark scene transitions foreshadow his marriage to the ballerina Lydia Lopokova (much to the shock of his friends and colleagues, who believed him to be homosexual).

Rory Kinnear plays a reserved yet charming Keynes, providing glimpses of the charisma which convinced Douglas LePan to describe him as “the most beautiful creature I have ever listened to.” However, Natalia Osipova steals the show, in her theatre debut on sojournment from the Royal Ballet, playing a sharp, witty, and comedically Russian Lydia Lopokova. The highlight of the play is the meeting between Keynes and his great rival, the proto-neoliberal Friedrich Hayek, on the roof of King’s College Chapel, Cambridge.

The almost unbelievably true encounter sees Keynes and Hayek on fire warden duty during a Nazi bombing raid, still arguing the merits of their respective worldviews. The pair meet again during a feverish tango scene which places Hayek’s “we must tighten our belts” against Keynes’ “buy a new belt”.

Other standout performances include Pip Carter’s drippingly sardonic Lytton Strachey, a fellow member of the Bloomsbury Group and a former lover of Keynes, and Laurie Kynaston’s Hayek, whose thin veneer of self-confidence masks both a bitter ideological resentment of Keynes the economist, and a deep personal admiration for Keynes the man.

Those searching for a deep engagement with the economic arguments for and against government intervention in the free market may find themselves disappointed (much to the relief of the rest of us). cursory context is provided regarding the debate between Keynes and Hayek, typically followed by a quip from a less economically-minded character about just how complicated it all is, reassuring the audience that the graphs and equations espoused by these characters are not at all the point of the play.

Rather, the fundamental tension between Keynes and Hayek is captured in their differing worldviews, which shape the research they produce. Keynes’ good-natured belief in the capacity of governments to influence the world for the better, and the importance he places on leisure and the ‘good life’, stands in stark contrast



with the cynical zealotry of Hayek, who draws on his experience of the hyper-inflation in 1920s Vienna to justify his distrust of central bank interventions.

Therefore, although Graham seemingly writes Keynes to be the ‘hero’ of the story (if there even is such a thing), this should not necessarily be taken as an endorsement of his economic ideas, but rather a simple admiration for his uncompromising style of living, and the way in which it shaped his life’s work.

By highlighting the virtue inherent to Keynes’ radical imagination of a better life for all, influenced by his deep personal engagement with the moral philosophy of fellow Cambridge ‘Apostle’ G.E. Moore, *The Standard of Living* stands as a philippic against the state of

political and economic thought today, implicitly lamenting those who sacrifice ideology and philosophy at the altar of pragmatism and incremental change. Morgan McSweeney’s pragmatism-over-principle may have achieved the largest British electoral victory this century, but it was this same lack of philosophical imagination which doomed Sir Keir Starmer’s premiership from the start.

Through his exploration of John Maynard Keynes in *The Standard of Living*, James Graham implores us to not repeat these mistakes, but rather to learn from the ethos embodied by Keynes. By doing this, we might just be able to imagine a better way to live.

Image credit: Simon Harriyott CC BY 2.0 via Flickr.

Why do we feel for the death of fictional people?

Jas Mauj confronts the ‘paradox of fiction’ and why the stalls offer us a place to grieve

I always cry at the depiction of death in plays. Considering that, during my first year at Oxford – the first time I engaged seriously with theatre – the listings almost seemed pointed for someone as weepy about grief as I am. From the beautiful, slow reflections of Tidal Theatre’s *Launa* to the raucous yet still moving titles like Blackstar Productions’ *Teen Spirit* and *Greyjoy*, I had some sort of physiological reaction to all of them. Whether it’s a mild sniffle or full-blown tears, I always end up feeling a bit ridiculous about the whole ordeal when it’s over. I mean, it’s not real, is it? Why do I waste my grief on things that haven’t happened, that will never happen?

That question – why I feel sadness for fictional grief – is at the heart of the ‘paradox of fiction’, a philosophical dilemma that asks how we feel anything at all for things we know don’t exist. It could be that, caught in the moment, I am so immersed in the play that I treat it as real. But that fails to explain how one of the most gut-wrenching portrayals of grief in theatrical history – Mother Courage’s silent scream upon seeing the corpse of her son in *Mother Courage and Her Children* – takes place in the context of a Brechtian production that deliberately distances the audience. The perceived ‘realness’ may not

matter to our emotional reaction, but it raises the question of how fiction on the stage crosses boundaries to generate effects in the real world of the theatre stalls.

Theatre has many unique devices up its sleeve that make it, in my opinion, superior to every other art form in the domain of audience manipulation. Namely, theatre is rife with ritualistic elements: the surreal stiffness of monologues and of stage blocking, the very practice of dressing up to sit silently in a dark room. Of course, one could argue that these are also features of certain films, but film lacks theatre’s trump card: the sense of immediacy between actor and audience. As the influential Polish director Jerzy Grotowski put it: “Theatre cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, ‘live communion.’”

In a sense, the actor, inhabiting the ghostly space between unreality as a character and immediacy as a body for the audience member, can use it to be possessed by the emotions it would be impermissible for many of us to feel in real life. When watching theatrical portrayals of grief, we mourn through the actors as much as we mourn with them. We need not necessarily

mourn the same thing they do on stage. But even if all the play gives us is catharsis, a reflection the narrative gives us of the ‘real’, I think what is important is that it offers a socially valid space,

The actor, inhabiting the ghostly space between unreality as a character and immediacy as a body, can use it to be possessed by the emotions it would be impermissible for many of us to feel in real life.

separate from everyday life, for doing so.

Grieving rituals exist around the world, with ‘professional mourning’ mentioned everywhere from ancient Egyptian records to the Bible. In

the deserts of Rajasthan, India, Rudalis – lower-caste women hired as professional mourners in a declining tradition – still carry out the function of wailing and singing at funerals where it would be improper for the upper-caste relatives of the deceased to showcase such emotion. Professional theatre is unique in that it often offers release to the actor as well, whereas the tears of many marginalised mourners throughout history saw no such catharsis.

All of this may help explain why theatre can drive us to tears, but why do we seek out such experiences? Are audiences, voyeurs as they are, the strange ones for going to watch someone whose pain they share for two hours and an intermission, before forgetting it? Or is it the writer, the actors, and the director who work on ensuring their art creates a sense of bereavement in the audience? I believe that Joan Didion holds the answer in her firm indictment of the audience: why we are in the stalls and what we are postponing through it. The starting lines of Didion’s play adaptation of a famously harrowing account of grief following her husband’s and daughter’s deaths, her memoir, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, declare: “And it will happen to you.”

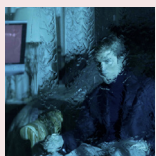
FASHION & FILM

What's Oxford watching?



Isabel at Brasenose recommends Hussein Chalayan for Olivia Rodrigo:

“Commissioned by Rodrigo for her Unraveled tour, the custom dress melts underneath the pouring rain as the singer performs her hit-song ‘The Cure’. Biodegradable, gorgeous, and phenomenally entertaining!”



Sam at Corpus Christi recommends *Primetime* (2026):

“This film is one of the most talked about of the year, and while it may be a little overhyped, I thought it was really stylish, had some great performances, and is getting people talking, which is exactly what it set out to do.”

Image credits: ‘Olivia Rodrigo’ and ‘Primetime’ via Pitchfork.com and imdb.com.

The legacy of the caricature

Rüya Oral reflects on the lives and careers of two greats who revelled in subversion

Hollywood has had a tough year so far. That the ‘In Memoriam’ section of the 2026 Academy Awards is going to be a serious tear-jerker was solidified by the passing of Dolly Parton and Tim Curry over two consecutive days. Both legends in their own right, one can scarcely imagine Parton and Curry in the same room, the former a peroxide-blond, rhinestone-clad country singer and the latter the ultimate black-comedy villain typecast – but their successive deaths have brought to light the many ways in which the two stars embodied the same, distinctive strangeness in the celebrity scene.

The current cultural landscape requires that every celebrity also be an influencer. Since the start of the millennium, stardom has been undergoing a perhaps uncalled-for yet inevitable commingling with the rise of social media. It is no longer possible to be celebrated simply for, say, your acting skills – you must also cultivate a persona with which to engage with your fans. This means that ultimately what celebrities profit off most is normalcy. To appeal to the largest group of people, they must appear quirky whilst actually being anything but. The ‘niches’ they sign their names to are of no use if they are not easily applicable to anybody who has an Instagram account. Hence the mass hysteria surrounding what I term ‘nothing aesthetics’: clean girl. Quiet luxury. No-makeup makeup look. The most sought-after manicure? Funny bunny (milky white), or if that is sold out, bubble bath (pinkish white). Pantone’s colour of the year? Cloud dancer (cloudy... white?). Disturbing political implications aside – we are still living in the aftermath of Sydney Sweeney’s American Eagle ad, after all – we are somehow witnessing the death of both individuality and community formed around unique and marginal traits at the hands of inoffensiveness.

One of the biggest perpetrators of the monochrome and monotone-ification of everything is Kylie Jenner. In an effort to keep up her quirky appearances, she has momentarily set the nude lip-kits aside to start a trend of putting gem stickers on everything – including

the lip-kits. She’s so crazy, love her! Since Jenner launched the bedazzled editions of her makeup line, every social media platform has been flooded with images of people covering their journals, bedsheets, and pickle jars with gem stickers, no doubt to be removed as soon as the photo has been taken. It’s both devastating and embarrassing, then, to hear Dolly Parton’s nephew Bryan Seaver announce that before her death Parton told him that she wanted “to rest in a beautiful bed of plush cotton because after a life wearing heavy rhinestones, she finally deserves to be comfortable and have some rest”. Not even the most committed “whimsy-maxxer” will ever get to make such a bittersweet statement.

