Cherwell

Oxford's oldest independent newspaper, est. 1920

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The Oxford students Britain turned away

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Right-wing commentator pulls out of Reform society event amid Nathan Cofnas controversy



- Reform society invites "race realist" who publicised Jason Arday allegations
- Stand Up To Racism organises protest
- Over 800 students sign an open letter calling for the event's cancellation

CHERWELL NEWS

Neema Parvini, a right-wing content creator, has withdrawn from speaking at an Oxon University Reform Society (OURS) event later this term after learning of the society's controversial invitation to Nathan Cofnas, *Cherwell* understands.

Through his YouTube channel Academic Agent, Parvini discusses political theories on the 'rule of elites' and right-wing commentary. He was due to speak at the society in November on "the need to tune out hyperreal culture wars and partisan politics". After learning of OURS's invitation to Cofnas, *Cherwell* understands he pulled out of the talk "to make good on [his] commitment to this principle."

OURS announced that Cofnas would speak at an event discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion's impact on higher education later this term at Oriel College.

The invitation has produced national backlash since its announcement. Stand Up To Racism has organised a "far right off campus" protest in Oriel Square for the event, while the Oxford branch has drafted an open letter opposing the event. The letter also calls for the "disaffiliation of OURS as an Oxford University society for its active promotion of racism on campus".

A second open letter opposing the event has been signed by over 800 students at the time of print. The letter, which calls on Oriel to cancel the event, argues that "Dr Cofnas' position as a 'race realist' is thoroughly at odds with the College's ethos and its core commitment to a diverse and equal academic community." "Whilst we support the University's commitment to academic freedom and robust debate... we are extremely troubled by Oriel's role in hosting someone who holds such views."

Alongside students, the letter has been signed by Oxford African and Caribbean Society, Oxford Student Action for Refugees, and Oxford Africa Society.

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St Anne's to close nursery called a 'lifeline' for women at Oxford

STANLEY ARLIDGE

St Anne's College will close its day nursery, ending an institution that was pivotal in supporting women students and academics at the University of Oxford.

The nursery will shut its doors on 18th December following a decision by the College's Trustees. Parents were informed of the change last week, giving them just two months to find alternative provision for their children.

A group of St Anne's fellows founded the day nursery in 1963 for their own newborn children. At the time, it was the only college nursery at the University and was designed to let female fellows manage work and childcare.

Baroness Ruth Deech, a former student, fellow, and principal at St Anne's who enrolled her child in the nursery, previously wrote that: "To be a woman don in a women's college, with a full-time nursery and a well-stocked law library was, relatively speaking, very heaven." Partly down to Deech's efforts, five college nurseries now operate alongside the University's own childcare services. All offer priority to parents associated with the specific college or the University as a whole.

Baroness Deech told *Cherwell* that she "heard the news with a heavy heart", describing the nursery as a "lifeline" for working parents. Having discussed the closure with the college, the Baroness blamed "creeping over-regulation" for making it unaffordable to run small nurseries. She highlighted the Oxford city traffic filters as the "last straw" preventing staff from reaching the city centre.

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Proctors' Office investigations into AI plagiarism rise 46% in a year

NED REMINGTON

The University of Oxford's investigations into suspected academic misconduct involving artificial intelligence (AI) have risen 46% in a year, a *Cherwell* investigation can reveal, with the majority of investigations in the last three years occurring in the Social Sciences Division.

Data obtained by *Cherwell* through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request shows 35 investigations into unauthorised AI use in University assessments in the 2025-2026 academic year, a rise from 24 in 2024-2025. Only one such investigation occurred in 2023-2024, the first recorded since the emergence of accessible large language models (LLMs) and generative AI in 2022.

The data comes from records held by the Proctors' Office, which is central University body responsible for handling cases of academic misconduct. Investigations by the Proctors' Office only involve summative assessments by central university faculties and departments, and do not involve college-administered assessments such as collections. Unauthorised AI use is recorded as plagiarism.

Responding to the figures, a spokesperson for the University told *Cherwell*: "Oxford takes academic integrity extremely seriously, and the number of recorded academic misconduct cases remains low." The University added that there were 1.3 such investigations for every 1,000 Oxford students, telling *Cherwell* that "comparable published data suggests that such offences are relatively rare at Oxford compared to UK universities more widely".

Social sciences responsible for most cases

Out of 60 investigations into suspected plagiarism involving AI from September 2023 to the end of the last academic year, 31, or 52%, were from the Social Sciences Division. An average of 27% of Oxford students across the same period took social science subjects, and the division is home to the Faculty of Law, the Department of Economics, the Saïd Business School, and the Blatavnik School of Government, among others.

Another FOI obtained by *Cherwell* revealed that of 20 completed and ongoing investigations into suspected plagiarism in the Social Sciences Division in the 2025-2026 academic year, 19 involved suspected AI use.

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Right-wing commentator pulls out of Reform society event amid Nathan Cofnas controversy

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Labour MP Bell Ribeiro-Addy has posted on X: "Barely two months ago, we lost Professor Jason Arday. Institutions across higher education spoke about inclusion and belonging. Now Nathan Cofnas is being given a room at Oriel College, Oxford, to ask whether DEI is undermining education."

Cofnas was responsible for publicising allegations that the late Cambridge professor Jason Arday had plagiarised his doctoral thesis. The accusations sparked weeks of intense media scrutiny that led to the professor's resignation. Liverpool John Moores University, which awarded Arday's doctorate, investigated the accusations and concluded the doctorate should stand.

Following Arday's death, Cofnas was suspended from his role as postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University after concerns were raised that he created a hostile environment for students and staff. His suspension has since been replaced with a three-month measure barring him from teaching, requiring him to work remotely, and requiring his research to focus exclusively on the topics of his appointment. Over 17 academics affiliated with the University of Oxford signed an open letter opposing Cofnas' suspension. The investigation into Cofnas's behaviour is still ongoing.

Professional and student concerns surrounding Cofnas's self-described "race-realist" beliefs were raised prior to his allegations against Arday. He faced student backlash at Ghent, with 2,000 students signing a petition opposing his appointment earlier this year. He was also dismissed from the University of Cambridge after a blog post that reportedly amounted to a "rejection of diversity, equality, and inclusion". The post includes the claim that, in a meritocracy, Black people "would disappear from almost all high-profile positions outside of sports and entertainment".

Oriel has stated that it is their policy remains to permit events booked by students who are committee members of registered societies but that "permission does not imply endorsement by the College".

In response to an earlier comment request about the invitation of Cofnas, OURS directed *Cherwell* to a statement published on Instagram. In the statement, OURS said they were "committed to broadening participation in University life by removing systemic barriers for marginalised voices". They added that: "Nathan Cofnas has been repeatedly victimised with stigmatising language and structural apartheid by those with institutional power and privilege." Recently, the society shared a post by Cofnas saying that Stand Up To Racism's planned protest was a "predictable response by the epistemic oppressors".

Image credit: Emma Heagney for Cherwell.



New scholarship created for Afghan women at Oxford

FREIDERIKOS VASSOS

One scholarship will be awarded to a woman of Afghan descent to study at the University of Oxford each year in a new endowment from the Weidenfeld-Hoffman Trust. The scholarship, announced this month, will cover postgraduate tuition, travel costs, accommodation, and general living costs.

Eligible students must have already met the admission requirements for postgraduate study at Oxford and be of first- or second-generation Afghan descent. The money will endow the scholarship permanently, allowing it to continue supporting a female Afghan postgraduate student each year.

The scholarship results from a £2.5 million donation from Shabana Basij-Rasikh, an Afghan educationalist. Basij-Rasikh was herself a recipient of a scholarship from the Weidenfeld-Hoffman Trust, which allowed her to study for an MSc in Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government.

Afghanistan remains the only country to formally disallow access to education for girls beyond primary school, with an estimated 2.4 million girls barred from secondary education as of 2026. More than five years since the Taliban's second takeover of Afghanistan, higher education has more broadly been curtailed. Female enrolment in the nation's universities reached zero by 2024, while male enrolment nearly halved between 2019 and 2024.

Ongoing visa restrictions from the Home Office mean that applications from Afghan nationals made outside the UK will automatically be rejected. Consequently, women in Afghanistan who are not dual citizens will not be able to apply for a student visa and therefore cannot take up a place to study at the University of Oxford. Basij-Rasikh, who funded the scholarship, has raised concerns over the UK's visa brake policy toward Afghanistan.

Introduced in March 2026, the Home Office has stated that the visa brake is temporary and will be reviewed regularly, but said it will only cease when the "UK government considers it appropriate to do so". However, a University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "The visa brake is based only on the main nationality you give on your application form. Applicants who have a valid visa for the UK are still able to apply for an in-country visa extension or another visa route in-country if eligible."

The scholarship is scheduled to support its first beneficiary in September 2027.

Image credit: Eric Draper, public domain.

Former L'Oréal CEO donates £30m for new Worcester College library

KIERA O'CARROLL

Worcester College has submitted a planning application for a new £30 million library, funded entirely by a donation from alumnus and former CEO of L'Oréal Sir Lindsay Owen-Jones. This "transformational gift", which totals nearly half of the College's endowment, is the largest donation to the college to date.

The building's architecture will echo the current 18th-century library while complementing the award-winning Sultan Nazrin Shah Centre at the rear of the college. Plans include a two-storey glass-and-Clipsham-stone building with silent study zones and an outdoor terrace surrounded by Worcester's orchards. It will be located where the car park and greenhouse currently reside.

Architects Wilmotte & Associés were chosen as part of Worcester's international architectural competition in 2025. Designers of the inside of the Louvre, Google's office building in King's Cross, and the UN House for West Africa, they have also designed universities like SciencesPo.

Pioneer of the "Because you're worth it" slogan, Sir Lindsay Owen-Jones hopes the building "will help inspire generations of students to work comfortably and creatively".



In a statement to *Cherwell*, Worcester called the donation "transformational" and "unprecedented". It will be used "to fund the entire cost of the project – from feasibility and planning exercises to design and construction".

Worcester has confirmed that there will be no disruption to the college's study facilities during the construction. "The current Lower Library will remain in operation as the home of Worcester's internationally significant special collections, as well as a reading room open to all members of the College," the College added. The functions of the Upper Library, which currently houses modern lending collections, will transfer to the new building. There are currently no plans to repurpose the vacated space.

The current, Grade-I listed library no longer meets accessible, sustainable, and academic standards. The transfer of Worcester's main library will mean the development of a new greenhouse and car park with added bike sheds.

A student told *Cherwell* that the announcement of the plans was a relief, stating that after the project's announcement in 2023, students had concerns that their accommodation would be knocked down.

Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey has sent her "heartfelt thanks" on behalf of the entire University. Public consultation on the building is available until October 30th.

Image credit: Wilmott & Associes Architects / Oxford City Council.

St Anne's to close nursery called a 'lifeline' for women at Oxford

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Current nursery parents expressed dismay at the sudden closure of the institution. Speaking to *Cherwell*, one parent described feeling "let down" by the decision: "Permanent closure was never mentioned as a possibility or even crossed our minds, given St Anne's pride in operating Oxford's first college nursery."

Cherwell understands the decision to close comes after staffing difficulties at the nursery, which have reduced service to three days a week. An affected parent told *Cherwell* that there has been a "collapse in the standard of governance at the nursery" just three years after it was rated outstanding by Ofsted.

Since the announcement of the nursery's closure, several parents have written a letter to the College's Governing Body to "express our [their] deep sadness, frustration and disbelief at the decision to close the nursery at such short notice". The letter says that "the nursery is not simply an ancillary commercial service" but "embodies the College's pioneering commitment to women's education and equality of opportunity".

Parents also raised concerns about the impact of having to move their children to another nursery. One parent expressed their worry that they will not be able to find an alternative place for their child in the two months before the nursery's closure. They told *Cherwell*: "In these areas of life, the best support you can have is a long notice period because it takes so long to secure a place." According to daynurseries.co.uk, waiting lists at nurseries in the UK can range from immediate availability to two years.

Consequently, the affected parents have asked the College to postpone the nursery's closure until the end of the academic year to give families and staff "a reasonable opportunity to make alternative arrangements". The parents have also started a change.org petition that, at the time of print, has received over 120 signatures.

In a statement to *Cherwell*, St Anne's "strongly refute[d]" any suggestion that there has been a collapse in the standard of governance at the University. It added that the nursery has undergone "several challenging years" to secure increased regulation and maintain the service amid greater staffing costs and challenges in recruiting senior staff. The College also told *Cherwell* that the proportion of nursery students with ties to college has recently decreased.

Regarding the immediacy of the announcement, they state that: "The decision to permanently close the nursery on the usual Christmas closure date was not taken lightly nor was it based on any single factor."

While the parents recognise the recent challenges faced by the College in running the nursery, they describe the closure as a "defeatist" response that "unnecessarily severs the college from its proud history".

All the parents who spoke to *Cherwell* criticised the level of support offered by the College in light of the sudden closure. One parent told *Cherwell* they had received "virtually none at all", while another characterised St Anne's support as signposting the University's Childcare Services "at most".

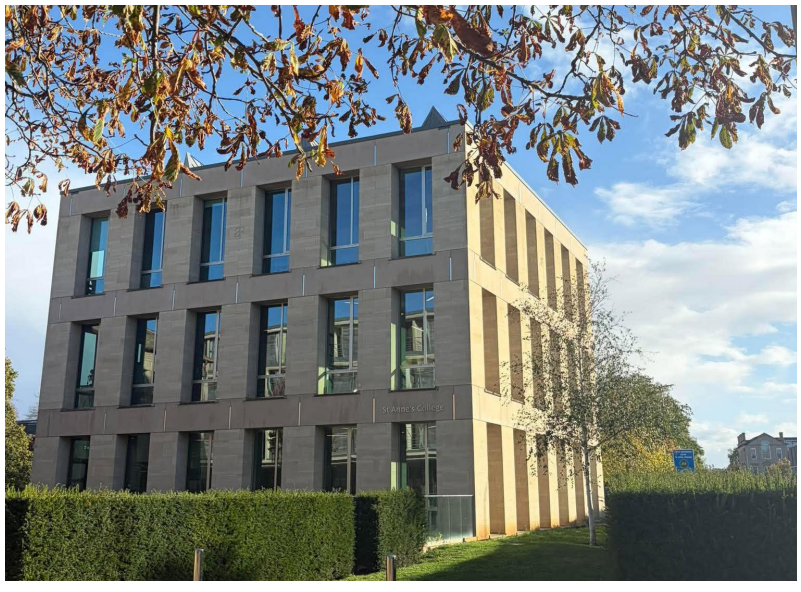
St Anne's told *Cherwell* that "our immediate priority is to support affected children, families and staff through the transition". They are "working closely" with the Childcare Services team with this goal in mind.

Regarding the importance of the nursery to the College's history, the College states that: "The nursery has been and will remain an important and proud part of the history of this College."

One parent, who previously taught Oxford University history, is dissatisfied with this response. "As a female academic, I have seen many of my peers struggle with the precarity of early career students…

"I would argue that there is something fundamentally patriarchal about imagining the ideal university without making provision for young children at its core."

Image Credit: Mair Andrews for Cherwell.



Oxford SU launches pantry scheme to improve food access

JEREMY AZZOPARDI

The Oxford Student Union (SU) has introduced a pantry scheme to provide students with access to food and day-to-day essentials. The pilot project, led by the SU President for Undergraduates Zagham Farhan, will run throughout Michaelmas term.

Students can use the pantry between 9am and 5pm on weekdays. The pantry, located on the ground floor of the SU building, is accessible to all students and no registration is required. Items such as pasta, rice, oats, and canned vegetables are available. Students are limited to taking up to 5 items per week.