Largely acknowledged as the most universally beloved public figure, dead or alive, Dolly Parton spent much of the first few decades of her 70-year career facing ridicule for the way she presented herself. Infamously modelling her look after the ‘town tramp’, Parton sported blonde wigs piled up to the high heavens, blood-red acrylic nails, and tight, rhinestone-studded clothes all the way until her final public appearance. “I’ve often made the statement that I would never stoop so low as to be fashionable”, she said in a 1977 interview with Barbara Walters, where she also acknowledged that many people’s initial reaction to “the ridiculous way I look” was either shock or mockery. However, she knew the real joke was always on those who made fun of her: “I know exactly what I’m doing, and I can change it at any time.” Hers was a costume designed to be abnormal. She revelled in the caricature that she made of herself, and by never once folding under the pressures of those who thought her ‘trashy’, she eventually brought everybody over to her side.

Though even Donald Trump joined in on the national mourning period, Parton lived as a non-conformist until the end. She never had children; she never made public appearances with her husband, and often talked about how their relationship thrived because she was often away from home and free to do whatever she wanted; she supported LGBTQ+ causes, and even went on record many times to say that if

she were born a man, she would have been a drag queen. Indeed, many of her queer fans think of her as the first cisgender woman to do drag on the global stage. Beyond her branding, her philanthropy was also consistently aimed at enabling social and cultural progress. She supported new artists, both financially and morally; she started one of the biggest and most successful literacy programmes in history with her Imagination Library; she funded COVID-19 vaccine research, and offered herself up for their trial. She used the glitz and glamour which once made her strange, different, and alienated her from her people to foster happiness, mobility, and freedom in communities like her own.

Unlike Parton, Tim Curry revealed little to nothing about his personal life throughout his lengthy career on both screen and stage. He also didn’t have a consistent persona like Parton’s, rather walking through a revolving door of increasingly freakish and subversive characters. Similar to Parton, though, his embrace of the caricature was a force that created community, even in the absence of any discernible shared traits. Best known for his performance as Dr Frank-N-Furter in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), Curry’s lasting influence in the role is showcased by the millions who attend showings of the film in full costume every year. A self-proclaimed “sweet transvestite”, Dr Frank is a figure of unintelligible sexuality and gender who violates both scientific and ethical codes to satisfy his desires. He is also not altogether human, hailing from the planet “Transsexual” in the galaxy of “Transylvania”. By playing into these stereotypes about queer people, Curry’s performance emphasises their ridiculousness and forces the audience to reckon with the rigidity with which they treat those unlike them, and how their bigotry ultimately reflects on how they govern themselves. For 50 years, Curry’s Frank-N-Furter has brought people together and allowed them to leave the binaries that rule their lives at home. That is the power of kitsch: it invites you to laugh with, not at, the strange and unfamiliar.

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

‘NAZA’: The most important film of the year

WILLOW JOPP

It was my final day at what had been a simultaneously controversial and underwhelming Venice Film Festival – controversial because of the lack of major Hollywood releases and the scarcity of female directors among the line-up, and underwhelming because the films that remained were boring, pretentious, or a combination of the two. The festival had a promising start, opening with the adrenaline-filled *Ink*, directed by Danny Boyle, and the crowd favourite *Wild Horse Nine*, directed by Martin McDonagh, a couple of days later. However, there was a run of complete filler throughout the middle portion of the festival. The lack of female voices in the lineup was noticeable in the films themselves, with one film after another about a man struggling with his conscience while also cheating on his wife. Needless to say, I was feeling the fatigue.

However, upon the release of the festival line-up, there was one that I just knew was going to be good. That film was *NAZA*, a documentary produced by *The Guardian* and directed by Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor. According to one of the officers, the title refers to “collateral damage”: the number of civilians who are killed in a targeted strike – in this case, the drone strikes that, the officers say, Israel can use to kill any person it wants, at any time. Both directors made the incredible *No Other Land* in 2024, and the premise of this film – interviews with Israeli intelligence officers about the systems used to remotely kill Palestinians essentially at will – was too good to fail. Going into my 28th film screening of the festival, I was proven right, with the film prompting the longest standing ovation in the festival’s history – 25 minutes long. While watching it, I knew I had to write about it, especially while details of its wider release are still emerging.

The death and destruction feel remote and are not shown to the audience until the film’s very last moments, in an emotional gut-punch. This is fitting, as the interviews focus specifically on remote killing. The filmmakers interview 24 Israeli operatives on the rooftops of Tel Aviv – only 60km away from

a site of extreme devastation. Tel Aviv, however, is unsettlingly quiet. We see people in high-rises doing yoga, washing up, watching television, leading normal and uninterrupted lives. The interviewees, silhouetted and with digitally altered voices, talk matter-of-factly about the methods of remote massacre that they helped to create and execute. *NAZA* creates geographical, moral, and cinematic distance from the destruction in Gaza, withholding what many other filmmakers would want to confront their audience with. I am reminded of *The Zone of Interest*, in which violence is kept just out of frame, and the film’s normality is made unsettling by what it chooses not to acknowledge. The filmmakers of *NAZA* clearly know that beyond physical distance, emotional distance is what allows the violence in Gaza to continue, and show us just how easy it is to ignore what is going on right under our noses.

In case the film does not get a wider release, I will take some time to describe some of the topics discussed by the Israeli officers. We begin by being told that every phone in Gaza is being tracked and constantly surveilled by the Israeli government, which is how the following technologies can function. The first is ‘Lavender’, an AI program that tries to evaluate whether a potential target’s phone ‘behaves like’ a Hamas phone by comparing your activity to that of a confirmed Hamas member. It is a program which, despite creating thousands of targets to be bombed, is often incorrect – at least 15% of the ‘targets’ are incorrect, according to one of the tech officers who helped make it. The idea that the decision of whether a person should live or die is decided by AI is harrowing, and yet is described as safer than being in the hands of a person who has a personal vendetta against Arabs.

We then learn of ‘Where’s Daddy?’, which spies on family members’ phones to see or hear when a target returns home, so that they can be killed in their house. We are told that the preference is to strike Palestinians in their homes, often at night, when they are least expecting it. Again, it is a system which often makes mistakes, as we are told of a case where the potential target simply left their phone at home, and only the man’s family was home, including his daughters

of ages three and six. We learn that the computer program used to analyse homes (every home in Gaza has a ‘serial number’) informs you of the expected *NAZA*, including whether they are children.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has rejected the film’s central allegations, but *NAZA*’s emotional force comes from the accumulation of testimony, and the calm, technical language of those who say they participated in the system. The Israeli officers being interviewed don’t care about who they are killing, and this is clearest through their damning language. Here are a few quotes given by interviewees about the killing of Palestinians: “It’s like a video game”; “Quantity not quality”; “The goal is to destroy”;

“Destroy everything as quickly as possible”; “We expect them to learn it through blood”; “If they want him dead, he dies”; “We erased history.”

I gained no comfort in watching *NAZA*, no cathartic ending, and no sense that anything will change because of it. It plainly describes a machinery of violence operating at this very moment. After the screening, the audience leaves in a sombre silence, like a funeral procession. It is a strange feeling to leave a film about mass death by walking over a red carpet, above which the Israeli flag flies. I leave on a vaporetto and say goodbye to this year’s festival.

[Read the full article at cherwell.org](#)
Image credit: *NAZA* via IMDb.



Between beer gardens and picnics: ‘Climate Culture Care’ warns us about our future

Leo Maudsley-Barton urges attendance for topical Ashmolean exhibition

When I returned to Oxford this term, just as England teased us with the sixth heat-wave of the year, I found myself at a loose end. With the deadline for two vacation essays still far in the distance, the sun lit up the sign for Soma Surovi Jannat’s Ashmolean Now exhibition, *Climate Culture Care*. I went in to see it (rather grateful for the museum’s air conditioning, if nothing else), and I was directed to the basement level.

From the first few lines of her introduction, the importance of Surovi’s exhibition is clear. Her work is groundbreaking: “The first solo presentation of any Bangladesh-based artist in a UK museum.” Looking at the list of her exhibition’s supporters (including The Patrons of the Ashmolean Museum, British Council Bangladesh, Samdani Art Foundation, Charles Wallace Bangladesh Trust and Gallery Espace, New Delhi), the weight of this presentation should not be underestimated. Her work is tucked between the bustling cafe and gift shop.

Like the other viewers who came in behind me, I was first struck by Surovi’s “ephemeral work”, *She Carries the River in Her Skin*. A single piece, the work bends around the corner and spans almost the length of the back wall. Drawn directly onto the wall in March, when the exhibition opened, the white plaster is a mighty canvas, but the black skeletal shape that arches over it does not overwhelm the space. Surovi seems to trust you to come closer to see the intricate details of her strokes. I do, as do the others. We find the figures wrapped around each other, hands that become trees, then scissors which slice through a single flower. The different parts of the wider body are all kept in individual, connected ovals. They start to feel like eyes watching us, a gaze which I am forced to drop, while it remains unblinking.

The wall text beside it is a sobering description: “Surovi examines the impact of climate change on women and children.” The words explain that this work is focused on the social challenges that women face after losing

their husbands to tiger attacks in Bangladesh. She also draws attention to the health risks posed to those who find their home in the Sundarbans (the world’s largest mangrove forest). They have reduced access to clean water: “A basic human right that remains unfulfilled for many.” Her artwork is beautifully detailed, but perhaps does require the accompanying commentary to be properly appreciated. The final line especially really resonated with me: “While the work has been carefully documented, it will be erased at the end of this exhibition.”

I find that sense of erasure – the art’s self-proclaimed ephemeral nature – more compelling than the physical work itself. I think of the plants, the houses, the people, the lives that were just as uniquely intricate and detailed, then so brutally erased by the unforgiving violence of wildfires and storms. The eyes keep watching me.

I turn to take in the wall opposite, and find another impressively expansive artwork. *Between the Sea and the Sky, Who Holds the Ground?* is a scroll nearly 10m long. Unlike the black-and-white wall piece behind it, this artwork is an archival ink-on-paper work with acrylic colour, gold and silver leaf. This time, I read the description first: “Surovi’s work reflects the strength of ordinary people facing migration challenges, depicting a long scene of climate refugees, including both animals and humans.” As suggested, I follow it from right to left, appreciating the representation of shifting ecosystems and “cosmic transformations” caused by climate change. Again, I am not sure it would be as impactful if the meaning was not explained beside it.

Then, about halfway through, I am suddenly stopped by a ceramic hand mounted above the scroll. It was not mentioned in the description. I think it is one of the “Ashmolean inspirations” scattered throughout the exhibit, historical artefacts that influenced Surovi in her creation of the exhibition. The raised red hand is held upright, as if urging us to stop, but it has lost

its thumb and forefinger. It is one of the most striking images in the basement room. It feels like the past is reaching out and begging us to change, desperate for us to stop the destructive consequences of climate change. But then I, like everyone else, move past this warning. We leave it behind as the reality of those consequences continues on the scroll.

In the middle of the room, a few smaller artworks are organised on free-standing displays. They are circular and part of a series which “delves into the emotions of animals, and the feelings of being trapped in the human world.” Looking around, they are not getting as much attention as the bigger pieces, but as I weave in and out of them, something suddenly catches my eye. An air purifier sits at the end of the room, wafting cool air through the displays. I am quickly beside it, enjoying the breeze it allows.

From my cold haven, I cannot help but mark the uncomfortable irony of this exhibition. Surovi’s works warn us of the pressing danger of climate change, and the museum must plug in units to cool the room down. She constructs works whose gaze you cannot look away from, and the exhibition is fitted underground at level minus one. It takes a committed viewer – who doesn’t mind the occasional shriek of an excited child in the cafe – to find it.

Eventually, I climb back up to the ground floor of the Ashmolean. I am quickly blinded by the light of the unseasonably hot September day flooding in through the main doors. *Climate Culture Care* is an important reminder that between the beer gardens and picnics, our world is being destroyed. Walking home, I find it is not so much the individual works that stay with me, but that final sentence: “It will be erased at the end of this exhibition.”

What else is being lost, as the world above us gets warmer?

This free exhibition ends in November, and I would suggest that if you have time, stop by the Ashmolean to visit it. Before it is erased.

ART

What’s Oxford looking at?



Sasha at Christ Church recommends *Frida Kahlo: The Making of an Icon*:

“A really interesting exhibition which not only looks at the incredible paintings of Frida Kahlo, but the countless artists that she has inspired over the past few decades, with a vast array of different types of artwork.”



Simon at St Anne’s recommends *The Bayeux Tapestry*:

“A genuinely awe-inspiring experience to see this artwork at the British Museum. As someone really interested in that period of history, it was a dream come true to be able to see one of the most important artefacts in the world...”

Image credits: ‘Frida Kahlo’ and ‘The Bayeux Tapestry’ via [tate.org](https://www.tate.org) and [britishmuseum.org](https://www.britishmuseum.org).

Art as protest on university campuses

LARA SOLIE-TULUIE

This week, Cornell University has made headlines as prosecutors reopened an investigation into the alleged rape of a student at the Ivy League in 2024. The case is characterised by extreme violence and the university’s apathy towards the anonymous Jane Doe. When victims are ignored, and perpetrators’ punishment is to write an essay, what can we learn from those who use art as protest on campus?

In 2015, Columbia University student Emma Sulkowicz carried her dorm room mattress across her graduation stage. She had been carrying it for months: every day the university failed to expel the man she accused of anally raping her. Having reported the assault to the university in April of 2013, Columbia found her attacker, Paul Nungesser, “not responsible” for his alleged crimes. She then filed a report with the New York City Police Department to no avail.

In response, the visual arts student embarked on a performance art piece entitled *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)*, as her senior thesis. Starting in September 2014, Sulkowicz carried a 23kg, dark blue, extra-long twin mattress, identical to the one on which she was raped, with her constantly while on campus. Dubbed by Sulkowicz to *Columbia Spectator* as an “endurance art piece”, she described the mattress as “the perfect size for me to just be able to carry it enough that I can continue with my day, but also heavy enough so that I have to continually struggle with it”.

Her performance was intended to travel by “word of mouth”. Having written the rules of engagement for lugging the heavy mattress around the walls of her studio space, she left the rest of her performance unexplained: a student

walking around campus with a blue rectangle of springs and plastic.

On the steps of university buildings, at coffee shops, covered in a sheet matching the shade of Sulkowicz’s graduation gown, the mattress is always there. The mattress’ out-of-placeness is off-putting, interrupting a space of efficiency, learning, and practicality. It is cumbersome, attention-grabbing, and unsettling. It’s a weight not only to those who carry it, but a disruption to the lives of those around it. Its presence speaks to an absence of accountability and justice in the space it inhabits. Notably, under Sulkowicz’s regulations, the mattress was not allowed to be removed from the university campus, even when she was elsewhere. The burden of truth and violence was made big, blue, and bold. It’s difficult to move and impossible to ignore. In a piece written for *TIME*, Sulkowicz accused Columbia of being “more concerned about their public image than keeping people safe.” When the words of victims have limited consequence and perpetrators fail to be held accountable, art speaks in a tongue that cannot be twisted.

Protest is often remembered through its material objects. We picture the hourglass of Extinction Rebellion, the peace sign of the anti-Vietnam War movement, the crouching panther of the Black Panther Party. The visual memorabilia and graphic art of protest leave a lasting cultural and personal impression. In an interview with *Tate*, artist Jeremy Deller recalls the impact the protest art of the 2017 Women’s March had on him: “It was kind of the first time you saw... those body parts being drawn or in public being displayed, those sort of reproductive organs.” Really, women’s reproductive systems have been displayed on museum walls with varying accuracy for centuries. Think only of Gustave Courbet’s 1866 *L’Origine du monde*: it’s all the ‘taboo’ bits and nothing else. Possibly, it is the presence of these taboo bits paraded so



pointedly, with overt political sentiment behind them, as well as the real-life person holding the placard, that makes protest art, at least to Deller, so remarkable. It discards any question of whether art should be political and forces it to be so. It gives the aesthetic political purpose; it upsets how we understand, use, and display art. In Sulkowicz’s case, it makes the mundane, purpose-driven object an aesthetic anomaly that first surprises, and then frightens.

Sulkowicz’s performance art protest draws on the visual interruption caused by something being in the wrong place, detaching the signifier from the sign. The spatial anachronism of mattress-in-library, or mattress-in-cafeteria, creates an unsettling instance of a stubborn, physically cumbersome dedication to truth-telling. The mattress is impossible to ignore; so

is the silent system of gender-based violence that permeates university culture. Sulkowicz makes the location of violence mobile, unavoidable, and universal. While the weight of assault can be carried by anyone anywhere, the mattress is a reminder that the perpetrators of such violence are just as present.

The tool of oppression deployed by universities like Cornell and Columbia is language in the form of excuses and essays. Language is fortified to protect the guilty and complicit from the consequences of their actions. Art, at this moment, confuses the schemes of language. It evades clear distinction, forces itself to be acknowledged, and upsets the campus’ playhouse of power and punishment.

Image credit: Adam Sherman, CC by 4.0 via [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org).

MUSIC

What's Oxford listening to?



Ashley at Somerville recommends *Prima* (2026) by Adéla:

“KATSEYE-reject Adéla wins the chart battle against her almost-girl group with songs like ‘Ain’t in LA’ and ‘Nicole Kidman’ quickly becoming modern classics. Listen to it and weep, HxG!”



Emma at Merton recommends *Music, Fashion, Film* (2026) by Charli xcx:

“The highly anticipated record had big shoes to fill, following the unquantifiable success of *Brat*. All I can say is, against all odds, Charli has done it again!”

Image credits: ‘Prima’ and ‘Music, Fashion, Film’ via Pitchfork.

The rise of pop girlies: Mediocrity or feminism?

Aoife Williams questions whether music icons of the moment deserve the spotlight

GIRLS INVENTED PUNK ROCK, NOT ENGLAND”: so reads the iconic green T-shirt of Sonic Youth legend Kim Gordon. The slogan stands in defiance of an unfortunate truth in the music industry: femininity and credibility often exist in contention with one another. Patti Smith, discussing her impact as a woman in the male-dominated 1970s punk scene, has expressed her resentment of the term ‘female artist’: “To me, I was an artist. We don’t use the expression ‘male artist’”. I share Smith’s reservations about the term ‘pop girlie’. The now well-established term, born from the boom in popularity of young female pop artists, feels to me somewhat belittling of women’s artistry. But my own gripes with the term aside, it’s worth exploring what it means for women in music, and for pop culture more broadly.

It’s not unusual for glamorous women and their young, largely female audiences to dominate the charts: Madonna, for instance, is listed as the fourth best-selling artist of all time. The pop girlie explosion, though, has captured the zeitgeist with an era-defining ferocity previously reserved for men. The music we historically afford this label of ‘era-defining’ to is overwhelmingly male: The Beatles as the faces of peace, love, and LSD; the Sex Pistols as the ugly (and co-opted) face of punk; Nirvana as the begrudging kings of grunge; and so on. The year 2024, however, was to the pop girlies what 1976 was to punk. With the Eras Tour in full swing, the year was marked by several huge releases by female artists, notably Sabrina Carpenter’s *Short n’ Sweet*, Gracie Abrams’ *The Secret of Us* and, of course, Charli XCX’s cultural behemoth, *Brat*. Admittedly, *Brat* aside, these releases are not to my personal taste, but my self-indulgent distrust of the mainstream doesn’t blind me to the significance of women becoming front and centre in an industry so historically hostile to us.

The trend kept its momentum in 2025, diversifying as Olivia Dean’s R&B-infused *The Art of Loving* became a global phenomenon, and Slayyyter’s ‘Crank’ introduced a hedonistic edge. Songs are becoming shorter and snappier, with the influence of alt-pop icon PinkPantheress evident in the increasing rarity of albums exceeding 30 minutes. Brevity, though, can entail a lack of depth.