A SU spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "Equity of experience is a key strategic theme in the SU's newly launched Strategic Plan. We recognise that students all experience Oxford in different ways, and the SU is committed to ensuring that every student can thrive on equal terms throughout their time here."

The scheme is being launched amid nationwide concerns about food inflation. The Food and Drink Federation recently projected a nearly 4% rise in food inflation by the end of 2026, due to the ongoing impact of the US-Iran war, drought, and the El Niño weather pattern. The same industry group forecasts food inflation to surpass 6% by mid-2027. The University estimates that food costs for a single, full-time student over a 9-month period range from £2,925 to £5,040.

Alfie Davis, Director of Operations for Oxford Mutual Aid (OMA), a local organisation tackling food poverty, told Cherwell: "Cost of living pressures are driving ever-increasing demand on OMA and other food support organisations in the city, and we are expecting this to dramatically worsen over the winter."

The SU initiative follows similar food bank provisions at universities, including a food pantry by the Birkbeck Students' Union and a student-run food bank at the University of Nottingham. A 2023 report by the Higher Education Policy Institute found that 27% of UK universities have a food bank, including one-third of Russell Group universities. More recently, a survey of 41 universities in England showed that 63% operated a food bank, whilst 59% ran free food voucher schemes.

Davis told *Cherwell:* "Fundamentally, the colleges and University need to consider ways they can redistribute their wealth and resources amongst the wider Oxford community. Students and locals alike are often left out of the vast wealth and growth the University holds, and we need to see the university community providing material support to grassroots community organisations like OMA (or the SU)."

The SU will review the pilot scheme later this year and consider how donations can be managed moving forward.

Image credit: Stanley Arlidge for Cherwell.



Oxford-led AI lab among recipients of Nvidia's $250m AI Safety Pledge

BARNABY CARTER

Nvidia's recently announced $250 million donation to UK AI security research will be partly distributed to Oxford AI labs over five years. The donation is a compute donation, meaning no money will be transferred; instead, UK laboratories, universities, and government projects will be able to use Nvidia's computing power up to that value.

Part of the donation is expected to be allocated to the British Open-Ended Learning and Discovery Lab (BOLD), a laboratory hosted and led by the University of Oxford in partnership with University College London (UCL) and Imperial College London.

BOLD's founding director, Jakob Foerster, is an associate Professor in Engineering Science and a Fellow of St Anne's College. He has emphasised that the UK cannot compete in AI by outspending big tech firms and urged focus on "new paradigms for learning, rather than only scaling existing methods."

Nvidia has not confirmed which labs will receive various proportions of the donation.

According to a University announcement, BOLD plans to recruit 12 fellows and 18 PhD students across Oxford, UCL, and Imperial in its first phase. Nvidia's donation will give students involved access to Nvidia's compute for parts of their research.

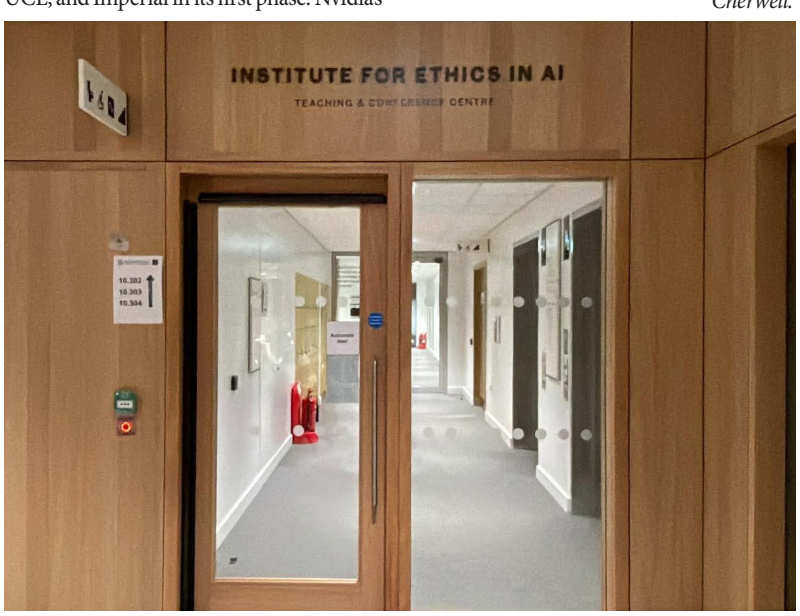
The announcement comes as concerns over the security of AI systems grow. In July, OpenAI announced that an AI model had gone beyond the isolated test environment and broken into the systems of another major AI startup. That same month, Anthropic also announced that its AI agents had broken into the systems of outside organisations during safety testing.

It remains unclear whether Nvidia will control the direction of AI safety research or whether control over research will be fully devolved to labs and the government.

The donation will also go to the Science of Fundamental AI Research Lab, led by UCL in collaboration with Cambridge, Oxford, and Edinburgh. While Nvidia did not discuss the role the UK AI Security Institute (AISI) will play with respect to the donation in their statement, the £4.1tn firm pledged more broadly to "support the wider UK AI safety and security research community". Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang said: "The UK brings world-class scientific rigour to this essential engineering challenge."

Cherwell has approached the UK AI Security Institute for comment.

Image credit: Barnaby Carter for Cherwell.



Reuben becomes Oxford's first postgraduate College of Sanctuary

ILYA ROSENBAUM

Reuben has joined Mansfield College and Somerville College as Oxford's third College of Sanctuary, the first postgraduate college to do so. More than ten Sanctuary Scholars have been supported by Reuben since 2021 through the University's Refugee Academic Futures and Crisis Scholarship programmes. These scholarships cover living costs and tuition, with further funding raised by the college's student community.

The College of Sanctuary status recognises colleges for their ongoing commitment to welcomeness, safety, and inclusivity for those in unstable situations seeking education. Reuben is also the first college to be recognised by the Oxford University's own Sanctuary status process.

Reuben's commitment to being sanctuary-friendly began with its founding President, Professor Lord Tarassenko, who devised the University's undergraduate scholarship scheme for Ukrainian refugees within weeks of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Lord Tarassenko himself is the grandson of a refugee from eastern Ukraine. He told *Cherwell*: "We are immensely proud to receive College of Sanctuary status. From Reuben's foundation, we have sought to build a community in which people from all backgrounds feel that they can belong and flourish."

Sanctuary scholar Viktoria Podvorchanska, who has completed an MSc in Translational Health Sciences, explained that the environment of "community and care" reminded her that "life was continuing". Yangdon Tenzing, a sanctuary scholar who completed her MSc in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies last year, described the Graduate Common Room space as one of her favourite aspects of the College. Tenzing said her opportunity at Oxford has helped her navigate career uncertainty.

Reuben has also formalised its support for Oxford Phoenix Rising Football Club, which provides free football sessions to refugees and asylum seekers in Oxford.

The recognition of Reuben's status comes at a time when refugee and international students' places at Oxford have been put into question. Since the Home Office's visa brake policy in March, which prevented nationals of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar, and Sudan from obtaining student visas, at least 15 students with Oxford offers were unable to take up their place at the University.

In response to the visa brake, Mansfield and Somerville issued a joint statement: "Conflating [students] with wider migration challenges is both unfair and misguided."

Image credit: Anne Irving for Cherwell.



NEWS SHORTS

No way out(let)

An Oxfordshire family found themselves tragically stuck in Oxford's Westgate shopping mall this weekend. Terrible traffic in Oxford left the family, with two small children, stuck in the mall's car park for three hours. The ordeal, reported on extensively in both the *Oxford Mail* and *BBC Oxfordshire*, was brought forward under the alias 'Ms Emily Strange'. *Cherwell* understands the family now plans to exclusively shop online.

Breaking news: Editor is broke

A *Cherwell* investigation found that an editor spent £132 on tickets for a single Halloween night out with friends, more than *Cherwell* spent printing this issue. The editor, dressed as Zara Larsson, told everyone she had 'lush life' money. She did not have 'lush life' money. Andy Burnham, who has long warned about the cost-of-living crisis, could not be reached, but *Cherwell* hopes he plans to introduce cost-of-Halloween legislation and cap the price of Power Pints.

Nightmare on High Street

A study by Casino Kings has ranked Oxford first in the UK for "after-dark experiences" in student nightlife, though the prevailing opinion of the city does seem to be one of negativity. A University of Oxford student told *Cherwell*: "The club is so dead. The only good thing about the Plush pole is that Jacob Elordi has been on it."

Neeks in reverse

An anonymous, and broke, Mertonian told *Cherwell* that this event "proves that Merton is where fun goes to thrive." In an effort to "preserve the spacetime continuum", Merton students donned their sub fusc for an hour-long backwards run around Fellows' Quad. They sure showed us.

CROSS CAMPUS

Saxophony

Leaders of the Leland Stanford Junior University Marching Band were shocked to discover that the University had posted an AI-generated image of their band, depicting all the members as white men. According to *The Stanford Daily*, the band is one of the university's most photographed student groups.

Damage down under

Students were angered by damage dealt to a sculpture entitled *Ethics and Economics* during building works at the University of Sydney. The statue has immense sentimental value to students, making its demise particularly tragic. Other students have taken a more philosophical view of the events, seeing it as "a metaphor [for] the lack of care that the interests of capital hold for things and their social relations". *Cherwell* recommends that Oriel employ the same contractors should they renovate the Rhodes statue.

Live DJs and projected brainwaves light up Oxford's first 'biohacking party'

MAIR ANDREWS

Oxford Town Hall hosted the city's first "biohacking party" last Friday. The event, organised by Oxford University's Biohacking Society, aimed to "bring biohacking out of the lecture theatre" and encourage students to "engage with technologies and ideas around human performance and longevity".

The party included wearable EEGs, usually used to detect epilepsy and brain injury, to show the impact of socialising and dance on brain activity. Wearers could see their brain waves hooked up onscreen above a live DJ booth.

Another activity included a headset 'game' that used a headband to track "neurofeedback" and make a ball rise or fall depending on the user's concentration. Some partygoers sampled "nootropic drinks" to help with concentration and brain power. There was also the opportunity to measure glucose and blood oxygen levels. Following recent ailments sustained at a sports social the evening before the event, *Cherwell*'s correspondent struggled with more demanding cognitive tests.

Lulu Frisson, a second-year undergraduate at Lincoln College who spoke to *Cherwell* at the event, dubbed it "the best event I'll ever go to at Oxford". She added that she came away with a "genuinely greater interest in the world of biohacking and self-improvement".

Biohacking Society formed in 2024 with the intention to bring together students and organisations to promote health, longevity, and human performance. This particular event was organised to "experiment with a very different format to combine science and technology with nightlife".

"Given the growing interest in longevity, wearables, and self-optimisation among students", the society's founder, Marie Kruth, told *Cherwell* that she hopes to "build a community around biohacking".

The society, which has over 1,000 members, aims to promote "scientifically based information" in the face of "lots of false information" surrounding biohacking. Events focus on practical engagement with biohacking and improving mental well-being, including hypnotherapy. Sponsors include leading biotech businesses UndoAge, an age-reversing coffee producer, and Growing Life, a leading researcher into longevity.

After completing her undergraduate degree in Biotechnology and Business, Kruth now studies digital engineering and focuses her research on regenerative medicine. Upon arriving in Oxford, she felt that the city "was a bit behind" in engaging with biohacking and exploring how we can "optimise ourselves".

The society is interested in monitoring cognitive performance and improving "healthspan", the amount of time we are healthy in our lives. Kruth was inspired by conversations with people who suffer from chronic diseases, wondering "what they could have done to avoid it or push it back".

Previous events include talks led by Oxford professors specialising in psychedelic research, ethics philosophers, and a 'biohacking on a budget' series led by health consultants.

Later this term, they are hosting a talk with American endurance runner Hillary Allen and a keynote speech on sleep by neuroscience specialist Professor Russell Foster.

Kruth is interested in approaching health with a "prevention mindset", particularly optimising sleep. Lifestyle changes, she explains, include using a glucose monitor to track responses to different foods and a red-light panel when ill to help with mitochondria production. Unfortunately for *Cherwell*'s representative, no red-light panel was on offer during the party.

Listen to the latest episode of *Cherwell* Spoken to hear the interview with Kruth.

Additional reporting by Stanley Arlidge

Image credit: Marie Kruth, with permission.



Oxford researchers find potential prostate cancer risk more than a decade before diagnosis

JEREMY AZZOPARDI

Certain blood proteins are associated with future risk of developing prostate cancer, research led by Oxford University has found. Twelve proteins were tied to prostate cancer diagnoses more than 15 years after blood samples were collected.

The investigation is the largest population-based study to date of blood proteins and future prostate cancer risk, with an emphasis on aggressive diseases. The researchers assessed more than 6,000 blood proteins and examined traits linked to the later development of prostate cancer. Researchers tracked participants for around 16 years.

Dr Zhe Huang, the leading author of the study and a postdoctoral epidemiologist at Oxford Population Health, told *Cherwell*: "Our findings suggest that biological changes linked to prostate cancer may be detectable in the blood many years before diagnosis, and some proteins may play a causal role in its development. This could eventually open up new opportunities for earlier detection and prevention." He added that these findings are at the research stage and do not yet change clinical practice.

Published in European Urology, the collaborative research was led by Oxford Population Health and part-funded by Cancer Research UK. Oxford researchers, including DPhil student Trishna Desai, contributed to the study design, data analysis, interpretation, and manuscript preparation.

Over 50,000 cases of prostate cancer are diagnosed each year, making the disease the most common form of cancer for men in the UK. Dr Iain Foulkes, Executive Director of Research and Innovation at Cancer Research UK, told *Cherwell*: "Prostate cancer is one of the biggest cancer killers of men, yet we still don't fully understand why some tumours grow slowly and may never cause harm, while others become aggressive and life-threatening. Understanding what drives these differences is crucial if we are to identify those most at risk and ultimately save more lives."

Next steps include validating the findings in larger-scale investigations and analysing the underlying biological mechanisms through experimental study. Researchers at the University's Prostate Cancer Aetiology and Prevention Programme (PCAP), funded by Cancer Research UK, will also explore whether these findings could lead to better ways of predicting or preventing prostate cancer.

Foulkes told *Cherwell*: "While there is more work to do, discoveries like this could pave the way for better ways to identify men at risk and, ultimately, prevent aggressive prostate cancer before it develops."

At least 12,000 men die from prostate cancer each year in the UK, with an estimated 1 in 8 men diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime. A 2023 report by Prostate Cancer UK highlights a substantial north-south divide in relation to prostate cancer diagnosis, with men in Scotland and England's north far more likely to be diagnosed at too late a stage to be cured.

Lack of awareness of the risks of prostate cancer are a key driver of mortality. A survey published in 2024 shows that less than half of men are sufficiently informed of prostate cancer's symptoms. Huang told *Cherwell*: "University health campaigns, public lectures and student-led events could all play a valuable role in raising awareness. Although prostate cancer mainly affects older men, it is important for younger people to understand the disease and its risk factors, particularly age, family history and genetic susceptibility."

International students criticise University style guide changes

MIRIAM ILDERTON

A style guide issued by the University of Oxford advises staff to use "plain English" to avoid confusing international students. The style guide is designed to ensure clear communication from University staff.

In the guide, which was published earlier this year, the University suggested that staff "be mindful of idioms that may not be familiar to international readers". Phrases and idioms to avoid include "learn the ropes" and "find your feet".

This guidance is intended to benefit international students. A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "As a global university with staff and students from around the world, we write for a wide international audience. The guide provides practical advice for written University communications, from punctuation to choosing language that readers will readily understand." International students make up 43% of Oxford students overall and 60% of graduate students.