Internet music critic and self-important bald man Anthony Fantano said of Addison Rae’s debut *Addison*, for example, that beyond “its pleasant, gently danceable beats, and moody ennui... this record really contains no thrills or appeal or depth or excitement or substance”. Fantano speaks to a shallowness that is the product of a need for songs to be clippable and suitable as potentially viral soundbites for TikTok – a trade-off of artistry for marketability. Young female artists like Rae face ridicule for supposedly ruining music for everyone, whilst the profit-driven record executives who are actually to blame largely escape backlash.

Dismissing music made by young, attractive women as unserious and shallow, though, isn’t a new phenomenon; it is a long-established tradition. Courtney Love once remarked that “proletariat male rock critics” had “a real problem... with denim boomer issues” when it came to accepting the credibility of glamorous women. The cultural ecosystem of which she spoke has since all but disappeared: music magazines which could once make or break careers are now reduced to niche online publications, unimportant to all but a particular group of vinyl-collecting, band-tee-adorned nostalgists. Her point stands, though: people who care about music can’t seem to help but revel in tearing apart the artistry of successful women.

This is not to dismiss criticisms about the quality of music coming from the current pop girlie boom. To be honest, I find some of it to be absolute drivel (see Taylor Swift’s laughable latest single, ‘Cleveland!’). But I wouldn’t dare equate my own boredom with a lack of artistry. The three-minute pop song, for all its clichéd lyricism and its intro-verse-chorus-verse-chorus unoriginality, is a sacred thing. The nature of pop music is that it is formulated to be popular. Not everything needs to be ‘boundary-breaking’, ‘ethereal’, or whichever other buzzwords Rolling Stone likes to throw around. Simplicity isn’t a crime; it’s the backbone of the music industry.

I do wonder whether a label such as pop girlie can be reductive. The tendency of audiences to place the artists we adore into neatly labelled boxes can be detrimental, as Charli XCX expresses in ‘Camera’, the fourth track on her newest album, *Music, Fashion,*

Film: “Am I being fuckin’ stupid if I try to be a girl on the screen when I’m turning thirty-four?”

Reaching new levels of fame with *Brat* seemingly came at a cost for the singer, who, after spending her career developing a complex, varied sound, suddenly found herself the caricatured face of a cultural movement beyond her control. Artists are fragile beings: if we try to reduce them to a two-dimensional label, they will retaliate with a mediocre swerve to grunge-pop.

Some, though, have embraced grouping female artists. Olivia Rodrigo’s recent *Daisy Chain Fields* festival, which raised \$20 million for organisations supporting women and girls, is a testament to this. The festival boasted a stacked line-up, bringing together some of the biggest female pop acts in recent years, including Chappell Roan, Mitski, and of course, Rodrigo herself. A range of alternative acts also performed, including alt-rock veterans The Breeders and riot grrrls Bikini Kill. The festival’s marketing, shrouded in flowers and pastel tones, did not shy away from girlish motifs. Such a wholehearted embrace of the feminine aesthetics that our misogynistic popular culture has traditionally mocked creates the impression of a group of artists carving out a safe space for themselves in an industry that has long abused, mocked, and ignored them.

With this sentiment in mind, I see why the pop girlie phenomenon could be important for women’s place in our culture. Perhaps flippancy is the whole point: embracing the artistry found in simple pop melodies and fun, girly aesthetics and demanding they be taken seriously. For all it may be a marketing ploy in plain sight, there is something to be said for the proliferation of music made by women and the wider impact it could have on the industry. If today our biggest pop stars are mostly young women, perhaps in ten years’ time indie and alternative scenes that currently struggle with seemingly constant scandals involving male musicians’ predatory behaviour will also become more welcoming spaces for women. Even if I were to be cynical and refuse to see this pop girlie influx as anything but a marketing ploy, this fact remains: anything Noah Kahan, Sombri, or Harry Styles can do, the pop girlies can do backwards and in heels.

World music after ‘world music’

AGASTYA ANAND

On the face of it, the term ‘world music’ is perhaps one of the most unhelpful terms for any genre of music. While there is stylistic, lineage-based, and thematic common ground that connects the music we categorise as ‘rock’, ‘jazz’, ‘hip-hop’, or even ‘pop’ music together, there is not very much that connects ‘world’ music.

If we go by the most liberal definition of world music, it’s simply any music released in a non-English language, or made outside the West (which is itself a very subjective geographic boundary). I like to narrow the term down to music that’s made outside the West, but heavily marketed to, if not self-consciously produced for, a Western audience. It’s still very much a ‘vibes-based’ descriptor, and I tend to associate it more with a certain language of exoticised marketing, typical of 1980s-2000s world music labels like Peter Gabriel’s Real World Records or David Byrne’s Luaka Bop.

Byrne – formerly the frontman of the band Talking Heads – has incidentally written before about his distaste for the term world music in a 1992 article, where he called it “a label for anything at all that is not sung in English or anything that doesn’t fit into the Anglo-Western pop universe this year”. Byrne was, in my opinion, correct, and it seems like his advice has at least been somewhat heeded – even the organisers of the WOMAD festival, a yearly celebration of the genre founded by Peter Gabriel, have moved away from this term. But from an epistemological standpoint, the term has some utility – at least in the context of the late 20th century. Fela Kuti, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and Youssou N’Dour – all artists who were marketed as making world music at some point or the other – may have very little in common musically, but they shared one common trait for the (Western) listener: their foreignness.

Much like the generic term ‘Latin music’, which could apply to everything from Andean huayño rhythms to Nuyorican salsa and modern electro-reggaetón, ‘world music’ is essentially an etic descriptor. Interestingly, ‘Latin’ music seldom is categorised as world music, perhaps because it was more familiar to American audiences, and often catered to Latino audiences in the US as much as it did to curious white Americans.

But does the term have any utility at all today? It seems like the world is – if not politically, then at least culturally – more globalised than ever. It’s no longer odd for Westerners or (more specifically) first worlders to listen to music from

Fela Kuti, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and Youssou N’Dour – all artists marketed for making world music – may have very little in common musically, but they shared one common trait for the (Western) listener: their foreignness.

other parts of the globe. These artists – BTS, Burna Boy, Anitta, Bad Bunny, and many more – are not exactly comparable to the ‘world music’ of the past. This is not only because they tend to be as popular in their home countries as abroad (which was rare among world music artists with some exceptions) but also because their music isn’t treated as a novelty, or ‘exotic’; rather, it’s treated as simply another part of the globalised pop-music ecosystem.

At the same time, demand for ‘obscure’ music from outside the West has not disappeared – as the popularity of labels like Awesome Tapes from Africa, Sublime Frequencies, Sahel Sounds, and Habibi Funk among music aficionados can attest.



Artists like Omar Souleyman, Ata Kak, and Mdou Moctar seem to fit the mould of ‘world music’ from the 1980s much more than the more well-known non-English or non-Western artists one might spot on the Billboard charts. They have reached a position of modest success, but mostly through Western audiences and labels, and have remained only somewhat known at home.

The most tangible legacy of world music is perhaps ‘worldbeat’, a genre that refers in broad strokes to Western pop or rock music infused with various ‘exotic’ stylings from ‘world music’ (think Paul Simon’s *Graceland*); a genre that is much more ‘real’ and definable than ‘world music’, and also has a much clearer lineage dating back all the way to the ‘exotica’ of the 1950s. This genre isn’t the most popular today, but it’s not dead, as recent (and rather popular) releases by Gorillaz and Ed Sheeran would suggest.

In the era of globalisation, ‘world music’ is something of an anomaly. On one hand, we are more culturally connected than ever; the internet has created opportunities for people across the

world to communicate with each other.

However, globalisation is asymmetric: because Western (and particularly, Anglo-American) culture is globally hegemonic, globalisation reinforces that dominance and rarely lets artists from the Global South speak for themselves without Western interference. Moreover, even popular artists from outside the Anglo-American world have faced backlash when entering the mainstream – one needs only to look at the negative reactions from the American right-wing mediasphere to the recent Super Bowl performance by Bad Bunny. But even withholding parochialism, the view of the Global North and the West as the ‘default’ is still prevalent even among those not defined by ideological fervour. Perhaps, if we want to get rid of the ‘exoticism’ regarding music from around the world, it might be best not simply to preach about it when it relates to music, but rather to push for cultural exchange to be the norm, and not to be an oddity.

Image credit: *Comecoquito*, CC0 by 1.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Diverse voices: ‘Inshallah, Madonna, Inshallah’ by Miljenko Jergović

Hiding in the woods, the narrator of Miljenko Jergović’s eighth story ‘Alkatmer’ in his collection *Inshallah, Madonna, Inshallah*, ponders the push and pull of religion in Bosnia. His is one of the trickier voices in the book. Obsessed with the sins of a lightning-struck Hodža, the disappearance of a young refugee from the town’s memory, he resolves to be the saviour. He answers the call of God, who is “testing us just as an old grandfather tests his coffee with the tip of his tongue to see if it’s hot”. As he falls asleep in the cold, his mind is fragmented with fantasies of sin and punishment. The details of “the Charred Mosque minaret” slip away; he remembers that “the Hodža was bald and smooth-faced”, but he cannot remember why. When he sneaks back into the town, forgetting the stories he has told himself and the crimes he is supposedly avenging, our narrator commits a confused final act of violence. Jergović, through translators Ellen Elias-Bursać and Mirza Purić, delivers: “We both heard the same thing, and by that, on judgement day we will be judged as men – the woosh of the paddle like the woosh of the wind that brings the snow and the winter.”