While recognising the advice's intention, some international students have criticised the guide as "a bit overdone". Speaking with *Cherwell*, one student said that "idioms are integral parts of the English language. It makes Oxford, Oxford."

Another student, Juniper Chan, told *Cherwell* : "It's kind of anti-integration, anti-naturalisation… to baby people. When I first got to the UK, I didn't get a lot of stuff, but you have to kind of pick it up."

Students have acknowledged the difficulties language barriers create at university. Chan told *Cherwell*: "There is a certain level of shame that comes with it [but Oxford] is a very international place. You could always ask your friends for help."

Oxford requires non-native English speakers to prove their proficiency when they apply, requesting evidence of C1 or C2 level ability on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The British Council defines C1 as the ability to "understand a wide range of more difficult, longer texts" and to "recognise implicit meanings", a skill that should enable students to understand English idioms..

The guidance has created controversy online. For example, Lord Young of the Free Speech Union said: "One of the reasons international students come to Oxford is so that they can immerse themselves in our culture and master colloquial English."

The University also added that its style guide is non-proscriptive. A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "Its writing guidance is advisory and supports staff in exercising their own judgement about the language they use and the audience they are writing for."

Oxford University and Wadham win at local environmental awards

ORLA MCMAHON

Oxford University Raff Lab and Wadham College were among the winners at this year's Oxford Climate Awards.

The event awards individuals, businesses, and institutions in the Oxford area for their environmental work. This year's awards, which were given at Oxford Town Hall earlier this month, were hosted by Oxford City Council in partnership with *The Oxford Times*, *Oxford Mail*, and digital marketing company LocaliQ.

Individuals or groups can be nominated in up to twelve categories, including the Innovation in Climate Action, Sustainable School of the Year, and Youth Climate Action Awards. Nominations were assessed by a panel of independent judges.

Raff Lab, part of the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, won the Innovation in Climate Action Award and was also named Overall Winner for its efforts to incorporate sustainable practices into its work.

Dr Saroj Saurya, winner of the Climate Action Champion Award and laboratory manager of the Raff Lab, told *Cherwell*: "We were absolutely delighted and genuinely surprised when the Raff Lab was announced as the Overall Winner of the Oxford Climate Awards. It is a wonderful recognition of years of hard work, persistence and collaboration.

"These awards are not just about one laboratory or individual. They reflect the growing culture of environmental sustainability across the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, made possible through the encouragement and support of our Head of Department, Professor Matthew Freeman, the dedication of Green Group volunteers, and the contributions of our technical and facilities teams and colleagues across the department."

Saurya is chair of the Dunn School Green Group, which aims to promote environmental sustainability within the Dunn School and the wider community.

Saurya told *Cherwell*: "One of our priorities is to develop a circular-economy approach in which laboratory plastics that cannot be reused are collected, processed and potentially turned into new laboratory products, rather than being discarded as waste."

Wadham won the Sustainable Further Education School of the Year award.

Director of Sustainability Frances Lloyd told *Cherwell*: "There has been a significant effort across the college to ensure Wadham plays its part in developing and demonstrating solutions to reduce its climate impact while contributing actively to nature recovery. Recognition like this demonstrates our commitment and determination to make a difference and will hopefully inspire others."

Image Credit: Saroj Saurya, with permission.



Proctors' Office investigations into AI plagiarism rise 46% in a year

Continued from Page 1

In the humanities division, six out of ten completed and ongoing plagiarism investigations in the same period involved suspected AI use. An expanded definition of plagiarism in the 2025-2026 Academic Disciplinary Procedure included "use of material generated wholly or in part through use of artificial intelligence" without prior authorisation. Whilst *Cherwell* has not seen similar data for previous academic years, the high prevalence of AI in suspected plagiarism suggests advancements in artificial intelligence have placed a significant burden on the Proctors' Office's academic misconduct procedures.

> Of the 20 investigations into suspected plagiarism in the Social Sciences in 2025-2026, 19 involved suspected AI use.

According to data received through *Cherwell*'s original FOI, the Department for Continuing Education conducted eleven investigations in the past three academic years, with nine in the Humanities and eight in the Mathematical, Physical, Engineering and Life Sciences (MPLS) division. Only one such investigation occurred in Medical Sciences, which includes Medicine, Psychology, Biomedical Sciences, and Biochemistry, despite the division accounting for an average of 16.7% of the university's students across the same period. Twelve investigations (20%) were into research-based assessments, whilst the remaining forty-eight (80%) were into non-research-based assessments.

The prevalence of social sciences reflects broader trends spotted in the misuse of AI in university-level assessment. A 2024 UC Berkeley survey of over 95,000 US university students found that 9% admitted to cheating on exams using AI, with the figure rising to 13% for business and management students and 17% for Economics or Journalism students.

The Social Sciences Division was contacted for comment.

Capped resits the most common punishment for AI use

Of the concluded investigations into suspected AI-related academic misconduct from September 2023 to the end of the last academic year, three led to students' permanent expulsion. No temporary suspensions from the University were issued.

By far the most common result was a capped resit, which was enforced on 28 occasions, where a student was required to resit an examination but with a limit on the grade they could achieve. According to the University's Academic Disciplinary Procedure 2025-2026, for a "Category 4" instance of "gross plagiarism", it is not usually possible to receive a grade higher than a pass in a resit examination. On two occasions, students were required to take an uncapped resit, whilst on three occasions students received mark reductions to work without undertaking a resit.

On 13 occasions, investigations resulted in cases being returned to the examination board with no further action taken. No students were given written warnings in place of other penalties. Three appeals to the results of investigations into academic misconduct involving AI were received over the same time period, with one resulting in a lower penalty being given whilst the other two were dismissed.

Oxford continues use of Turnitin

Once a report of plagiarism is received against a student, evidence is submitted before a Proctors' Office caseworker decides whether to investigate. Oxford confirmed to *Cherwell* that reports from the plagiarism detection software Turnitin are still used to decide whether to investigate, under the latest Academic Disciplinary Procedures which came into force on 1st September 2026.

This is despite several UK Universities, including Newcastle, Westminster, and Southampton, announcing an end to their use of Turnitin over an update to their End-User License Agreement (EULA) that could potentially allow Turnitin to use student work to train AI models. In a statement published a week after Oxford's latest Disciplinary Procedures came into force, Turnitin announced a year-long postponement and re-drafting of the EULA, and confirmed that "no student or staff data has been used to develop generative artificial intelligence (AI) models or large language models (LLM)".

Oxford noted that not every report into suspected plagiarism involves use of Turnitin. Under Oxford's 2025-2026 Disciplinary Procedures, any investigation into suspected plagiarism is presented in a report to the Proctors, before an appropriate penalty is decided, with the student given opportunities throughout to admit wrongdoing or accept an agreed penalty. The University "aims to conclude its consideration of any Report (sic) within 90 calendar days" of the report being made, with 20 of those days usually left for the evaluation of appeals to any penalties imposed. This timeline can prevent students from continuing into more advanced education programmes or graduate jobs that depend on receiving a final degree grade.

> The prevalence of social sciences reflects broader trends spotted in the misuse of AI in university-level assessment... 12% of students at UK universities included AI-generated text directly in a piece of assessed work.

The wider picture

The rise in investigations at Oxford into academic misconduct involving AI comes as more UK students report using artificial intelligence in assessments and examinations. The UK's Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)'s 2026 Student Generative AI Survey revealed that 12% of students at UK universities "included AI-generated text directly in a piece of assessed work", up from 8% in 2025, whilst 15% believe such use of AI is acceptable. The report also revealed that 25% "used AI to generate text, which is then edited before incorporating into assessed work". The report also found that "being accused of cheating by my institution" was the most commonly given reason that would make a student less likely to use AI for their studies, with 42% of respondents fearing accusations of misconduct.

The figures also come a year after *The Guardian* revealed that almost 7,000 instances of cheating using AI had been recorded by UK universities in 2023-2024. This was equivalent to 5.1 cases per 1000 students, at a time when Oxford University investigated only one similar instance for a student body of over 27,000.

However, the rise to 35 such investigations at Oxford in the last academic year comes after the University's rollout of access to ChatGPT Edu for all Oxford University students last September, amongst a "range of enterprise-level GenAI tools… with agreements in place so that data is not used to train external AI models."

The University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "We are committed to helping students use AI safely and responsibly while upholding rigorous academic standards… The University offers a variety of AI training and academic skills support to students. We offer guidance on the safe and responsible use of AI tools, set out clear policy on our expectations on their use, and our AI Competency Centre offers a range of dedicated student workshops. Critical thinking and independent learning remain at the heart of an Oxford education."

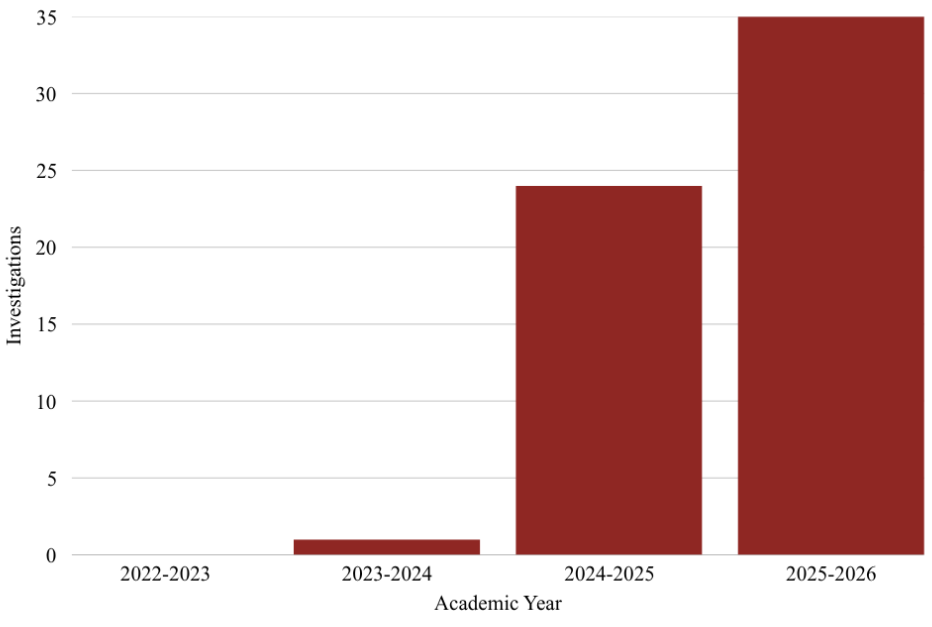
The University also pointed to Oxford's tutorial system, which it described as "particularly valuable in the age of AI… through regular, small-group teaching and focused academic discussion, students are challenged to explain their ideas, defend their arguments and demonstrate their own understanding".

Additional reporting by Timothy Blackburn.
Graph Credit: Ned Remington for Cherwell.

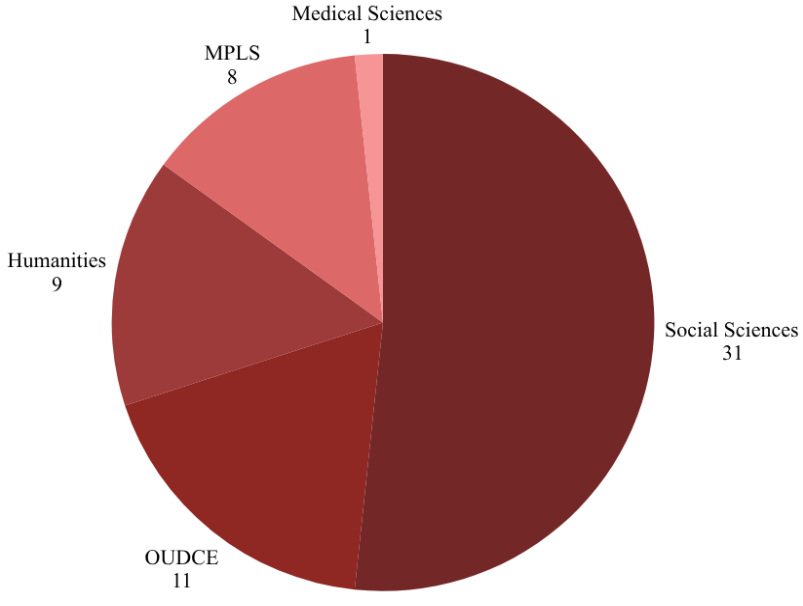
Correction: *The investigation headline in the last edition referred to Oxford University Proctors "turning away" sexual misconduct reports. This is inaccurate. The article clarifies that this referred to reports not accepted for investigation by the Proctors under University statutes, rather than complainants being refused support. The headline has since been amended online.*

Investigations into suspected academic misconduct involving AI use, 2022-2026

Based on Cherwell's analysis of a Freedom of Information response



Investigations into suspected academic misconduct involving AI, by subject division (2022-2026)



OPINION

Unity is the antidote

FREYA ROBSON

At a recent march in Oxford against the far right, one speaker's words really struck a chord with me: "We need unity irrespective of our differences on other issues." This declaration was all the more poignant given the eclectic mix of political groups represented at the protest, including those campaigning to keep Campsfield Immigration Removal Centre closed, the Oxford Labour Club, and Women Against the Far Right. An unshakeable sense of togetherness bound the groups together, and it was then that the antidote to the mess that we call British politics became clear: unity.

I'm aware that simply throwing out the word 'unity' as a quick fix to political turmoil seems ridiculous, as if proudly offering up a singular sandbag when a tsunami comes rolling in. What we don't need is another ideological proposition, the likes of which can be discussed at length in a tutorial as the world falls apart around us. But unity is so much more than that; it is a rallying cry for anyone who can get behind a common goal. A goal that, in this case, is the protection of our communities from the far-right threat that is slowly but surely seeping in.

For too long, British politics has felt like an unending roundabout of infighting while the world falls apart around us. I am reminded of Ludwig Wittgenstein's analogy of intellectuals as flies in a jar, endlessly talking over ideological minutiae rather than ever actually getting anywhere. Whilst I recognise the irony of referencing a philosopher when criticising unsatisfying conclusions, this analogy really does seem to resonate.

Following what *The Guardian* called "the worst unrest seen in the UK for a decade" during the wave of anti-migrant riots in the summer of 2024, it was found that nearly three-quarters of the British public felt worried about right-wing extremism. However, in the two years since this statistic was produced, we have nothing to show for how we have countered these fears. If anything, these concerns have been strengthened and intensified, with groups like Patriot Platform filling the streets to preach about women's safety, while clad in black balaclavas and chanting "stop the boats". I'm left wondering where our collective terror of the growing extremist ideologies has disappeared to. Or, rather, where it has been channelled instead.

Whilst it is true that a large proportion of the UK fear the far-right, the recent action that has been taken speaks for itself. The Labour Party has been battling it out with the Conservatives in government in a treacherous game of who can seem the toughest on immigration, attempting to claw back lost voters. As a result, MPs from both parties are discussing immigration in a more hostile way than at almost any other point in the past century, according to a recent study by *The Guardian*. Meanwhile, despite their consistently anti-far-right rhetoric, the Greens are busy redefining Zionism and dividing their party supporters along the way. And to top it all off, Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey is describing the surge in far-right ideologies and change in UK political opinion as a "historic opportunity to win many more seats", rather than a threat to our nation's diverse community. The people might agree on the issue, but finding the solution is a completely different story.

As it turns out, constant bickering about party politics doesn't actually get us anywhere.

So what does? Saying that we should all work together to counter the rise of the far right is easier said than done – and feels a little too *High School Musical*-esque. But having political cohesion across parties is really not so far-fetched. We only have to look across the Channel to France to see how cross-party collaboration can be accomplished. In the French political system, elections involve two rounds of voting, with the first round eliminating candidates with the fewest votes. A benefit of this system is that between the first and second rounds of voting, it is common for parties to join forces to compile their votes. For example, in the 2024 legislative elections, between the rounds of voting a broadly left-wing party arose called Le Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP), made up of over six smaller parties hoping to combat the far-right party, Le Rassemblement National (RN). The result was a success: 182 seats for the NFP against 143 for the RN and its allies.

While French politics are clearly not flawless, and this system does mean learning a ridiculous number of acronyms for newly formed parties in every election cycle, it does teach a valuable lesson. Acting as a collective does not mean thinking as a hive mind, nor does it mean having exactly the same views on every issue. But what it does mean is showing unity in the face of opposition, particularly when that opposition threatens to push our fellow citizens out of the country.

And making governmental change is just the beginning. The reality of implementing unity in political action can be done both day-to-day and in Parliamentary. Opening up conversations with peers about the far-right without veering into irrelevant discussions, and engaging with people from different political leanings to find common ground; these are the ways we become a collective.

So whilst the antidote of unity may not be a quick and easy fix, it can certainly help us in the long term. Our wonderfully diverse community is under threat, and our fears need to be channelled to inspire collective change. Maybe, after all, *High School Musical* was right – we truly are all in this together.



Illustration credit: Ian Coates for Cherwell.

In defence of consent training

MADELINE GILLETT

CW: Sexual violence

It is often well-intentioned, stereotypically 'progressive' people who argue against the need for Freshers' Week consent training, or at least find it obsolete. This includes even those most committed to dismantling rape culture, as well as those aware that sexual violence is horrific; something they would never dream of committing. They might think those who really need the training won't be receptive anyway, so what's the point? Those who oppose rape culture might feel comfortable that they would never jeopardise someone else's bodily autonomy, and think that those who could are a separate class of citizen; no amount of healthy discussion can be expected to save them, especially not an hour's worth while hungover on a Wednesday afternoon. However, even thinking this unconsciously contributes to a dangerous culture of complacency, ignoring the very nature of sociopolitical progress and how it manifests across time.

During Freshers' Week consent training, I heard people say that choking is a normal part of sex. I also heard the term 'normal sex' batted around a lot, without any real attempt to actually explain what this was, or what exactly people are consenting to when engaging in it. In reality, 'normal sex' is a vast umbrella term for an array of acts. These oversimplifications are not inherently sinister, nor were they spoken by people whom I'd deem deeply ignorant and apathetic towards consent, such as the bigoted types you'd see in a TV drama that stages sexual violence. What these assumptions do signify is the necessity to rid our minds of sociosexual scripts.

Sociosexual script theory was first coined by the sociologists John Gagnon and William Simon in 1973. It refers to the internalisation of societal norms, which can dictate how people act in sexual situations: often sex is informed by expectations of what is 'normal', as well as, or even more so than, preference. The theory becomes especially pertinent when thinking about gender roles and sexuality. It's not out of the ordinary to feel you need to do something in a 'mainstream' or 'conventional' way, nor does it make you a bad person. What this can do, however, is make you feel pressured to enjoy certain types of sex more so than others, and make it unclear what is being consented to when sex is brought up. For example, sex is not necessarily just penis-in-vagina (PIV), even when it is between a cisgender man and woman. For one person, this might be the norm and to be expected. For the other, it might be deeply uncomfortable, or even not physically possible.

Sociosexual scripts engender a harmful hierarchy of acts, deeming some less 'serious' than others, and therefore requiring less informed consent. What might be considered foreplay for one person can be the main event for the other, and so what one person is happy to rush into might be deeply vulnerable for the other. Sociosexual scripts are also inherently heteronormative: when we assume that 'real sex' is penetrative, we exclude what might be the norm for two cisgender sapphic women, for example, as well as pressuring cisgender, heterosexual people to define safe sex in a specific way.

Choking and sexual strangulation are clear examples of this. Studies consistently show that there are significant risks and harms associated with this act, but what used to be considered a kink has recently made its way into the mainstream sexual script, with over one third of 16-25 year olds reporting being choked at least once during consensual sex in a study done in December 2024. There is a sense that this is both because of an uncritical approach to what is manifest in pornography – a disregard for its chauvinistic stagings and glorification of power dynamics – and also a desire to not be perceived as 'kink shaming'. While there is merit in warranting people freedom for sexual self-exploration, it is essential that this rising trend is accompanied by an active dialogue about the dangers of strangulation, and the recent spike in choking-related deaths. In order to avoid situations such as these, kinks are often accompanied by ongoing conversations about boundaries, safety, and comprehensive aftercare, because of the awareness that they fall outside the bounds of the 'mainstream'. The very act of shifting something from the category of kink to 'normal' sex requires reflection. When we make something a standard that was once physically threatening, and still is for many, people may assume consent, when open dialogue is required to foster a safe environment. Consent training, in this light, can be viewed as the absolutely essential counterpart to mainstream pornography, which engenders certain expectations if consumed uncritically.

Consent training becomes more pertinent than ever when we dispel 'the monster myth'. This is the notion that sexual assaulters are inherently monstrous people, detectably evil and with no capacity to be perceived as normal. It breeds complacency: people think they are immune to violating consent if they do not associate with this stereotypical 'evil' or disregard for their sexual partners' welfare. Breaches of consent also result from lapsed communication and a socially-informed assumption of preference, which manifests as selfishness or entitlement. Sexual violence can be perpetrated by close friends, in seemingly mundane environments. Understanding this is also key to understanding why survivors might not fit the script that society expects them to: they might remain friends with the perpetrator, or not even realise that what occurred was a breach of consent until much later. After the recent discourse about the 'Cornell 7' and people discrediting Jane Doe for remaining close to her abusers soon after her assault, it is more relevant now than ever before that we dismantle all expectations for survivors, and understand how common it is that sexual violence does not necessarily manifest in a violent or explicit manner.

Read the full article online at cherwell.org

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

The problem with home

Every year, international students substitute the cost of an almost-promising life in their developing homelands, for an allegedly prestigious UK degree. And, every year, England reminds those students that, while British imperialism may have subsided, their lives – parallel to their ancestors – remain ruled by British control.

This month, UK universities, including Oxford Brookes University, tightened the water spigot of opportunity for students gasping to desert their struggling home countries in the Global South. Complicating admissions entry through the introduction of rigorous compliance requests, restricting sponsorship from reputedly high-risk nations, and withdrawing admissions offers, the UK urged an ethnic eradication for majority-world students, mostly from Nigeria, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Ghana, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. And, in an ideal society, I believe that the universities' visa refusals – albeit outrageously racist and devastating for each student – are incredibly advantageous in the long run to cure the brain drain occurring across the Global South. Whether coincidence or not, many of the countries excluded from UK student entry were historically devastated by British imperialism and are presently devoid of academically and professionally skilled students, who permanently leave their home country to improve their newly-settled nation. But, all this leaves is a post-colonial country continuously struggling to retain doctors, lawyers, and teachers.

As Ti-Jean Martin argues ('Politics must not serve as a barrier to education'), the UK faces a medic shortage, and the NHS would benefit from international students studying health sciences. But, what about the absence of medical professionals in the home countries of Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, where growing concerns regarding the rise in overseas employment echo the pains felt by left-behind countrymen? In 2024, Nigeria scored 6.60 points in their brain drain index while the world average is 4.98 points, Bangladesh ranks 6.70, and Pakistan received 5.50 points. If the British government fears the misuse of study visas for work or asylum routes, then they must invest in the countries that remain underdeveloped because of colonialism, by providing public sector stake in universities and schools alike. The British International Investment already invests in private sector capital across Africa and South Asia to build infrastructure and local enterprise.

Further, long-term funding for education sectors are being phased out in many third-world countries by the UK government. What good is this doing if students and citizens are fleeing because of the lack of jobs? Students from targeted countries deserve to consider their home universities as excellent academic options, and the countries themselves deserve to see professional longevity, despite a national past defined by Western oppression. The UK government must provide educational aid to the Global South, to prevent a continuous brain drain and to amend their newly-prejudiced policy.

Madison Garrett, Criminology and Criminal Justice, *Worcester College*

THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts

I'm actually sat here laughing at the comments stating "it wasn't that fancy." They're talking about YOU and I really, really hope you somehow, someday experience existing at an underfunded state school. ('The quiet guilt of upward social mobility at Oxford')

morgan.a.thomas via Instagram

First was Paris. Next? Let's hope it's not Oxford. ('Students join march against the far right at matriculation')

guildfordbendinat via Instagram

Mr Parvini prefers the term 'sensible centrist' btw ('Right-wing commentator withdraws from Reform Society event following Nathan Cofnas invite')

willtcj via Instagram

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

The Vinted paradox: Consuming our way out of overconsumption

AGATHA CROWTHER

There are few pleasures quite like finding a jumper that sells for £70 new listed for £14, "worn twice" by someone in Leeds. It is cheaper, potentially more individual, and crucially already exists. No new jumper is manufactured on my behalf. I can congratulate myself on my thrift, environmental consciousness, and extraordinary eye for a bargain all at once. The problem is that I rarely close the app there.

Vinted's innovation may not simply be making fashion circular, but bringing the doomscroll to shopping. Opening the app resembles opening Instagram or Pinterest: an endless stream of images invites the same absent-minded scroll, becoming uncannily attuned to my taste with every search, click, and favourite. Here, however, my For You Page comes with a price tag and a buy button. The infinite feed has entered the wardrobe.

Yet within that apparent abundance is individual scarcity, as each listing offers a single garment, with another buyer potentially hovering over it. Every bargain comes with a countdown: deliberate too long, and someone in Bristol gets your next vintage, one-of-a-kind going-out top. Missing out triggers a push notification that a favourite has sold, followed by an obliging carousel of 'similar items' ready to inherit your attention. Scarcity creates urgency, and recommendations ensure the cycle continues. The garment is finite; your scroll, unfortunately, is not.

Vinted's ecological proposition to circulate existing clothes rather than manufacture new ones is compelling. But circularity describes what happens to clothes, not necessarily what happens to our appetite for them. When I asked four Oxford students whether Vinted had reduced their purchasing, one admitted the opposite: lower prices meant freedom to buy more. Another described that spending on the app felt less like a "real purchase". Asked whether second-hand status made unnecessary purchases easier to justify, the consensus was striking: "yes, definitely", "all the time", and, most revealingly, "it's fine because it's Vinted".

Behavioural economists have names for my amateur theorising. The 'rebound effect' describes how cheaper, more efficient consumption can encourage more of it; 'moral licensing', how virtuous behaviour makes indulgence easier to justify. Hence three unnecessary second-hand tops somehow feel more defensible than one bought new.

Research suggests this is more than hypothetical. A 2025 *Journal of Cleaner Production* study identified a 'circular rebound effect' on Vinted itself, linking lower prices to increased demand, and time spent on the platform to impulse buying and overconsumption. A separate 2025 *Scientific Reports* study of 1,009 American consumers found a positive correlation between purchasing second-hand and new clothing. The enthusiastic thrifter need not be the antithesis of the fast-fashion shopper, for the same appetite finds another marketplace.

This is not to collapse the distinction, for I welcome a fashion economy in which second-hand eclipses fast fashion. But Vinted is far removed from meandering through the rails of Mind or Cancer Research. It borrows social media's algorithm of personalised feeds and frictionless transactions, applying it to consumption already furnished with an ethical halo. It makes our appetite for novelty less destructive without asking us to desire less.

Take the Vinted balance. Sell a dress for £20, spend £18 on another, and somehow I have not spent £18; I have practically conducted a swap. Richard Thaler's paper on 'Mental Accounting and Consumer Choice' offers one explanation: consumers mentally code and budget money differently despite its objective fungibility. £18 remains £18, even when Vinted has helpfully quarantined it from my bank account; psychologically, however, the proceeds of selling clothes can feel remarkably like credit for buying more. Apparently pounds become Monopoly money once they acquire a Vinted balance.

There is an irony here. Co-founder Milda Mitkutė has traced Vinted's beginnings to her "overflowing wardrobe", revealing that: "I was surprised at the 100 pieces of clothing that I had worn only once or not at all." Vinted converted those unused possessions into circulating value, yet its balance system complicates that solution, as sale proceeds remain poised to fund the next purchase unless manually withdrawn. Once an unwanted dress becomes £20 of in-app spending power, decluttering funds re-cluttering.

The prospect of resale also changes our commitment to ownership. A questionable purchase can always be defended with promises that "I'll sell it again". My interviewees admitted that potential resale made buying easier to rationalise, while photographing, listing, packaging, and posting the item was quite another matter. Vinted can therefore lengthen a garment's material lifespan while shortening our psychological commitment to it.

None of this should obscure what Vinted gets right. The Apparel Impact Institute reported in 2026 that fashion industry emissions rose 6.3% between 2023 and 2024, driven principally by growing fibre use, particularly petroleum-based polyester. Against rising material throughput, circulating existing garments is not cosmetic environmentalism. Vinted's own 2026 Impact Report estimates that 76% of its 2025 orders displaced the purchase of a new item. Even with the caveat of company-commissioned research, this suggests that resale can meaningfully substitute for primary consumption.

But perhaps substitution is not the end of the question. If Vinted successfully changes where we satisfy consumer demand, what happens to the demand itself?

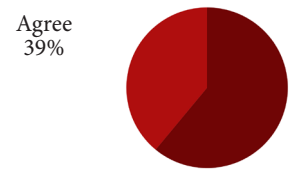
My interviews exposed this tension. Asked how many of their last five Vinted purchases they would have made without the platform, answers ranged from one to two. Though hardly representative, this raises a distinction between the environmental benefits of individual purchases and the consumption habits the platform encourages. Unlike the charity shop, constrained by opening hours, physical stock, and the effort of getting there, Vinted is always open, endlessly replenished, and rarely more than a thumb's movement away. Clothes become not merely things we acquire, but content we consume; shopping doesn't always start with wanting something, sometimes boredom is enough.

Yet expecting Vinted to discourage that impulse is perhaps to misunderstand what Vinted is: a marketplace that, in 2025, generated roughly £930 million in revenue and £52 million in net profit. Its business is transactions, even if those transactions are materially preferable to fast fashion. The Vinted paradox is therefore structural rather than hypocritical: a more circular marketplace can prosper within, and perhaps intensify, a culture of perpetual wanting.

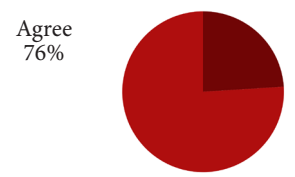
My criticism is therefore directed as much at consumers like me as it is at Vinted. I will continue using Vinted (you would have to pry my £14 cashmere jumper from my hands). But perhaps the most sustainable wardrobe is not simply one that is pre-owned; it is one where, occasionally, the scroll ends without a parcel on its way.

THE VERDICT

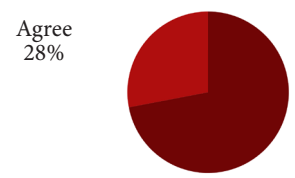
Vinted encourages overconsumption



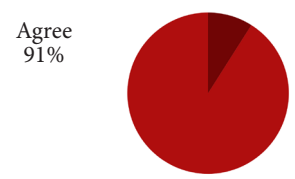
Unity is the solution to the rise of the far-right



Political party societies are fit for purpose



Postgraduate colleges should run consent workshops



THE DEBATE CHAMBER

Ti-Jean Martin and Elizabeth Millett debate whether Oxford's political party societies are fit for purpose

TI-JEAN MARTIN

Entering Oxford University as a left-leaning student, word-of-mouth references and a *Cherwell* feature quickly gave me the impression that its party-aligned political societies did indeed constitute "a drifting elite with few ideas". This didn't put me off the concept entirely – I was in favour of the move to create a Green Party society, a feat that, this Michaelmas, has been accomplished alongside a Reform UK-aligned equivalent.