Whilst the delusion of Alkatmer’s narrator is perhaps more complex than some other voices in this collection, the understatedness of his story and the winding, folkloric tone are definitive of *Inshallah, Madonna, Inshallah*. Every story is characterised by the universal intimacy of the voice of a stranger telling you strange tales around a fire. Sometimes there is magic explicitly at play, like the talking bird of ‘Zulum’. Sometimes, with the freedom of unreliable narrators and prophetic dreams, reality in Jergović’s stories bends only slightly; such is the case in “Tespih” and “Misir”.

As he describes it, *Inshallah, Madonna, Inshallah* is the author’s attempt to capture “the unusual documentary spirit of Bosnian and Dalmatian lyrical songs.” Every short story begins with a note describing the “lyrical song” (or songs) that inspired it, thus each is framed explicitly by the culture and history in which Jergović writes. The natural, and surely intended, product of this form is the sharp focus, every time, no matter the length or style of the story, on the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The book stands as a record of Jergović’s people, a collection of mythical voices that can speak to God, to Allah, to birds, and dead brothers.

The balance of folklore and monotheistic religion is a fine one, but Jergović seems well practised at spinning plates. One does not detract from the other: the presence of everyday myth lives alongside the honest faith of his characters. Nor does Jergović shy from the conflict between Christianity and Islam. The suffering of religious war is present, as are its justifications, its heroes and its victims. The form of a short story collection is, in this way, ideally suited for Jergović’s project, which does itself seem to extend a little beyond “lyrical songs”. Or rather, as I would believe myself, Jergović’s valuation of the music extends far

Every story is characterised by the universal intimacy of the voice of a stranger telling you strange tales around a fire. Sometimes there is magic explicitly at play, like the talking bird of ‘Zulum’.

beyond that first experience of hearing them. The crises of life, death, love, and faith are all within the bounds of “lyrical songs”.

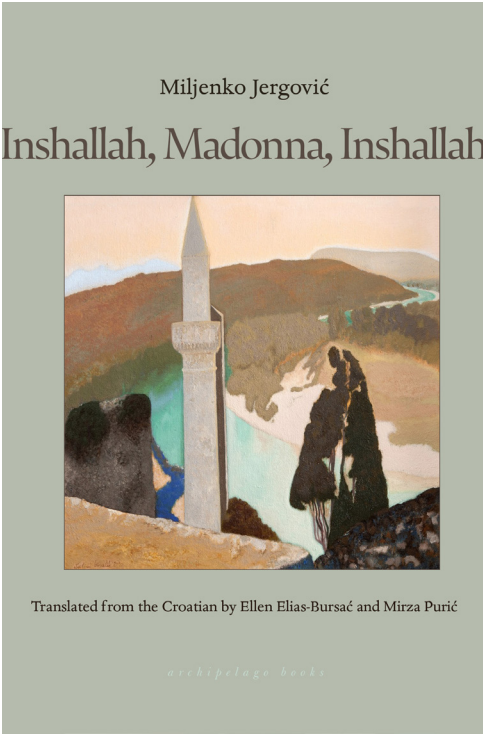
It is fitting, then, that such a diverse chorus of voices is published in English by the independent publishing house, Archipelago Books. Founded in 2003 by Jill Schoolman, the small team specialises in translated fiction “from the margins”. It publishes around 15 to 16 books a year, exclusively translations into English. In a 2018 interview for Publishers Weekly, the translator Bill Johnston describes working with Jill and her team. “It’s an unusual, collaborative dialogical approach,” he says, “and I find it very conducive to doing good work”. At the risk of understatement, it seems this same process has been successful for Elias-Bursać and Mirza Purić: *Inshallah, Madonna, Inshallah* is some pretty “good work”.

Unique writing can come from all kinds of directions, but I don’t think it is a coincidence that Jergović’s writing is coming into English

through an independent publishing house, one known for its “dialogic collaborative approach,” the same one that has published his work in English three times before. You might say the same for Mathias Énard and Fitzcarraldo, or the 2026 International Booker winner Yáng Shuāng-zī and & Other Stories. Independent publishing houses are taking risks that larger organisations cannot, and as readers we stand to benefit enormously from this.

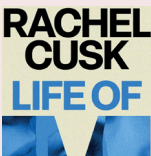
I’ll finish with this bit of advice. Contrary to popular belief, not everything goes in one ear and out the other. Some stuff gets kept, and it would be nice if it was interesting. It would be nice if it was the kind of voice you hadn’t heard before. So keep an ear out because *Inshallah, Madonna, Inshallah* is coming out on 13th October.

Image credit: *Inshallah, Madonna, Inshallah*, via Archipelago Books.



BOOKS

What’s Oxford reading?



Lottie at St Anne’s recommends *Life of M* (2026) by Rachel Cusk:

“Cusk’s odyssey to remove the self from her narratives takes a slight detour in her much debated takedown of friend and fan, Natalie Portman. Tap in if you love to seethe about celebrity culture and thought *Black Swan* was a little overrated.”



Willow at Christ Church recommends *The Aspern Papers* (1888) by Henry James:

“A very well-written novella, full of drama and tension. It takes place in Venice, which is where I was when I read it, and he writes about the city in such a vivid way, and the book really enhanced my experience of Venice.”

Image credits: ‘Life of M’ and ‘The Aspern Papers’ via waterstones.com.

WHAT’S ON

MUSIC

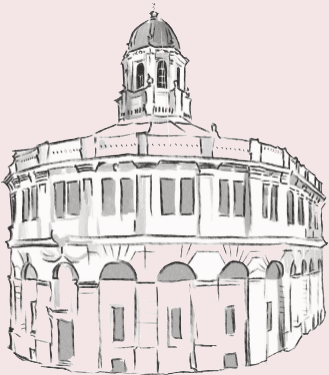
Odette and Supports
The Bullingdon
25th October, 7pm

BOOKS

William Tullett *SNIFF: A History of Smells*
Blackwell’s
16th October, 5:30pm

ART

The Shape of What Remains
Modern Art Oxford
Until 22nd November



On seasonal reads, growing up, and guilt

ELIZABETH GAMMAIDONI

Reconnecting with reading is something many people tend to do on a summer holiday, and statistics suggest it is one of the only times the majority of adults read throughout the year. *WalesOnline* reports that 25% of its 5,000 respondents only ever read whilst away on holiday. Perhaps more interestingly, it reports that, whilst 29% of people would be too embarrassed to be seen reading romance in their day-to-day life, 17% change their mind when they are away on holiday. Although it feels like a societal issue that people would be too self-conscious to read romance in public (perhaps because it is a genre enjoyed by more women than men), this speaks to how much further from their regular selves people feel whilst on holiday.

It seems that many people find summer holidays to be a time in which they can disconnect from their real lives and read things they would usually feel too self-conscious to. This same study reveals that over half of adults wish they read more, implying that not everyone manages to crack open a book whilst on holiday. The study reports that the average number of books read on holiday is 2.3, but it does not say how widely the results ranged. Given that over half of people wish they read more, it is quite possible that, rather than a lot of people reading two or three books each, many read none at all and others read copious amounts.

I personally find this to be the case. Every summer holiday, reading for pleasure is something I either nostalgically reconnect with

or grow ever more distant from and feel guilty whilst doing so. I will spend a week either reading a similarly obscene number of novels to what I consistently read as a child, or not once broaching the first page, and pre-holiday it is impossible for me to predict which will occur. For more self-aware readers, perhaps this is not such a surprising phenomenon, but I find each time I am surprised either by the large amount of my to-be-read list I’ve suddenly ticked off, or by the fact that the most words I consumed were on a restaurant menu.

Reading seems to be the one hobby that causes people to forget what the purpose of a hobby actually is: pleasure.

You might assume that, since this article is in the ‘Books’ section of *Cherwell*, I am about to try to convince you that you should have spent your summer reigniting your childhood passion for reading. It is not an uncommon pipeline for someone who is nerd enough to get into the University of Oxford to have greatly enjoyed reading as a child, only to arrive here and have reading become their entire life. This, for many, leads not necessarily to falling out of love with reading, but perhaps to a reading fatigue that makes us increasingly reluctant to spend our precious free time with our nose in a book.

I know many people who at least somewhat

mourn the more casual relationship they had with reading as a child. One thing that categorically never encourages a reignition of a love for casual reading, however, is guilt. At no point has a nostalgic childhood hobby been happily rediscovered through guilt. I also think that, for many people, guilt is a feeling associated specifically with reading for fun. It’s almost like many people who grew up with a love of reading also developed a need for academic achievement to such an extent that this would be carried into adulthood hobbies.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a hobby as “an activity or interest pursued regularly in one’s leisure time for pleasure”. Unfortunately, when it comes to reading, many people seem to forget the final two words of this definition. So, ultimately, guilt seems to be almost exclusively applied to reading as a hobby, in a way that is damaging to our enjoyment of it. Reading seems to be the one hobby that causes people to forget what the purpose of a hobby actually is: pleasure. If you’re no longer wanting to read for pleasure, that’s not something that should be forced. I’ve watched people obsess over reaching arbitrary reading goals in a way that prevents their hobby from matching its definition.

In my opinion, as long as you’ve replaced it with other hobbies rather than an alarming screen time, falling out of love with reading is not something to be ashamed of, and it shouldn’t be a hobby forced out of some misplaced sense of guilt. The pause doesn’t have to be permanent, and perhaps not forcing it will allow it to come back naturally (as well as leaving a part of our lives in which reading comprises alarming amounts of our time).

An accidental archive: The same seat, the same drink

Priya Burrow discusses how to find a sense of permanency in a fleeting environment

By the end of Michaelmas, darkness had begun to arrive before dinner, and I was still figuring out how to make Oxford feel like a life rather than a place I was passing through. One evening, after a pitiful college dinner, as I stewed over an overdue essay, a friend suggested a board game. It was something we occasionally indulged in at the college café, branding it a gentler form of procrastination, one that rotted the brain a little less. This time, I suggested a change: a trip to Formosan, my favourite tea shop, only a few footsteps from Pembroke. We were greeted by a friendly array of samples, and I confidently ordered for him before we settled into the warmth of the spacious tearoom, set up the board, and, at least temporarily, blissfully ignored every deadline in favour of fierce competition. In the weeks that followed, our trips to Formosan became a ritual and the friendship grew closer. We joked, shared secrets, and made plans. “To be honest, I can see why you quite like it here”, he admitted. It was that transient calm that kept drawing me back.