Yet whilst these moves will diversify a stagnant atmosphere in terms of party allegiance, it seems unlikely that they will break the mold of the political society. Neither will they move the Oxford political scene any closer to the relevance it sorely lacks.

One needn't look as far back as 1968 to see the potential of campus politics to catalyse change. At Oxford, however, the idea that political action can actually change things seems to have been forgotten, or perhaps never thought of. Members of the Labour Club (OLC), Liberal Association (OSLA), and Conservative Association (OUCA) – or all three, as many political BNOCs seem to be – themselves would probably acknowledge that the 'big three' do more drinking and Union connection-making than political action.

If they are breeding future prime ministers, as the reputation goes, they're doing it the old way, serving as old boys' networks-to-be between their many shared members. This is demoralising in a place with the potential to create future leaders, a place with the power to turn a generation's disillusionment into meaningful, different politics. It doesn't do anything to help Oxford's reputation as an elite bubble, cut off from political issues that actually matter, either.

It would have been nice to think that creating two new societies could remedy these issues, yet change can cut both ways. Concerns have already been raised about the potential threat to the safety of Muslim students at the University posed by the Reform society's affiliation to a party that many have argued to be actively Islamophobic. It has also recently invited the controversial self-described "race realist" Nathan Cofnas to speak at Oriel College in November, spawning the announcement of a protest by the campaign group Stand Up to Racism. It remains to be seen who will constitute the Oxon Universities Reform Society's membership, but it is quite possible that many of them will carry OLC, OSLA, or OUCA cards – the same may well be true for the Oxford Student Greens.

This cannot be the price we pay for an ostensibly more diverse partisan landscape. But where does Oxford's politically-inclined student body go, then? To the 'big three', which the aforementioned feature labelled the "stand-up comedy clubs" of a faded elite? To the new societies on left and right, whose potential for both harm and good remains to be seen? And should we abandon partisanship altogether? Something like the October Club, which in theory constitutes a left-wing space without party alignment, could be replicated across the political spectrum, but this model has its own problems – the Oxford Social Democrats' (formerly Left Society) attempt to create such an environment appears to have fizzled out.

Within the current system, there seems to be no answer to these questions. Unless the party-aligned political societies start actually doing politics, they will remain unfit for purpose.

ELIZABETH MILLETT

Oxford's political party societies have a dual reputation. On one side of the coin, many boast long-standing histories and influential alumni, from Clement Attlee to David Cameron. Flip to the tail end, and you find a termly reality of boisterous drinking socials and inconclusive debates that are, in the words of *Cherwell*'s Stanley Smith, "more fixated with personality than party". But does this reputation really disrupt the confines of what these political party societies are made for?

The recent establishment of Reform and Green Party societies has prompted a return to analysing the state of Oxford's student political groups. A predictable flurry of apprehension has followed this broadening of a scene that currently appears both contradictory and relatively subpar. Though understandable, I feel these criticisms have lost touch with the actual purpose of political party societies.

The self-proclaimed objective of the Oxford University Conservatives Association (OUCA), penned by the current President Harriet Dolby, is to "provide a forum for students to discuss politics and policy" and encourage the "fostering [of] open and rigorous debate with those of all political persuasions". Other groups' intentions are similar. The Oxford Labour Club (OLC) expresses a commitment to a "conviction that ideas matter, that argument is worth having, and that a fairer society is worth working for", while the months-old Oxon Universities Reform Society sets out in the opening statements of their website a strive towards "providing a space for free speech".

We appear to have deluded ourselves into viewing these political societies, like all student societies for that matter, as more than what they are designed to be: a place for amateurs to channel and discuss their interests. At what point were student societies discouraged for being merely recreational? University environments are defined by members undergoing a process of growth and learning; they are not a final product. An unjust amount of pressure is placed on these student groups to provide term cards and socials of the calibre that might produce our next generation of leaders. This expectation is purely based on the careers of a few outstanding predecessors that are, bluntly put, anomalies. While politics should certainly not be considered a mere pastime (I have no intention of being satisfied with low-quality debate in these forums), these societies are certainly in an adequate position to carry out their self-proclaimed purpose of having passionate and engaged discussions.

Whether they do this well is a different matter. There is no denial that the list of zero-tolerance "Terms & Conditions" set out by the Reform society for their fourth-ever speaker event (chosen to be with controversial academic Nathan Cofnas) makes one wince. Similarly, the Green's "lemonade and leftism" sessions are destined to lose any sliver of prospective zest when debates on nuclear energy and climate change are bound to become an echo chamber when held amongst students of the same political disposition – there is a clear distinction between being functional as a society and remotely impressive.

These societies can admittedly be disappointing in their execution, allegedly devolving into sessions of networking and natter. Their wavering relevance is not, however, symptomatic of being unfit for their purpose, but a case of often not living up to what they could do with the frameworks already in place.

The Oxford students Britain turned away



They proved their academic brilliance and earned places at the world's top university, only to have their futures blocked by their passports

MAIR ANDREWS and STANLEY ARLIDGE

When you matriculate at Oxford University, the Vice-Chancellor asks that the attending students be accepted. Under Christopher Wren's painted ceiling, after copious submissions, emails, and acceptances, the University still has one fleeting chance to turn around and say "no".

There is a sense of just reward for the chosen in this ritual. As the Vice-Chancellor herself says in the ceremony: "It is not easy to earn a place at Oxford – we are the number one University in the world, after all." While many students recognise the role of luck in getting to this moment, few are aware of just how lucky they are.

Over the past seven months, some of Oxford's offer holders have been hoping for their luck to change. They met the academic requirements and demonstrated sufficient intellectual rigour. What led them to fail the test was, instead, the passports they held.

> For asylum to be framed as the easy way out is a very disingenuous justification.
> **– Eaint**

They are the victims of a visa brake introduced by the Home Office, which blocks students from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sudan, and Cameroon from obtaining UK visas. Caught in the politics of immigration enforcement, these students felt the elation of an Oxford offer, followed by the cruelty of being told "no".

Seven months on, some still hold out hope of making it to Oxford.

The visa brake was part of a wide-ranging immigration reform package that has driven anger at the Home Secretary in the Labour government, Shabana Mahmood. To justify the claims, Mahmood cited a 470% increase in those on student visas from the four countries claiming asylum.

Over the phone, Yama jests that, as a scientist, he can recognise "when evidence is selectively deployed". He is an Afghan British researcher who has worked at the Oxford Vaccine Group since 2013, and he believes that the countries were chosen for political reasons. "They are not a priority for our politicians," he scoffs. Their lack of representation means those in power question, "'Is it really worth fighting for?' Morally, absolutely. But economically or publicity-wise, 'it's just ten students'".

Earlier this year, Yama wrote to then-Prime Minister Keir Starmer, met with MPs, and has led a UK parliamentary petition against the brake signed by nearly 40,000 people. He hopes that "next time someone thinks about Sudanese or Afghans or whatever other country," this campaign would mean that "they might spend one minute to pause and say, 'I'm going to do this, and this is very unfair'".

Filings from a court case challenging the policy serve Yama's point. The Home Office's own metric for the visa brake shows that, were all countries being treated equally, other countries, including Bangladesh, would have been included in the brake. The country was excluded, not because of its role in visa abuse, but because of deeper bilateral ties, such that "any action on Bangladesh would likely incur a far more pronounced impact upon relations".

Ask any of the Oxford offer holders what they hoped to achieve with a British education, and they do not ask for asylum. When a coup in Myanmar turned into civil war, Eaint watched her home country fall apart from her student accommodation at King's College London. Even knowing that, at home, conflict had "erased life as people knew it", she never considered asylum. "For asylum to be framed as the easy way out," she says, "is a very disingenuous justification". She had an offer to begin a Master's in Health Service Improvement and Evaluation in Oxford this October.

Studying abroad is not just about attending a particular university. For affected students, it is one of the few ladders out of the devastation caused by decades of civil unrest. Afghanistan has not recovered from the Soviet invasion in 1979 and, since the Taliban returned to power, women and girls have been systematically excluded from education past primary school. For them, universities abroad can represent one of the few remaining routes to continue their education.

> I have done everything in the past four or five years to qualify and get a scholarship from the UK, and now I'm being stopped not because I don't meet their standard, but because I'm Afghan.
> **– Prospective Afghan student**

Education is foundational to recovery, reinvigorating people and countries. Alongside her studies, Aisha has piloted an e-learning programme providing university-level education to women in six Afghan provinces. "It is a process that needs building, but we should not be waiting for the moment the Taliban are no longer in power to start working on the workforce." She had hoped to use her time in Britain to expand the programme through the University's networks.

Back in Oxford, Yama runs a similar programme offering education for Afghan women and girls; he's seen the impact of education through his sister, now a doctor in Denmark. Had his father not been so desperate for her to get an education, fleeing the Taliban in the process, "we would have a woman with no knowledge. We would have one less doctor."

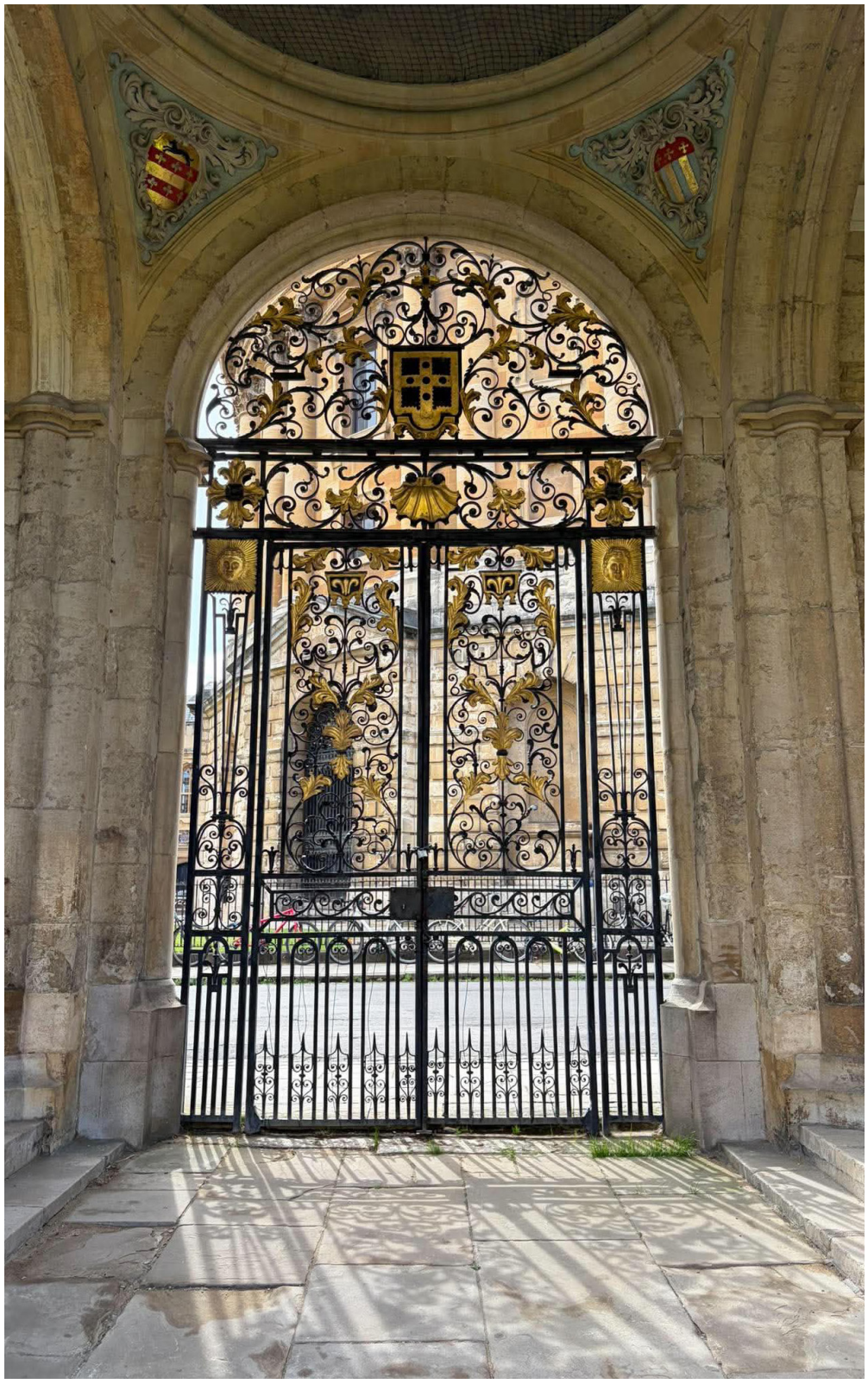
Eaint's grief is twofold: the visa brake does not just represent the loss of her own offer, but the knowledge of "what doors this was closing for people who just wanted a better future and education". "I had already gotten a bachelor's degree in the UK," she says. "I was so acutely aware that studying in the UK had changed my life in every sense possible."

Taking away the opportunity is equally life changing. One Afghan student told Yama: "What I'm going to do is this: I'm going to go into those boats. I'm going to cross the channel. I'm going to come into this country, and I am going to study. Because I already have an offer. I have done everything in the past four or five years to qualify and get a scholarship from the UK, and now I'm being stopped not because I don't meet their standard, but because I'm Afghan." When Yama tried to dissuade the student, he was reminded that "you are in Oxford. That's why you are saying, and you are advising me, 'don't do that'. Please, before going to sleep tonight, spend ten minutes putting yourself in my place and think about what you would have done." They have not been in contact since.

Underpinning the Home Office's policy is a sense of why international students come to Britain. But these students saw their Oxford offers not as a way out, but as an opportunity to help their home countries. They are the students who fell through the cracks created by a blanket ban.

Ibrahim was on a rare break from his internship when we called. For the first few minutes of the call, he recounts in detail the potential changes to Sudan's health referral system he has identified. Working in hospitals in Sudan during the ongoing war, he witnesses daily the challenges of a health system under stress – just three months into his placement,





the hospital he worked at was filled with victims of a drone strike in a nearby town. "There was just so much pressure to take care of all these patients," he says. Still, you have to be "vigilant" to survive in an active war zone. At Oxford, Ibrahim wanted to focus on how to implement his changes in a "volatile" environment as part of his Master's in Health Service Improvement and Evaluation.

Eaint calls from the Thailand-Myanmar border, where she is working on a project helping those fleeing her native Myanmar with medical and humanitarian aid. Ironically, she laughs, the project is funded by an Oxford research institute.

> 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.
> **– Safar**

For everyone, the Oxford offer symbolised that people cared. Ibrahim recalls coworkers and friends asking him why he was smiling so much after receiving his offer. To him, it validated that he had "the potential to contribute" to the field. Having spent her interview talking about their plans to improve the health system back home, Eaint tells us her offer "felt like a validation of the fact that these issues mattered". Safar, an Afghan student due to study an MPhil in international relations, told us that his offer "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."

What does it mean, then, that these offers are taken away? Yama describes himself as proudly Afghan British; he was a key part of the team that led the development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID vaccine and is currently working on the world's first Ebola vaccine. His expertise means he could easily move to the US, should he choose to, but he wants to stay: "This country has given me another home." The current policy, he says, "is against British values".

For Safar, the policy has shaken his faith in what Britain and Europe stand for. Having faced discrimination growing up as a refugee in Pakistan, he always thought that "progressive" Europe was different. "One of the reasons I had always wanted to study in Europe was my belief that Europe was built on the idea of human equality. I never imagined that I would encounter discrimination embedded in government policy in a liberal, so-called first-world country."

The Home Office itself recognised the dangers of the blanket ban – officials considered targeted interventions, including by course. Their own analysis noted that "the blanket 'brake' model offered speed and simplicity but raised proportionality and litigation risks". The office intends the measure to be temporary and precede more "nuanced" interventions targeting the root of abuse.

What the Home Office failed to consider was the human cost. By implementing the brake in March, when most offers for UK universities come out, many students felt both the elation of Oxford saying "yes", before the "numbness" of it being taken away. Having gone through the rigorous application process, Ibrahim assumed he would be exempt when he heard of the brake.

> I never imagined that I would encounter discrimination embedded in government policy in a liberal, so-called first-world country.
> **– Safar**

As the case has developed, Oxford has issued many statements. Each notes that the University receives "a significant number of applications from talented students affected by war and persecution" and reaffirms the University's commitment as a University of Sanctuary. A blanket script is the only way to answer a blanket policy – this national policy effectively ties the University's hands from abiding by its promise to students.

Students, like Ibrahim or Eaint, who had the UK as their only option for 2026-2027 study were left with no options. If they were to look abroad, as many are now doing, they would have to sit out a whole academic year.

Oxford has stated that it had "offered the same options to the same offer holders". Whatever the University has offered, the consequences for students are scattered. For some students, holding out hope is painful and unrealistic. The blanket change resulted from the efforts of students, like Ibrahim, to fight for their offers.

Though these students are not in the Sheldonian Theatre, they are waiting one last time to see whether the answer to their place at Oxford might be "no". This summer they launched a legal challenge to the visa brake. While the initial case failed at the High Court this summer, *Cherwell* can confirm that they have applied for permission to appeal.

Hope remains for those who have not withdrawn their applications. Students with unconditional offers, including Ibrahim, have been given the chance to defer to allow for the result of appeal. Even for the Afghans we spoke to who lost their offers, Yama is optimistic that the overturning of the brake would allow them to say "This student was successfully selected for last semester, but they couldn't get a visa. Could we renegotiate their position for next year?"

Should the appeal fail, the Home Secretary also retains the power to grant entry clearance to students outside immigration rules – the circumstances in which she would do so "are likely to be rare, and will be informed by the nature and purpose of the Student Visa Brake". To be an exception to a government immigration policy might be rare, but to get into Oxford has always involved some degree of luck and a willingness to test the odds.

Reflecting on the fact his future rests with a British judge, Ibrahim takes "satisfaction" from "deciding to persevere" till the very end. It has, he admits, been "a very long and very exhausting process", but the thought of making it to Oxford still excites him. "I think Oxford is worth it. I think it's really worth the wait. I hope it's a wait."

Image credits: Mair Andrews, with permission.

What UK student journalism can learn from Canada







Enveloped in each interaction with student journalists in Montreal was an immense culture shock, and a realisation that North American university systems are vastly different to those in Britain

EMMA HEAGNEY

Now, more than ever, British people turn to social media, rather than traditional broadsheets or broadcasters, to access the news. A 2025 Ofcom survey found that 51% of adults used social media for this purpose, with Meta and Google dominating the list of most-used platforms. However, while studying in Canada this summer, I found that this trend was unexpectedly much more complicated in the Great White North compared to the UK – hoping for a quick scroll through the main Oxford newspapers on Instagram, my access to *The Oxford Blue* was blocked. In fact, almost all news sources were blocked, instead yielding the result "People in Canada can't see this content."

I quickly learned that the vast majority of online news content in Canada had been blocked by Meta and Google, due to a controversial piece of legislation passed in 2023: Bill C-18. The bill, also known as the Online News Act, seeks to regulate these platforms, as the Minister of Justice describes it, by introducing a bargaining framework for news businesses to claim fair compensation "when their news content is made available by dominant digital news intermediaries and generates economic gain."

It seemed straightforward enough – that is, until Meta and Google responded by imposing a blanket ban on news content, a ban which largely remains today. If you are in Canada, whether a resident or tourist, you cannot, in most cases, view the news on Instagram or Facebook. Similarly, Canadian newspapers found their content removed from search results, news pages, and Google Discover.

A similar incident occurred in Australia in 2021, when the introduction of the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code resulted in Meta banning news from its platforms. A week after the news blackout, restrictions were lifted due to a deal struck between Meta, Google, and the Australian government, but the reason for the different outcomes in Australia and Canada may be due to the nature of the legislation – the Australian law did not necessarily designate the exact platforms to which the rule applied, unlike Bill C-18.

In Canada, larger broadcasters with strong funding models were able to survive the impact of Bill C-18, and Google did eventually reach an agreement with the Canadian government. But, Université Laval in Quebec found that a large number of young people changed their news consumption habits in response to Bill C-18, mostly by shifting away from Facebook and Google. Some smaller publications – like student newspapers – suffered, remodelled, and had to find alternative tools for growth.

Three years on, I met with student journalists at two of Montreal's most prestigious universities – Concordia and McGill – to learn just how much of an impact the Bill has had on their operations. However, enveloped in each interaction was an immense culture shock, and a realisation that North American university systems are vastly different to those in Britain.

I headed to the Concordia University campus on Canada's Labour Day, expecting an office roughly equivalent to the shared Oxford Student Publications Limited (OSPL) space on Folly Bridge – modest, but functional. Greeted by Tamara, the Creative Director of *The Concordian*, I was welcomed into a lively office, fit with podcast equipment and working Wi-Fi. The workspace was given to *The Concordian* team by their university. In fact, the entire street was lined with tall office buildings exclusively used by Concordia student associations. Even more radical was the fact that working for *The Concordian* was a paid role, offering a huge incentive for involvement. Admittedly, it may not pay the bills, but it was a far cry from British student journalism, in which participation is most often completely voluntary.

Sitting in on a pitch meeting, I was struck by the sheer enthusiasm of the team. This is not to say that *Cherwell* is a particularly stress-inducing publication behind the scenes, but it is naturally a side hustle for busy Oxford students, who often balance multiple essays, tutorials, and classes in just one week of a degree which has very little to do with journalism at all. Having a dedicated journalism programme, as is the case at Concordia and not at Oxford, goes a long way to attract competent and passionate student reporters.

This enthusiasm is only fostered by the fundamental optimism that underpins North American culture, in opposition to the UK. Aidan, who spent 2 terms abroad in London, compares both sides of the Atlantic for me: the UK simply does not have the same funding nor attention for its student journalism. *The Harvard Crimson*, for example, raised $15 million dollars in 2024. The job market for journalism students is also relatively healthier across the pond than it is back home, with the Canadian Summer Jobs scheme providing businesses with funding to employ young people aged 15 to 30, a programme which Aidan tells me has allowed him to undertake internships with various newspapers across the Canadian provinces. In fact, *The Concordian* does not print at all in the summer term, precisely because the team hopes that they will be too busy with their internships to publish biweekly. You would be extremely hard-pressed to find such confidence in the UK – Media and Journalism in particular are, by far, the most competitive sectors for internships at Oxford.

It is this kind of structural support that left *The Concordian* relatively unscathed in the aftermath of Bill C-18. Their former Instagram account had been blocked by Meta, but thanks to Tamara's knack for social media, the growth of their new page has been impressive. Nevertheless, the passing of the Bill has also meant the introduction of new obstacles to maintaining an online presence. Tamara gives me a whistle-stop tour of Canadian journalism on her phone, showing me the various hoops publications must jump through to avoid being blocked. *The Concordian* is very careful not to refer to itself as a newspaper on its social media channels, and many regional broadcasters have circumvented the changes by encouraging their reporters to post articles on their personal pages instead.

Despite being blocked, *The Concordian* is not eligible to negotiate with Meta. Part of the problem, according to City Editor and former Editor-in-Chief, Aidan, is that there does not exist an official, government-affiliated regulatory body for newspapers in Canada. Student publications therefore occupy a grey area – functioning just like 'real' newspapers, but not having the same legal expertise or government funding as regional or national outlets. The same is true in relation to the UK's Online Safety Act, coincidentally passed in the same year as Bill C-18. Journalists are exempt from the "duty of care" imposed on online platforms, but the current criteria for "journalism" does not map neatly onto existing regulatory bodies like IPSO, of which *Cherwell* is one of the first student members.

On the other hand, a lack of institutional support can exacerbate the damage done by Bill C-18. Speaking to the Editor-in-Chief Mairin and Creative Director Zoe of *The Tribune* at McGill University, I discovered a vastly different situation. *The Tribune*'s funding model allows them to maintain editorial independence from McGill – when paying their tuition fees, students at the university contribute a small subscription charge to the various clubs and societies at McGill, including *The Tribune*. However, it has often been at odds with the central university, a relationship which Mairin and Zoe believe has been problematic in the wake of Bill C-18.

In particular, *The Tribune's* political leanings and history of holding McGill accountable have been difficult to reconcile with the university's affiliations. Having published stories on the restrictions faced by Palestinian offer holders, the historic use of blackface at McGill, and the lack of diversity amongst McGill academics, *The Tribune* often reports on stories that may provoke outrage towards the university. While there are many ways to get around the Bill C-18 social media bans, it is also possible for news outlets to be reported to the relevant platform for distributing such news content – an innocuous charge which may seem utterly ridiculous to British journalists, but can be weaponised against Canadian news outlets, especially student-run publications which do not have dedicated legal teams. *The Tribune's* editorial board has, time and time again, been subject to such reports, and while the perpetrators cannot be confirmed, it is perhaps a natural conclusion to assume that high-risk stories come with high-risk consequences. Mairin tells me: "We just want to reach students and show them what is really going on at their university, but without a stable social media presence, it is so incredibly difficult to be seen by them."

Nevertheless, like the hard-working team behind *The Concordian*, *The Tribune* has not been discouraged by Bill C-18, perhaps due to the doors that a long-term position on a student newspaper can open. Mairin and Zoe explain that internships and society committee positions are seen as essential at Canadian universities – the expectation is that you commit yourself to them, as a path either to "grad school" or to a lucrative career. The prestige of your university's name – or the honorific MA (Oxon), in our case – is simply not enough.

When I first reached out to *The Concordian* and *The Tribune*, I anticipated a much more dire response to what I deemed an absurd situation. Student papers would be hit hard, I thought, with social media bans being huge obstacles to obtaining readership and funding. In some ways, they were, as several Canadian publications have had to migrate from one blocked account to another. A sense of caution has certainly become part of the newspapers' operations, for fear of being reported to Instagram for simply publishing the news.

But the most striking difference I discovered in Canada was not the lack of news available to me. Instead, what I had never even considered to be possible was the sheer amount of structural support offered by the government, universities, and other bodies to these ambitious student journalists, support which instilled hope and protected the papers against Bill C-18. The perseverance of *The Concordian* and *The Tribune* in the face of Bill C-18 demonstrates just how impactful institutional support can be, not least for allowing these student journalists to believe that their work is worth fighting for.

Image Credit: Emma Heagney for Cherwell.

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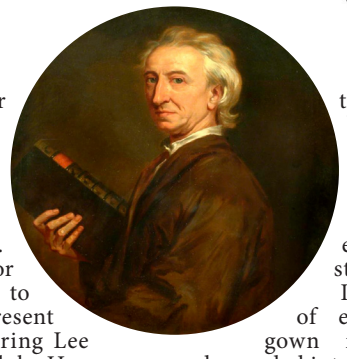
ARCHIVES
Emma Heagney

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Well, my ever adoring readers, I'm pleased to report that our favourite Jobless UncTM has done something productive. The ex-chief advisor Cromwell attempted to hand on his leaving present to the membership during Lee Kwan-Yewless's 5am club. However, this was met with uproar from The President-Neglect and Andy Burnedout, who reportedly failed to manage the required reading.

The exhausted pair were a sorry sight Tuesday morning as they explained the difficulty they'd had, and honestly we feel for them. Our chief informant told us that Burnedout and Neglect had been up all night practicing their phonics, at least, they assumed that's what those noises were.

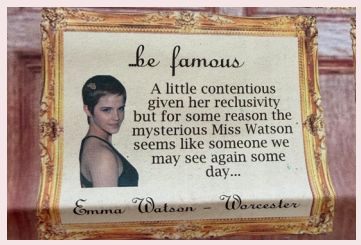
It seems change is afoot all over the house as everyone's favourite Diva-3-F galavants towards the end of his tenure. Diva-3-F's electoral reforms sent shudders down the spine of every hack in sight; It was a heart-warming sight to see both Blank Slate and Burnedout united in attempts to maintain their infinite-fresher-seccie glitch. Whilst John Evelyn welcomes change, he does lament the loss of character building ballots and argues that unless one fights 61 other candidates in a race, they have not earned their hacking stripes.

In a 'shocking' turn of events, the termly gown measuring contest descended into farce, as everyone's favourite electoral nepo-baby and Penfold vied viciously to be harassed by this term's standing committee. One can only hope that this election is free from fake electoral officials- unlike the last one.

Whilst the winds of change sweep Frewin Court, it seems Blank Slate is doing everything she can to run away from them. Focusing instead on Reform, we are pleased to see she has given Dershowitz a home as her Standing Committee candidate as well as his clients three spots on her brand new officer team. Safe to say that when Burnedout goes low she can always go Lowe-r.

With Fifty-One-May and Olaf firmly back at Burnedout's heel and Blank-Slate's deal with the devil having been signed, sealed and delivered; the membership needs more than a rules change to save them. They need a miracle.

ARCHIVES



Before the annual BNOC list, currently published in Week 7 of each Trinity term, *Cherwell* took a rather American approach, in the form of a yearbook. This particular print documents the results of the 2011-2012 academic year, complete with superlatives, awards, and some interesting reflections for 2026.

The winner of 2012's 'Best Bop' was Pembroke – a great result for this term's Editor-in-Chief/ Pembroke Entz double agent. The bop's Pokémon theme was a hit with the *Cherwell* editors of 2012, while the award for 'Best College Ball' was given to St Hugh's. It remains to be seen if the long-awaited St Hugh's ball will return in 2027, after the occasion having been cancelled almost as many times as the ball-goers of 2012 stole lifesize Greek statues, apparently.

Wading through the countless superlatives, it is no surprise that a 21-year-old in 2026 has absolutely no clue who 2012's 'most likely to become Vice-Chancellor' is, amongst other names. One face, however, stands out. The winner of 'most likely to be famous' went to none other than Emma Watson, who, at the time, was enrolled in a Master's degree at Worcester. The *Cherwell* editors note that "for some reason the mysterious Miss Watson seems like someone we may see again some day", and they were right – if we swap the screen for Summer VIIIs.

EDITORIAL



Gavriella Epstein-Lightman

Deputy Editor: Sport

The freedom of being a second-year student has still not fully sunk in. This time last year, I was a terrified fresher, determined to trawl through every item on my reading lists and arrive at lectures 20 minutes early. Walking into tutorials, my knees would buckle in anticipation of the inevitable demolition of my weekly essay.

Amid the endless choices and overwhelming number of societies clamouring for me to buy a membership, however, one thing was certain: I wanted to join *Cherwell*. At Freshers' Fair, I made a beeline for the paper, and fired off my first article pitch the following week. In Hilary, I joined the *Cherwell* team for the first time. One of my earliest memories is the half-hour walk to the Choffice in the rain without an umbrella or a raincoat. By the time I arrived at the Profiles lay-in, I was quite literally soaked to my skin. What a good start, I remember telling myself.