In an environment as competitive as Oxford, it is easy to measure our lives by achievement, and our sense of who we are can be quickly warped by comparison. I began to measure my first year in strange increments: essays handed in late, friendships I thought I should have made by then, and weeks in

which I felt I was somehow doing Oxford incorrectly, gauging progress against an idealised version of the university experience. I could not help feeling constantly behind, thanks in no small part to my notable disorganisation. But the routine of returning to the same spot and ordering the same drink offered an alternative: a quieter measure of who we are, who we were, and who we were becoming.

I had first visited Formosan after a rather dull British Isles lecture, in search of some relief. Back then, it was enough just to sit for a few moments before returning to the college library. But the more I frequented the place, the more my feelings about the year began to evolve alongside it. Formosan became the haven where I met the people with whom I would later celebrate Holi, an important Hindu festival that I was marking away from home for the first time. It was where I battled an essay crunch, where I sat nervously before my first collection, where my friends and I talked to death about the same topics, and where they came to find me when they knew I was having a bad day.

Most significantly, though, Formosan holds the moment when I felt I most belonged: the moment I felt understood and recognised by the community I was only beginning to fit into. On my birthday, my best friend bought me a Formosan voucher. They had recognised

that this place mattered to me. Formosan was no longer just a space of nostalgia, but one I could learn and grow in. Its importance lay not only in the space itself, but in the people who had shaped it.

During the hell that was Prelims, I dragged myself out of a three-hour paper and through the heatwave, wearing a

So how do you make a space yours when you know you will eventually, and inevitably, leave it? Perhaps we do it by allowing our lives to accumulate there.

pitiful interpretation of sub fusc, and feeling thoroughly disheartened by a sorry excuse for an exam. Strolling past The Bear and into Formosan with my best friend, in a moment of calm so complete it felt almost surreal, I could finally appreciate the real progress of the year. Within the enormity of Oxford, its libraries and exams and traditions, a tiny, ordinary café had quietly become a repository for emotional transitions.

A beginner’s guide to being an amateur

MAY BRUCE

When I was seven, my grandma decided I was going to be a pianist. For the next twelve years, I sat through weekly piano lessons, despite a complete absence of enthusiasm for the instrument. Long after my grandma informed me that I was not, in fact, going to be a pianist, but rather a lawyer, I carried on these lessons. My goal was not enjoyment, but that treasure of infinitely greater value: a grade eight certificate.

What teenage me didn’t understand was the value of putting time and effort into something non-productive, purely for the sheer joy of it. I’ve heard people complaining that they don’t know how to relax, and the advice given in response is always that they’re lacking hobbies, that if they pick up a new interest their free time will become fulfilling and restorative. However, I think that what this fails to acknowledge is that it’s not simply a case of acquiring any old hobby. Our aim should be to find a genuine source of enjoyment, rather than a new avenue through which to seek validation.

Amateur, a word often used as an insult, comes from the Latin verb amare, meaning ‘to love.’ ‘Amateur’ in its modern form stems from the French word for ‘one who loves.’ To be an amateur in the literal sense, therefore, isn’t about an absence of skill, or experience, but rather doing something for the sake of passion, and without profit.

So what might doing something just for the love of it look like? This is an impossible question – the answer will look different for everyone, and will vary across different phases of your life. But the central idea is that whatever you’re doing, you’re not doing it for the sake of gaining something else. You might learn an instrument without taking graded exams, or maybe you want to write terrible notes app poetry that you will never show to anyone. Or perhaps what really calls your name is turning bottle corks into life-size models of the wildlife of the West Midlands. It doesn’t need to make sense to anyone but you.

If there’s one thing we’re all familiar with as Oxford students, it’s the constant

pressure to be ‘LinkedIn warriors’ and build up an impressive array of things to put on a CV. It seems even the much-coveted summer internship isn’t enough – you also need a hobby with tangible achievements that confirm your status as a strategic, results-driven team player. Activities that boost your employability are undoubtedly important, but they are not a substitute for doing the things you truly love.

Around the time my grandma accepted that I was not destined for piano greatness, I joined a choir. I would love to tell you I joined purely for the love of it, but this would be a lie – I joined because my older sister had. However, after the first couple of months, I found myself hooked. The feeling of hitting that high note, perfecting that one impossible harmony, was a far cry from anything I’d felt playing the piano. I didn’t take singing exams, I never went for solos. And of all the hobbies I’ve taken up in my life, choir is the one I always return to.

Let’s be honest, how many of us genuinely make an effort to try new things on a regular basis? It’s intimidating – it involves accepting that you will not be good at something, that the most you can hope for is ‘good for a beginner’, which is never much of a compliment. Perfectionism is not an easy thing to kick. And though it can be useful in many situations, it can also be very effective in holding you back for fear of failure. This is where the amateur thesis comes in. If you are doing something for the love of it, then the act of doing is enough. It doesn’t need to be perfect, so there’s really no way to fail.

I think we can all agree that our culture is obsessed with productivity. Many of us now find the idea of doing nothing far from relaxing, and it’s sometimes even downright uncomfortable. With weekly essay deadlines, and a constant sense that you’ve forgotten something, the fear of time wasted creeps into every part of life at Oxford. Is it any wonder that committing time to being an amateur isn’t something that comes naturally? Maybe this speaks to a wider issue: a disinclination to see our own immediate happiness as a valid goal.

Through building up hobbies that give us joy rather than measurable achievement, we cultivate self-validation. As human

beings, we are very good at outsourcing our need for validation. This is especially true in the age of social media, where you can build an image of the great life you’re leading, regardless of whether or not it’s true to reality. What if we tried to practice self-validation instead? What if your joy was an end in itself, regardless of whether or not other people knew, understood, or were impressed? By treating our own independent interests as something valuable, without seeking external confirmation of that value, we are, in turn, treating ourselves as worthy of effort. In our



Aries

No free merch will be missed at Freshers’ Fair.



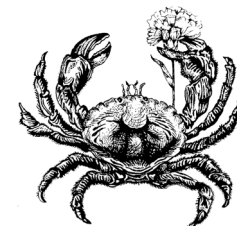
Taurus

The late deadlines of last year will be forgotten by your tutors.



Gemini

You will find a cure for freshers’ flu.



Cancer

You will have to tough out freshers’ flu.



Leo

Stop telling yourself your tutor is interested in you. Seriously.



Virgo

Reggaeton is NOT ready for you.

Libra



No collegecest this term.
Please.



The Glink won't make you
study harder. It's just going
to make you sad.



Sagittarius

It is wise to consider
starting your problem
sheet.



Capricorn

Don't rely on your college
family.



Aquarius

Surely there's no such thing
as too many Balliol Blues
in Week 0?



Pisces

The walls of Plush cannot
stop you from dancing.

CHERWELL-FED

How France healed my relationship with food

VERITY FLEETWOOD-LAW

CW: *Eating disorders.*

We're sitting at a makeshift dining table at the foothills of the Pyrenees, the mystic beauty of the mountains enveloping our little group. Stretched out before us is rich tomato pasta, savoury soups, cold chicken, and crusty baguette from the best bakery in Tournefeuille. A 'quick lunch' in the midst of a busy choir tour. An impossibility in the French mind. The main course is naturally followed by a litany of post-lunch titbits: cheese, compote, coffee. I enjoy my food without anxiety – the mountains have made me hungry, and I relish each bite.

I have not always felt so liberated in my enjoyment of food as I did that day in the Pyrenees. I never really considered our relationship to be damaged – it was just the natural suspicion of something which might affect my weight, and thus my worth. Calories occupied my thoughts, but I had never restricted myself so much as to cause a physical problem, which meant that there was no problem.

As someone who developed at a young age and towered over primary school friends, I found it hard not to be conscious of the space I took up. At secondary school, while other fears crept in, that one, the one about my body, seemed to fade out. Yet almost immediately after starting my first year at Oxford, I felt it return, this time stronger than before and reinforced with a healthy dose of imposter syndrome.

My academic and social status felt newly intertwined with how my body looked. I remember excruciating conversations at formals – the declaration of the confident maxim that "everyone here is skinny!" –

and feeling my stomach drop, thinking that I was not included in this "everyone". Looking back, such thoughts were paranoid and irrational, and the decision to only very occasionally eat breakfast during first year made me tired and unhappy at a time when my tutorial essays were exhausting enough.

Something began to shift in my second year. Having faced down Prelims, I had a greater confidence in my academic ability and started exercising regularly, which necessitated eating more food. I also started going out with someone who loves cooking and eating as much as I do, and I'm happy to say that the enjoyment of delicious food continues to be a core part of our relationship. Despite this, food still played on my mind. I enjoyed a regular breakfast, but fears of calories loomed, and I only allotted myself one sweet treat every two days (or often every three, or four).

Enter the year abroad. On my second day in Toulouse, where I would study for one semester, we lunched with family friends at a food market that could be classed as one of the 'Seven Wonders of the Modern World'. Stalls sold glossily sheened and butter-enriched pastries, every cut of meat imaginable, and an exotic variety of fish, including sea urchins. All this wonderment preceded a long lunch upstairs, which observed the restaurant's *formule* (a concept I came to know extremely well). Naturally, the meal started with an *apéritif*, followed by crusty bread and two courses. Though at this first, emblematic encounter I instinctively wanted to excuse my indulgence with thoughts of "it's okay to eat like this because I'm technically on holiday", I would soon come to break this pattern of thinking – my delight in French cuisine had only just begun.

In French culture, dining is about conversation as much as it is about food. I quickly noticed that Toulousains often sat for hours, chatting, over meals. A combination of reasonably priced restaurant menus – free from the shackles of calories (thanks, Boris!) – the travesty of my student accommodation prison kitchen, and a rapidly formed friend group of fellow Erasmus students, quickly allowed me to assimilate into this alluring way of life.