This year, like any *Cherwell* Deputy Editor, I'm busier than last year, but free from that fear that all freshers inevitably feel when navigating Oxford for the first time. Essays take half as long as they used to, niche coffee shops in Jericho are now familiar spots, and the infamously long walk from St Hugh's College to the city centre can now be completed in record time.

Sport so far this term has been a series of interviews: with a group of punters, a squad of Quadball players, and team captains. This week's print highlights two sports that haven't been covered a great deal in *Cherwell* before: Quadball and pistol shooting. One of my favourite aspects of the section I edit is the opportunity to highlight corners of Oxford's sporting scene that might otherwise go unnoticed. Whether niche, newly-formed or yet to be discovered, these pastimes can be fertile ground for compelling stories.



Mair Andrews

Deputy Editor: News

I am allergic to endings. I skip to the final chapter of a book when I am enjoying it and refuse to finish the final episode of any TV show I've ever binged. My tutor all but called me silly when, at my Finalists dinner, I confessed that I never wanted my degree to end. Finishing what was undoubtedly the most rewarding three years of my life, I was smarting – Oxford had meant everything to me, but I had meant nothing to Oxford. It was like a having a crush on someone who didn't even know how to say my name (it's "my-er" - just in case).

Any *Cherwell* reader dedicated enough to read the editorials knows that Oxford is an immovable force. Rarely will a comment request, open letter (see page two), or pleading email budge its outdated bureaucracy.

Even so, anyone who has ever put their name forward at Oxford, has hoped for the chance to change. Inside this weeks' pages, we have finally published a piece which occupied my summer: my fellow News Editor and I spoke to students who have been prevented from taking up their places this academic year. Each student confided in us their hope for change – to reform their home country, to revise immigration policy, to change the University's mind.

One student told us how they hope that it is only a wait, but, in the meantime, it is exciting to know that everything can change. We can't promise that one article in *Cherwell* will make the change they hope for, but we can make the most of not yet knowing the end.

The Week 7 pages – and the end of my time at *Cherwell* – are fast approaching, and I have no idea what will be in them. Though my heart will forever bleed brick red, for now, I'm hoping to make use of my red ink too.

Sharifa Al-Sudairi on becoming Saudi Arabia's first female alpine skier

'Put your blinders on, put your head down, and do the work. Don't listen to the noise. Just keep going at it, even when it doesn't make sense.'



SABA AHMADZADEH NOUGHANI

Saudi Arabia, a country renowned for its desert landscapes and scorching temperatures, seems an unlikely starting point for an alpine skier. Yet Sharifa Al-Sudairi grew up in snow-free Jeddah and pursued one of the most snow-dependent sports. Perhaps even more compelling, she started competing in her mid-30s, an age when many athletes consider retirement.

Al-Sudairi is Saudi Arabia's first female alpine skier, competing internationally as her country undergoes a period of rapid social and sporting change.

"Skiing was not part of my childhood in terms of seriously doing this competitively," she says. Instead, she grew up near the beach and remembers participating in water sports such as sailing, surfing and "just trying every sport under the sun".

Al-Sudairi tells me: "I was in every sports club in my school." She lists tennis, basketball, and "probably football at some point". Yet while Al-Sudairi's family encouraged her to do sports, she notes that "it was kind of something you do on the side".

Skiing first began as a "casual hobby" when her parents took her and her sisters on ski holidays in Switzerland: "Once a year we would go on these holidays." She laughs as she recalls being "more excited about the hot chocolates".

Her family's interest in skiing began after a friend of her father recommended that they visit a beautiful spot in Switzerland, which they enjoyed and kept returning to. She describes her father as an "adventurous traveller", the type of person "that spins the globe and says this is where we're going to travel to in the summer". So, skiing in Switzerland was something "we were going to try as a family, and that's how we got introduced to it".

At the age of 16, she moved to Switzerland for boarding school, bringing her closer to the Swiss Alps and giving her the opportunity to "really focus on skiing". But even then, she did not ever see herself becoming a professional athlete. The sport remained a "casual thing in the back of my head; there was nothing more to it, at this point of my life". What she did have, however, was what she calls a "competitive athletic bug", but her professional life would first take her in a different direction.

After studying fine arts in London and continuing with a Master's in Art and Business, Al-Sudairi worked as a gallerist, later becoming associate director at London's Pace Gallery. All the while, skiing remained a passion pursued separately from work. This changed in the early 2020s, "when my country was going through all these significant changes".

She recalls feeling intrigued when she heard Saudi Arabia was starting a snow sports federation: "I said, 'Wait, that's something I know how to do really well'".

It was a moment in her life when she felt she "really wanted to give back to my country". Joining the federation, she says, was "my way of giving back and I get to do my sport professionally". She told herself: "I don't want to look back when I'm 80 and say 'I wish I did this because that was the moment.'" Despite all the reasons that could have stopped her, she knew: "This was the chance."

The sudden change came with many sacrifices. Al-Sudairi tells me she had to miss a lot of events and personal occasions with her friends and family, but "I did that kind of happily, because it really gave me so much fulfilment, you know, doing what I did".

While Al-Sudairi had to cut out some of the social aspects of her life to prioritise her athletic goals, she has no regrets because her friends were "always with me along the journey".

For instance, when she had to turn down dinner invitations and late-night plans because protecting her sleep was important to maintaining her training and performance, her friends "understood that if I couldn't make it for dinner, then they would come and see me for lunch".

Her decision to take on skiing professionally at Olympic level in her mid-30s stemmed from "just being inspired by what my country was going through". Her journey representing Saudi Arabia began in 2022 when she took the leap and registered with the Saudi Winter Sports Federation. Her early races came at Ski Dubai, where she competed in regional indoor ski events that helped launch her competitive career.

She remembers the support she received from her Jeddah community, which she says encouraged her throughout the process: "I felt like I went to the Olympics. The love that I got from my community was incredible."

> Even on the hospital bed when I broke my arm, it made me think, 'I want to get back and show that I can do more'. I think I thrive off of this feeling.
> **– Sharifa Al-Sudairi**

Competing in the sport competitively and nationally was, at first, unfamiliar territory. "I kind of didn't know what I was doing", she admits. Yet her presence alone marked a historic first for Saudi Arabia.

When asked whether there were moments when skiing felt impossible, her answer was immediate: "Right from the start it did." Her decision to change careers and train as a professional athlete, at an age when many athletes were considering retirement, "did not make sense to many".

Someone even suggested that she take a desk job with the ski federation instead of skiing, but Al-Sudairi persisted and continued training. She recalls there being many moments where she "could have easily left skiing" but there was always "something inside me, a voice in me that said just go".

The conventional route into elite sport is typically mapped out from childhood, starting with specialist coaching, participating in junior competitions, then national teams after years of progression. Yet Al-Sudairi's journey was not planned as such, and growing up in Saudi Arabia, skiing was hardly the obvious career choice: "I think our way of getting into sports, as females in Saudi, was quite unique to other nations."

Growing up, Al-Sudairi recalls being very aware that there are misconceptions about women in Saudi Arabia and, more broadly, the Middle East, but believes that "maybe at some point you don't blame [people for having] the misconceptions".

For Al-Sudairi, the changes she has witnessed in Saudi Arabia are particularly significant for women. She describes Saudi women as "leaders".

Women in Saudi Arabia are working across sectors from some of the region's largest companies to ambassadorial roles or, like her, at the forefront of women's sport. Particularly in the past eight years, Saudi women have "slowly broken those barriers, probably in our way" and "kind of just proven to the rest of the world that women here are capable".

Even if not every woman was given these opportunities as a child, the next generation of Saudi women will certainly "know a world where they're doing the exact same thing as any girl or woman anywhere in the world".

But barriers remain. At the moment, Al-Sudairi believes the biggest challenge that young Saudi girls face in skiing is the lack of proximity to snow: "These sports need to be really accessible, and at the moment, it is a trip that you have to take."

She also considers family support and encouragement as factors in a young athlete's success. "It makes it easier", she says, believing that first and foremost, one's journey pursuing their sport "has to be a family affair, because you have to commit a lot of time to it".

Regarding her own challenges with sports, Al-Sudairi has also had her share of injuries. In 2023, during the ski season, she tore a ligament, which caused her to miss the summer training block.

> "I think what matters to people who look like me is to know that there is someone from your background. It does make a big difference to them.
> **– Sharifa Al-Sudairi**

In December the following year, she broke her arm while training in Italy: "In these moments, you stop, and you think, is this worth it?" But she recalls that "even on the hospital bed when I broke my arm, it made me think, 'I want to get back and show that I can do more'. I love the grind. I think I thrive off of this feeling."

Her results have since reflected that determination. In February 2025, she was part of Saudi Arabia's debut team at the ninth Asian Winter Games in Harbin and Yabuli, China, where she competed in the women's slalom and served as a flagbearer at the opening ceremony.

The following month, in Kolašin, Montenegro, she secured two second-place finishes across a series of International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS) and national championship races. In March 2026, she returned to Kolašin and placed fourth in the National Championships slalom and fifth in the National Junior Championships slalom. She also competed in the National Junior Championships slalom events in Kopaonik, Serbia, that month.

However, being the first woman to achieve something was never her primary motivation. "I knew I had to put in double the work", she says, and so she "wasn't sitting there being focused on the fact that I was the first".

Representing Saudi Arabia as the first female alpine skier is an "incredible honour", but equally, she "wasn't quick to go and do it because 'you might be the first'". What mattered more to her was that she "just wanted to go out and ski".

Yet she recognises the significance that being the first can have for others: "I think what matters to people who look like me is to know that there is someone from your background." She adds that "it does make a big difference to them".

Despite the significant impact representation can have, Al-Sudairi grew up having no Saudi female alpine skier role models to look up to.

Now, she has become the first herself. For a young girl considering an unconventional path, her advice is clear: "I would say, put your blinders on, put your head down, and do the work. Don't listen to the noise. There's going to be a lot of it, but just be prepared to put in the work."

She says sports, or any ambition for that matter, "has to consume your life, because every aspect of your life plays a role in whatever it is, something unconventional, challenging, difficult or not the norm that you are pursuing. Just keep going at it, even when it doesn't make sense."

Image credit: Benoît Grandjean, with permission.



OXFORD SPOTLIGHT



Leo Maudsley-Barton talks to Stuart Jeffries about Oxford, philosophy, and the present state of protest

It's safe to say that Stuart Jeffries has a complicated relationship with the University of Oxford. He is now a freelance arts journalist, writing regularly for *The Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *Spectator*, and *Mail on Sunday*. Earlier in his career, he also wrote as a jazz critic for the communist newspaper *Morning Star*, under the pseudonym Lew Lewis and penned his first book, *The Oxford Handbook*. Since then, he has written four more. He published his most recent, *A Short History of Stupidity*, last September. Before that, he was the first person in his family to attend university, matriculating at Exeter College.

As we settle down at a table just around the corner from his third-year accommodation, he tells me: "I really hated it. I came from Solihull Sixth Form. Oxford was really loud, really boorish… and it was very rugby-oriented, which was just not part of my culture."

Jeffries recounts a specific evening when the team had been on a club dinner. He says: "They were scrumming down, in the quad, and just being absolute a***holes." He then describes his retaliation. He and the drummer in his short-lived band "got a fire extinguisher and… sprayed it on [the rugby team]… which, of course, is just like a red rag to a bull. They all came tanking up the staircase and… there was a bit of a fight." He stops for a moment, then adds somewhat more bashfully: "In retrospect, we were the people who started the trouble."

For him, another stark difference between his state comprehensive and university was the quality of teaching: "The teaching I had at sixth form was really, really good, consistently… all the teachers were really passionate. And I didn't really feel that with many of the teachers I had at Oxford." Again he stops and counters himself. He considers his consistent love of philosophy: "I had a couple of philosophy tutors who I really loved, and clearly left a mark on me, because I'm still really interested."

It sets the tone for the conversation. For Jeffries, Oxford "was f***ing hard". His strong Birmingham accent set him apart, with tutors regularly 'correcting' his pronunciation and taking aim at his flattened vowels. He felt out of place with the "ethos" of the college, especially in 1981, when Exeter had gone co-ed only two years earlier. He says that a postgraduate student that he spoke to when he last returned, in 2007, described his time as "specifically… quite a bad era". But then he soon continues: "Part of the problem was mine. I wish I had been more mature."

He seems caught between the haunting memories of that "bad era", which he "suspects" he "probably repressed a lot", and the opportunities the University offered him. He mentions the weight of his place at Oxford more than once, and it is something he also wrote in his first book, The Oxford Handbook: "There was no question I could drop out… I think I was quite depressed and was probably struggling a bit mentally, but I didn't feel that I could yield to any of that." He is smiling as he considers his past: "I can't remember myself that clearly when I was young… why didn't I have a breakdown?"

Then he tells me: "You shouldn't whine too much." His tone, as it has been throughout, is light and joking. And he admits that Oxford is "absolutely worth it". He adds: "For that name alone, the name of the University." After all, it is also at Oxford where he found his love for philosophy. This love manifests clearly in his literary work, and it is obvious as we discuss his most recent book, A Short History of Stupidity. Beginning with the Ancient Greeks and taking us all the way to the artificial intelligence of our modern day, Jeffries looks at humanity's moments of 'stupidity'.

He talks to me specifically about intelligence and IQ tests: "They were first introduced in France, in 1905." This, he says, was in an attempt to help students who the government thought were being left behind: "The psychologists' idea was that if you introduced some sort of battery of tests… you would be able to help the kids who are struggling… but it very, very quickly became what the eugenics movement made of it… You get a number, and it hangs around your neck like an albatross…The eugenics movement perverted a really hopeful idea of what education could be, and instead became an absolutely racist means of trying to change society."

"Oxford was absolutely part of it… it's shocking to me that Rhodes is still up," he continues, referring to the controversial statue of Cecil Rhodes in Oriel College. This sparks another memory: "I remember when I was at Oxford there was a massive fuss about putting up the Thatcher statue in Somerville." Jeffries picketed against it. He also protested against his college's association with Rio Tinto Zinc, for its involvement in apartheid in South Africa. Although he was demonstrating against the University, he says: "You didn't feel as though you were necessarily pushing against a closed door… you could do something."

He is not sure students today have the same opportunity. With rising university fees and the omnipresence of social media, there are "consequences" and "risks" he never really thought about. He thinks about recent headlines, and says that "the panopticon of social media has a chilling effect on… protest". For him, "being a student was three years in which you were kind of expected to be a pain in the a***… for the powers that be". Once more, reflecting on his time at Oxford, he adds: "Not that I did all that much." Jeffries admits that he thinks his perspective has been "skewed" by the experience of his daughter, who took up a degree in history at Oxford last year.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

Image credit: Stuart Jeffries, with permission.

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Behind glass: Lighthouse Productions' 'The Seagull'

***Jas Mauj** reviews the latest production of one of Chekhov's most famous plays*

I want to tell you how this play ends, but I think you should watch it yourself. The thematic potency and the overall success of Lighthouse Productions' iteration of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* all came together in a great and terrible revelation. I say this not to diminish the preceding three hours in favour of a single line, but to compliment how masterfully and intentionally they were crafted, for the final sentence to have the power it had.