Of course, my student lifestyle in Toulouse did afford me much more time than I ever had in Oxford. Post-*Brideshead Revisited*, most of us rarely have time for a three-hour-long lunch in between lectures and tutorials. However, even working 9am to 5pm for six months in Paris, I found space to regularly enjoy an *apéro* with my friends and relish a superb sandwich from my favourite *boulangerie*. I was fortunate to live in an unusual student residence in

Paris which offered a daily breakfast of *tartines* to all inhabitants, a practice which both saved me money and facilitated some of the most interesting conversations I had during my time in France.

My relationship with food had changed without me realising it. I no longer limited my intake of sweet things to twice or thrice weekly, instead relying on my own intuition. Sometimes that final course doesn't seem appealing at a restaurant, but equally one sometimes must acknowledge the futility of denying oneself a particularly appealing *patisserie*. The year abroad was transformative for me in so many ways – not only did my relationship with food begin to heal, but I also had the luxury of time to reflect on how I was changing as a person, which, in turn, motivated me to maintain these positive changes.

Read the full article at cherwell.org
Image credit: Verity Fleetwood-Law, with permission.



Dosa Darlings, we need to get a move on



ELLIE PEMBERTON

Along Cowley Road, a taste of South India sits within a rather inviting building, complete with burnt red accents and the occasional fairy light: Dosa Darlings. After many of my friends had moved to the area into their second-year houses, it only seemed right to try out a restaurant located somewhere beyond a five minute radius of Turl Street. For one night, I left the joys of Najar's and the Covered Market in search of a new place to add to the 'treat' rotation.

Walking inside, the atmosphere was immediately welcoming, complete with dim lighting, though not *too* dark given the sparkle of lights decorating the restaurant, and the candle perched in the middle of our table. It was looking to be a lovely evening, which was only further confirmed by the rather beautiful-looking jug of water (still, not sparkling) on the table. This was nothing like the typical uninspiring water containers I had become accustomed to receiving during my summer in the US.

We ordered a selection of food for the table – I have learnt that ordering as a couple is far superior to having individual meals – since there was so much on the menu that looked appetising. There were the famous dosas and other classic curry dishes, as well as vegetarian options, and 'little plates'. After some difficult deliberation, we started with two vegetable samosas (£6.50 total), accompanied by a tamarind chutney, as well as a plate of beef chukka (£9.50). Whilst I did not try the latter, I was assured on good authority that it was quite delicious – and I can confirm that the samosas were delightful. They were fresh, piping hot from the kitchen, and generously sized too, leaving us with some leftovers (though not

for lack of enjoyment).

The first dishes were speedy, but we then waited another 50 minutes until our main courses came out. Ordinarily, this would have been fine, but here everything was ordered to come together. The wait took a little away from the experience, mainly because, after looking around, it was quite clear that most tables were emptying – even those who had arrived after us. We did finally receive the selection of poppadoms (£4) we had ordered some time earlier to nibble on. This was genuinely quite exciting; there were several types which were all different, not just in shape but also

It's not the place to go
for a cheap evening
out, but it is by no
means overpriced. So
if you're looking for a
place to go for a special
occasion, then Dosa
Darlings is just right.

in flavour, texture, and, best of all, colour. So, I suppose, had we not been waiting for so long, we would not have had time to enjoy the novelty of this selection.

This period of delay gave us our most memorable experience of the evening by far. My boyfriend returned from the bathroom, and exclaimed: "You won't believe what they're playing in there." He was correct; I did not believe him until I went to test the claim myself. Playing very loudly in an otherwise quite chic bathroom was the booming voice of Stephen Fry narrating to me the journey of the 'Golden Trio' in Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

– not quite what I was expecting, given the relatively inoffensive and quiet music playing in the background of the rest of the building. Either way, I did enjoy my short time hearing about Harry's journey within the Ministry of Magic before returning. Eventually, the main event was here: a prawn moilee curry (£16) and a walnut cinnamon and honey dosa (£9.50).

The curry wasn't particularly memorable and was light on prawn, but the flavour was enjoyable and paired with what was left of the poppadoms. For those who have not enjoyed a dosa before, they are quite spectacular in their own way. Dosas are cone-shaped savoury crepes, and mine was so big it didn't quite fit on the plate. It was, however, utterly delicious, and drowned in honey. I think our combination of flavours may have negated the savoury component slightly, but nonetheless it made the wait worth it. It had a Goldilocks quality, in the sense that it was filling, but not overly so in the way some breads and dipping snacks tend to be.

Just before the restaurant had completely emptied, we decided to ask for the bill, and it was here that our waiter made up for the earlier inconvenience. He brought over two desserts for both of us to try. I wasn't quite sure what it was at the time, but after a few Google searches, I believe it was ras malai, since it had a spongy disc in the middle soaked in a bath of milk flavoured with a range of spices. The spongy part was not quite to my taste, but the milk component had a unique (but enjoyable) taste to it which, I suppose, is all I can ask for in a complimentary dish.

Despite the longer-than-anticipated wait time, the evening was memorable and a great environment to spend a couple of hours in. It's not the place to go for a cheap evening out, but it is by no means overpriced. So if you're looking for a place to go for a special occasion, then Dosa Darlings is just right.

RECIPE

Halva

Ingredients:

- 360g tahini (1½ cups), at room temperature and well stirred
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp salt
- 250g sugar (1¼ cups)
- 80ml water (⅓ cup)
- Roasted pistachios, coarsely chopped (optional)

Instructions:

1. Line a 20cm square tin with baking parchment, leaving some overhang so you can lift the halva out later.
2. In a large heatproof bowl, stir the tahini, vanilla and salt together.
3. Put the sugar and water in a medium saucepan and raise to a medium heat. Gently stir until the sugar has dissolved.
4. Once the sugar syrup starts to simmer, reduce to a low heat and gently swirl at small intervals. Cook until it reaches 121°C, checking with a sugar thermometer.
5. Pour the hot syrup slowly into the tahini, stirring constantly and quickly. Stop as soon as it begins to pull away from the sides of the bowl. Overmixing at this stage results in a crumbly texture.
6. Working quickly, scrape it into the tin, press the Halva flat and scatter over the roasted pistachios.

Does the ‘Oxford bubble’ breed employment anxiety?

BELLA HUGHES

Strong-minded and academically driven undergraduates are certainly not something found lacking at the University of Oxford. The thousands who swarm the streets of this beautiful city of ‘dreaming spires’ bustle about the centre, emitting a hum of excited determination. What exactly these ‘buzzing’ students are determined to achieve can vary. For freshers, it might be making their time here rich with new experiences and people, or maybe it’s the aspiration to achieve a distinction in their Preliminary Examinations. However, for those of us approaching our final year, career-led ambitions have, to a certain degree, overtaken academic concerns at the forefront of our minds.

Although the word ‘finals’ is enough to generate anxiety in even the most level-headed among us – a feeling my flatmate and I commonly refer to as ‘the pit’ – it is also the worry of what lies beyond these fated examinations that can daily plague both our conscious and subconscious minds. The pressure to know where our careers are headed is often amplified by our parents (or grandmothers, in my case!), some of whom might have a more definitive idea about where our degrees will take us. It is true that some come to Oxford with a clear picture of where they would like to be in ten years’ time; however, amid the masses of budding professionals, there are those of us who feel lost regarding what we truly desire to do with the rest of our lives. If you share similar anxieties, it is not inconceivable to perceive yourself ‘falling behind’ in an imagined race set along a preordained linear trajectory.

Surrounded by peers who have already secured placements or appear to know exactly the career path they are about to embark on, it is easy to develop a sense that you are running out of time. This is only amplified by the frequent stories of the dire state of the graduate job market, passed through the grapevine of the recently (and not-so-recently) graduated. We undergraduates often hear horror stories about how long it can take after graduating to find a company willing to interview you, let alone hire you, despite potentially having received a first-class degree from one of the finest universities across the globe. Unfortunately, there does not seem to exist an easily deducible ‘correct’ path one ought to take; one that might prove all the time spent studying intensely, coming home early from a night out to cram, and the sleepless nights spent completing essays has been worthwhile.

I believe a feeling many undergraduates here will resonate with is academic perfectionism that is almost never satiated, at least in the long term. After achieving one goal, the next takes over, and the drive to succeed and prove oneself can become overwhelming, without one really being aware of what it is that matters so greatly about being ‘the best’. It is this compulsion that has troubled me recently. While I am not sure I would go as far as to say that Oxford breeds specific expectations of ‘right’ career progressions for its graduating students, I would be lying if I claimed I didn’t believe a competitive environment such as this can encourage the feeling commonly labelled ‘impostor syndrome’, convincing you that there are such expectations to which one must live up in order to ‘fit in’.

Furthermore, this unsettling feeling can pose an issue for humanities students such as myself.

The seemingly ‘elusive’ career path of humanities students is one that can provoke an ever-resurfacing anxiety when it becomes the topic of conversation.

Many humanities degrees do not lead directly into a specific professional field. As someone who studies Theology and Religion, I have often been asked if I intend to pursue a career in the Church but, as an atheist, this path is not one I have been especially tempted by, or would be particularly appropriate for me. The response that follows this answer is usually a variation of: “Well, what else can you do with your degree?” The answer, luckily (or unluckily – depending on how you look at it), for me is “quite a lot actually”. But this also poses a significant problem. Without my degree leading me to a specific career, my choices are rather expansive, which can be quite daunting if you, like myself, chose your subject out of passion, rather than practical use. Thus, the seemingly ‘elusive’ career path of humanities students is one that can provoke an ever-resurfacing anxiety when it becomes the topic of conversation.

Now, as I enter my final year, I am still none the wiser regarding my career aspirations beyond those

which most primary school children could identify: reasonably high-paying, relatively enjoyable, and somewhat related to my degree. These criteria would then, hopefully, make my degree, and the approximately £60,000 worth of debt I will have accumulated in my studies, worthwhile (though most ten-year-olds might not include the latter). Perhaps this seems juvenile and obvious, and it is certainly not at all helpful in narrowing down what I want to do. Nevertheless, in writing this, I am aware that, when one doesn’t know exactly where to begin in the search for job prospects, this is not necessarily the worst place to start! After all, in a pool of fresh graduates eager to find employment, I would wager that being open to anything while I find my feet is no bad thing.

I have been working on the assumption that the path I need to take to achieve my ‘dream’

career (whatever that might be) is linear and flat – something that any path towards something worth having rarely is. If my slightly vague, short-term and more generic aspirations have gotten me this far, then I am sure that, in time, they will get me to where I eventually decide I want to be.

I have spent the last year preaching that finally letting go of internal pressure to ‘be the best’ is what actually got me to where I am now, rather than overloading myself with the expectation that I need to meet a certain goal in order to make my degree ‘worthwhile’. It is perhaps time I began to heed my own advice: to let myself enjoy my final year here for the wonderful experience it is, and realise that I have the privilege of time to discover what I would like to pursue a career in, and change my mind again, and again, before I get it right.

Image credit: Abigail Christie, with permission.



OXFORD TINY LOVE STORIES

Love can be fleeting, momentary, intangible. Two strangers from opposite sides of the earth were brought together beneath the blanket of that midnight starry sky, enveloping them with its secrets, quietly promising to keep theirs too.

With no connections to the outside world, without the crutch of technology that supports a modern romance, they were forced to connect solely upon what was similar between them; even more so upon what was not.

What a miracle to be anyone, momentarily: a beautiful, natural ventriloquism.

Time soon signalled their departure. Yet a portion of their souls remains alive here; permanent, eternal, intangible.

Aayah Aslam, Lady Margaret Hall

CHERPSE. Oxford’s blind dating

Will a date at The Alice turn into Wonderland, or will these two find themselves falling down the rabbit hole?



Mr Tongue-Tied

First impressions?
A bit of a blur because I was still so nervous.

Did it meet your expectations?
It exceeded my expectations and after some Dutch courage, I found myself less nervous. She was a little mean but I liked it.

What was the highlight?
It turned out we grew up in the same county so we had lots to talk about.

What was the most embarrassing moment?
I kept stumbling over my words and pretended I hadn’t, but she kept asking me to repeat myself.

Describe the date in three words:
Fun. Sweet. Memorable.

Is there a second date on the cards?
If I can string a sentence together to ask her out, then yes.

Miss Queen of Hearts

First impressions?
He was super awkward but sweet.

Did it meet your expectations?
I had no expectations at all, but the date actually turned out to be pretty good.

What was the highlight?
We had both worked in hospitality so we bonded over the horrors of the general public. He also insisted on paying.

What was the most embarrassing moment?
We both had far too much alcohol for a ‘fancy’ restaurant.

Describe the date in three words:
Silly but sweet.

Is there a second date on the cards?
After the hangover subsides, hopefully?

From Oxford to Cambridge: The 204-mile punt for Alzheimer's



GAVRIELLA EPSTEIN-LIGHTMAN

Four students from St John's College, Cambridge, have undertaken an extraordinary fundraising challenge, punting over 200 miles in 12 days from Oxford to Cambridge to raise money for the Alzheimer's Society.

The participants – Charlie Swinfen, Stefan Narinian, Beth Erskine, and Ryan Vowles – covered an average of 19 miles a day in their bid to complete the endurance challenge.

Their punting effort has attracted considerable media coverage. The four have been interviewed by BBC Oxford, BBC Cambridgeshire, and ITV News Anglia. *Cherwell* interviewed the intrepid group midway through their journey.

How did they come up with such an unusual fundraising initiative? "Some students at St John's did it in 2010, and we thought it was the craziest thing ever", one told me. "We settled on doing it for the Alzheimer's Society as a couple of members of the group have family affected by it, and also September is World Alzheimer's Month."

The group were also keen to emphasise the connections between their college and Alzheimer's research. St John's College and the Alzheimer's Society share the forget-me-not as a symbol. The motto of the College's founder, Lady Margaret Beaufort, was "Remember me often", giving rise to the forget-me-not as a college flower. The College's former Master, Sir Christopher Dobson, provides a further link between college and charity: Dobson was credited with research that shed light on the likely cause of Alzheimer's.

"We didn't have any experience with canals or houseboating", one says. "Initially, being naive, we pieced together the blog of the students from 2010 to figure out a general route. But in hindsight, using canal planning apps, we realised that there's only one decent route to get from Oxford to Cambridge."

Surprisingly, the four did minimal physical preparation for the challenge they had set

themselves. Instead, the emphasis was on logistical preparation: figuring out where to stay and securing insurance. The punt they used was built by Alex Ramsey, also from their college.

The most direct puntable waterway connection between the two universities takes a route through Northampton, Peterborough, and Ely. The group began their journey northwards on the Oxford Canal, navigating a maze of locks, tunnels, canals, and rivers before eventually joining the River Cam and arriving back at St John's College.

"The first few days were really nice. The canals around Oxford were gorgeous", one says.

Three of the former students who completed

The people we meet along the way are so lovely – they are very moved by what we are doing, and some have had family members affected by Alzheimer's. Meeting them keeps us going, even when it's pretty bleak.

the punting challenge in 2010 also came to visit them for a picnic along the route.

Yet by the halfway point of their journey, on the canal from Northampton to Peterborough, the four admitted that the hours of punting each day were beginning to take their toll, though they stressed that the experience was still enjoyable.

I ask about the differences between their effort and that of the students in 2010. They point out that they are travelling to Cambridge rather than from it, meaning they are going in the opposite direction to their predecessors. "The droughts this summer mean there are lots of sections where we've had to lift the punt to get around closures," one adds.

The day before we speak, the four had braved one of the most challenging – and perilous – parts of their journey: the Braunston Tunnel, a mile-long, unlit tunnel dating from the 19th century.

"There are seven locks in quick succession on both sides, so you are basically not allowed to go through the tunnel in a canoe or punt", one tells me. "So we needed to find someone with a motorboat or houseboat to tow us through." Eventually, after hours of waiting, a group agreed to tow them through the tunnel.

More peril was still to come for the four. The day after we spoke, they were due to pass through a large water-management complex north of Cambridge, the Denver Sluice. "We'll need to do it at the right time of day so the dam doesn't drag us out to sea", one told me.

The group emphasised their appreciation for all of their supporters – old friends and new acquaintances alike. "The people we meet along the way are so lovely – they are very moved by what we are doing, and some have had family members affected by Alzheimer's", one tells me. "Meeting them keeps us going, even when it's pretty bleak."

"We really enjoy reading the comments that come through with the donations. They make us feel like this is worth doing", another adds, as our interview draws to a close.

The four arrived at their final destination, St John's College, at approximately midday on Sunday 4 October. They were greeted by a crowd of friends and family as they passed under the Bridge of Sighs.

In an interview with BBC Oxfordshire, they admitted that they were "pretty knackered" but were still fuelled by adrenaline.

The group initially aimed to raise £5,000, but have since blown past that target. At the time of writing, they had raised over £10,000 for a cause rooted in college history.

"We are delighted to have made it back to St John's and to have raised these funds for such an important charity," they told *Cherwell*.

Image credit: Charlie Swinfen, with permission.

SPORT SPOTLIGHT



Gavriella Epstein-Lightman interviews women's Blues cricket captain Charlotte Maple

Sport has been a constant feature of incoming Oxford University Cricket Club (OUCC) women's Blues captain Charlotte Maple's time at Oxford. Now completing her DPhil, she began at Oxford six years ago to study Ancient and Modern History at Lady Margaret Hall. As an undergraduate, she combined her demanding degree with Blues competition in both cricket and football. This year, by comparison, will be easier, she tells me.

"The only feeling I have is excitement", Maple says when I ask how she feels about becoming captain of the Blues. "I have been playing for OUCC for six years, and I've been hugely invested in the squad. I'm going to make the most of it."

Maple first played cricket when she was seven. Her father was a keen cricketer who had played the sport to a high level, and he encouraged her to play for the local village cricket club in Somerset. She was the only girl in the local team. "It felt isolating, but I fell in love with the game," Maple tells me. Aged twelve, she was scouted for a county trial for Somerset, and after being accepted, she played county cricket for two seasons. She was told that a professional cricket career was possible, but put the sport aside to focus on GCSEs and A-levels. Her love for cricket never left, and upon arriving at Oxford, she promptly signed up to the cricket team at Freshers' Fair, getting her first Blue that same year.

One of the most coveted events of the Oxford cricketing season is the annual Varsity match against Cambridge, held at Lord's Cricket Ground. The men's Blues have played at Lord's for over two centuries, but the women's Blues first played at Lord's in 2022. Maple was part of the pilot squad playing that match. I ask her what it is like to play on such a historic sporting stage. "It's an incredibly exciting and important opportunity, one that nobody else really has, to play an amateur fixture in one of the most spectacular cricket grounds", Maple explains, her enthusiasm evident. She points out that some professional cricketers never even have the opportunity to play at Lord's in their careers.

Maple is keen to encourage more female students to engage in cricket. She tells me that women's cricket became a full Blue sport from 2016. Since then, the standard of women's cricket has continually increased, as has the number of participants. Last year, a second women's team was piloted for the first time. Beyond Oxford, women's cricket is taking off, growing in strength in funding, professionalism and grassroots engagement. "It's a growing sport, and we're rising with it at Oxford", she says, as we end the interview.

UPCOMING

Oxford Half Marathon

11th October
University Parks

Hockey

4pm 14th October
Iffley Road
Men's Blues vs. Bristol

Rugby

7:15pm 16th October
Iffley Road
Men's Blues vs. Leicester

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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