The Seagull is a simmering, slow play, written to subvert the theatrical conventions common in Chekhov's time. It's theatre laid bare, which is why the choice of a minimalist set works so well for this production. Beauty still flickers incandescently across the austere, almost empty, stage in the form of a talented dance crew choreographed by Anya Fuller, showing that the symbolist techniques derided within the story still have their uses. With their changing clothes, all evoking birds, they act as a sharp contrast to the monotonous blue costumes of the characters in the story. Clara Woodhead and Sophia Harris have both done well as costume designers for such an extensively large cast, and the symbolism in their clothing comes across clearly without being gaudy. Lucian Ng's original score, which evokes the glacial minimalism of a Hildur Guðnadóttir film soundtrack, adds further depth to the interplay of sterile calm and quick bursts of movement we have already seen with the costumes and staging, the string quartet expertly evoking horror when it was needed. I did find that the score could be overbearing for my tastes at some times, though that was more an issue of volume, exacerbated by microphone issues on stage on the night I attended.

Much of what I have talked about with the play's minimalism focuses on how it changes the experience of theatre through what it omits. But what makes this staging unique is what it does show, through a plexiglass box designed by Max Antoniou.

Chekhov intended for the play's principal actions to take place off-stage. Here, these key moments, including that ending, take place inside the glass box. This is an audacious move for a play that relies on subtlety for its subversive effect, and it would certainly have failed if not for the cast's tactful performances. It would certainly have failed if not for the cast's tactful performances. The cast handled the comic and tragic aspects of this polytonal play exceptionally well. I cannot commend all of them, as this ensemble is absolutely massive, but that none of the characters felt two-dimensional is a testament to both the play's enduring greatness and the cast's ability. Ezana Betru and Rufus Shutter, Chekhov veterans from Fennec Fox's Uncle Vanya in Michaelmas 2025, continue to impress. Danya Griver makes a welcome debut on the Oxford stage as Nina: it takes an exceptionally talented actress to play a rather mediocre one. I have particular praise, though, for Rowan Brown as Irina, a self-absorbed matriarch who could have easily become a shrill caricature of an ageing, vain woman, but whom she plays with exceptional life and sympathy. Because of these sublime performances, this production adds a darkly ironic and almost voyeuristic dimension to Chekhov's script, rather than reducing emotional complexity and subtlety. It changes the purpose of the story, from a revolution in theatre to an indictment of its audience. There is the excitement that comes with seeing, with being in on the secrets of these characters, followed by a sense of guilt: it almost implicates you for watching. Chekhov's Trigorin looks at a dead seagull and sees only material for a short story, and the glass invites us to do something not too different with someone else's suffering.

Lighthouse Productions' *The Seagull* is not a play to be missed. In her Director's Note, Alys Young writes that she hopes to leave us "feeling more sure of the power of theatre than ever before". By this metric, she is surely successful. Staging a lengthy, character-driven and



understated play like *The Seagull* – so poorly received in Chekhov's own day that he almost resolved to never write again – for an audience with a beleaguered attention span is no easy task. This production indicts our world's lurid appetite for other people's tragedies from TMZ to LiveLeak. Three hours long and unhurried, it still kept me perched on the edge of my seat, complicit and captivated in equal measure. A conventional part of me, however, wishes the play retained some of Chekhov's tendency to hide the action, in defiance of our demand to know and to see. It would've surely strengthened the great, explosive ending all this work built toward, that final line I cannot yet tell you about.

Image Credit: Sasha Ranawake, with permission.

How books are being burned today

ROMILLY IRELAND

It is a worrying thought that what sits on your bookshelf today could be out of reach tomorrow. You might believe book banning to be a thing of the past – the stuff of Nazi Germany or Mao's China – but restricting public access to books still happens today; you may be affected without even realising. The issue has recently resurfaced in the UK after UK markets and eBook platforms removed Sally Rooney's books. The content of her novels was not the reason for their removal; it was her pledged support of the proscribed organisation Palestine Action. Furthermore, the decision was made with Rooney's agreement to avoid legal risk. This self-censorship by a celebrated author has unsettled the UK media and should draw attention to the quieter instances of censorship around the world.

There is some confusion surrounding what it means for a book to be 'banned'. The American Library Association describes book censorship (or banning) as the act of restricting access to books due to images, ideas, or information contained that is found to be objectionable. It can also involve relocating books to less accessible sections, requiring special permission to access a book, or obscuring sections of materials from readers. It is these latter, more subtle methods that usually go unnoticed. But, they are just as problematic as outright removal.

If you are a historian like me, mass book bans are all too familiar. Examples can be found as far back as 213BC, when books were burned by the Chinese Emperor to strengthen the dominance of the governing philosophy. Most famously, tens of thousands of books by Jewish, socialist, and pacifist authors were burned by the Nazis in the 1930s for being un-German.

Today, Russia and China sit at the extreme end of book censorship. Russian law enforcement has raided major publishing offices and detained executives with charges of extremism, for the content of the books they publish. Often books are removed from shelves, given black-and-white wrappers, or text fragments are physically blacked out. In China, the CCP censors books through a state-mandated system. Problematic books are categorised as either black (political works that criticise the CCP or its history) or yellow (immoral, obscene, or 'spiritual pollution').

This runs on a case-by-case basis, and authorities frequently order school and public libraries to destroy books – in 2019 books were actually burned in Gansu province. Ironically, this article itself most likely could not be published in China. These countries, however, have historically been notorious for a low tolerance for criticism and high levels of censorship. What may be more surprising is its existence in the 'Land of the Free'.

In the US, social media has recently fixated on sensationalised stories of nationwide lists of proscribed books. The reality is not so absolute, but it's still more alarming than you might expect. PEN America describes current censorship in the US as being the worst wave of book bans since the Red Scare of the 1950s. Its most recent report from the 2025-2026 school year found 12,000 instances of book bans in public schools and libraries nationwide – the most in a single year. The states with the most bans were Texas, with 8,100, and Florida, with 3,200, both far outranking the rest. In the majority of districts (72%), state legislation drives removals, though encouraged by politicians' campaigns, pressure groups, and parents. Following Texas' Senate Bill 13 in September 2025, books are removed from its public schools on the pretext of being harmful, sexually explicit, vulgar, indecent, or profane. This has made hundreds of renowned works of fiction become inaccessible in the name of safeguarding. These include *Jane Eyre, A Clockwork Orange, The Handmaid's Tale*, and practically every work of Stephen King.

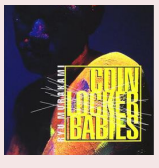
Across the pond, the UK has its own controversy around school libraries and their contents. An investigation by the Index on Censorship found that 53% of surveyed UK school librarians reported being asked to remove books from their shelves. Following the report, the Minister of State in the Department of Education reaffirmed that no books or genres have been banned by the government, and schools are free to make their own choices about which resources and books they hold. Anyway, the sample was small and in just a few cases were books actually removed. Thus far, the country seems safe from the Bible-belt style morality bans. However, Reform UK councils have also directed libraries to remove Pride displays, and discussions around what is 'appropriate' for the public are ongoing. We should be wary of what could be on our doorstep.

Having limited access to certain books on a larger scale can impact your worldview and ideology. In schools especially, book bans cut students' access to diverse perspectives, and so hinder the individuality of their thought. Under the guise of limiting books to their age and maturity, this rhetoric has removed pivotal works of modern literature from their education. What is more, those that rely more on public libraries and schools are more susceptible to the effects of these bans.

Diversity of viewpoint should not be only for those who can afford it. Independent minds will not grow from greater control; creativity does not come from gaps on the shelves.

BOOKS

What's Oxford reading?



James at Hertford recommends *Coin Locker Babies* (1980):

"Three words: Beautiful. Insane. Japanese."



Selvi at Oriel recommends *Invisible Cities* (1972):

"A beautiful, philosophical exploration of the multiple personalities a single city can have. Never have I read a book which resonated with me as much as this one, and I take it with me every time I go on holiday, so that I can properly try and understand where I'm going on a deeper level."

Image credits: 'Coin Locker Babies' and 'Invisible Cities' via Waterstones.

ART & FASHION

What's Oxford looking at?



Maximian at St Peter's recommends *Renoir and Love*:

"A beautiful, pleasant exhibition which celebrates all of life's pleasures. Makes you want to have a lovely long lunch with your friends in the park."



Barnaby at Hertford recommends *Ana Mendieta*:

"This exhibiton shows some of the best art I've seen in a long time. Ana Mendieta's work is beatufiul, dynamic, and scary in equal measure."

Image credits: 'Renoir and Love' and 'Ana Mendieta' via nationalgallery.org and tate.org

Oxford's art scene: A picture still being painted

***Mirriam Hussein** reflects on the diverse artistic landscape that surrounds us*

Who gets to make art, who gets to see it, and whose art history gets told? Oxford's artistic identity may seem firmly established: the Ashmolean's collections, the portraits and sculptures tucked away in university colleges, and the dreaming spires that have made the city famous. This is only part of the picture, look closer and a more varied artistic landscape begins to emerge.

This Michaelmas, the city offers new ways of thinking about art and its place in the world. From Mike Nelson's unsettling installation at Modern Art Oxford and Rhodes House's exhibition exploring the meaning of home, to the Ashmolean's exhibition on Aphrodite's artistic legacy and display of work by contemporary Bangladeshi artist Soma Surovi Jannat, a city is revealed whose artistic heritage is as much about asking new questions as preserving old answers.

Mike Nelson: The past is never past

At Modern Art Oxford, the past acts as a starting point for new perspectives. Mike Nelson's *Double Negative (The Clown)*, on display from 3rd October 2026 to 11th April 2027, revisits an installation he created at the gallery 22 years ago.

His dilapidated desert shack, once evocative of the turmoil of the Iraq War, returns more weathered and broken than before, its exposed foundations laying bare a disillusionment that continues to haunt the present. Visitors must navigate the fragmented structures and objects, from left-wing pamphlets and travel books to a projector flipping through self-portraits, piecing together their significance for themselves.

Constructed on-site from remnants of the original exhibition and newly created sculptures, the installation collapses together two moments in time into one unsettling environment. Nelson forces us to ask ourselves what has changed in the decades between – and what, more troublingly, has not.

Rhodes House: A home of one's own

While Nelson asks how we reckon with the past and cope with the present, *Show Me Why You Love Home* at Rhodes House explores how memory and cultural traditions shape our sense of belonging. The exhibition brings together work by Rhodes Scholars and fellows from across the world. Lana Alabbasi's mixed-media piece *Carrying a Starry Home* reimagines Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* through Saudi memory and heritage, while Palestinian embroidery and Nadine Pinede's poetic exploration of Haiti, diaspora, and remembrance illustrate how artistic expression allows us to preserve shared histories across generations and borders.

In a city that prides itself on international exchange and communication, these works reveal how Oxford's artistic life is shaped by the people who come here and the stories and traditions they bring with them. Home, after all, is not a fixed place, but something we continue to build.

Aphrodite: Beauty through the ages

Just as home can mean different things to different people, so too can beauty take many forms. Yet, for thousands of years, artists have turned to Aphrodite as its enduring symbol. At the Ashmolean, *Aphrodite: The Making of a Goddess* (8th October 2026 – 11th April 2027) traces her evolution across more than 5,000 years through over 150 objects, spanning ancient Cyprus, the Greek and Roman worlds, Renaissance Europe, and contemporary culture.

As successive societies have reshaped Aphrodite in their own image, the goddess has come to embody shifting ideals of beauty, femininity, love and desire. Yet, beneath these changing interpretations lies a figure whose image remains remarkably recognisable across the millennia. With free admission for University of Oxford students, the exhibition brings ancient and contemporary art together into one space, encouraging us to reflect on how our ideals of beauty have evolved, and what has remained unchanged.

The Ashmolean: Beyond the colonial gaze

However, the Ashmolean's engagement with art extends far beyond simply preserving historic works. In its Ashmolean NOW series, contemporary artists are invited to create new artwork in response to the museum's collections.

In *Climate Culture Care*, the fifth exhibition in the series, Bangladeshi artist Soma Surovi Jannat draws inspiration from the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest, to explore the intersection between climate change and social inequality. On display until 1st November, her work, including a thirty-foot-long scroll and imagined landscapes, places art in conversation with urgent environmental concerns. As the first solo exhibition by a Bangladesh-based artist in a UK museum, it also broadens the range of voices represented within these institutions.

A different perspective emerges in *Colonial Views of India*, on display until 13th December. The exhibition presents photographs taken by nineteenth-century British colonial officer Eugene Clutterbuck Impey, documenting people, landscapes and religious sites across India. Taken during, and by a proponent of British colonial rule, the images are far from neutral records and were often used to reinforce cultural distinctions that underpinned imperial power. Displaying them today raises questions not only about what they show, but whose perspectives they privilege, and how their colonial context informs our understanding of them.

While Jannat uses the museum's historical objects as a starting point for imagining environmental futures, revising Impey's photographs invites us to question how British colonial rule shaped the images of India that have survived. Neither exhibition requires us to abandon the past; rather, both ask us to look at it more critically.

Oxford's art scene is not simply a compendium of what past generations have valued, but an ongoing conversation about what matters to us now. By stepping beyond our usual galleries and seeking out unfamiliar perspectives, we may discover just how many stories the city's art still has to tell.

The paradox of uniformity: Who do we dress for?

TILLY STANLEY

Walking to chapel on a mid-winter Wednesday morning, you could almost be certain to hear a teacher's anguished cry: "Take those hoop earrings out!" Until two years ago, my sixth-form had only admitted boys for nearly six and a half centuries. There was still a strange ring of uncertainty in the voice of authority that pursued us with moral outrage, insisting we favour studs. Somehow, I always found myself wearing the wrong thing. The attention fell on the clothes, but inadvertently, the body beneath them too. Ours was a peculiar kind of uniform: no formally prescribed list beyond vague terms like 'smart' and 'sober colours', yet we were endlessly policed. I learned what was acceptable and what was not mostly through a series of raised eyebrows and disapproving looks. It left me wondering: what exactly made one outfit acceptable and another an offence?

Most schools in the UK have a uniform. While it is not mandated, the government advises that a uniform provides 'a sense of belonging and identity'. The logic is persuasive: if we think of uniform as something beyond just a logo or a colour, it offers a visible affiliation between an individual and the collective. Leaving school ostensibly offers an escape from such scrutiny. At Oxford University, there is no everyday uniform, but students quickly become recognisable by what they wear. Whether your friend religiously favours their rowing jacket, designer gear, Lamb and Flag merch, college puffer, or rejects these altogether, they seem to offer a shorthand about the self. The college puffer is particularly interesting because it occupies the space between anonymity and personal identification. Despite being the ubiquitous symbol of the Oxford student, a black winter coat conceals much of the outfit beneath it, allowing the wearer to blend into the visual landscape of the city. Yet the college crest and embroidered initials invoke community. I still feel a surprising sense of camaraderie when I spot a stranger wearing a Lady Margaret Hall jacket. The distance between two people who have never met can be narrowed; the coat makes us alike. We are accustomed to reading garments as statements about their wearers, their tastes, and the connections they have. Whether those readings are accurate is another matter. Clothes can tell us something about a person, but they can also tell us what we have been taught to expect.



> Adolescence is already a period of sartorial experimentation, moving between styles and trends as you try to discover who you are. However, dressing under the scrutiny of others acquires a different dimension.

Adolescence is already a period of sartorial experimentation, moving between styles and trends as you try to discover who you are. However, dressing under the scrutiny of others acquires a different dimension. You begin to anticipate what might attract comment, becoming conscious of the gap between how you want to look and how you are permitted to appear. When judgement falls on a skirt, a neckline, or a pair of earrings, it is difficult to separate criticism of the garment itself from criticism of the person wearing it. Yet, being judged for my uniform made me conscious of my own emerging style. Personally, I am drawn towards exaggerated, masculine tailoring in blazers and coats that seems to parody the patriarchal authority that sought to impose its judgement on me. Whilst now there is rarely a day that I am not in heels of some description, my principal criteria for shoes is that they must make a noise before they are seen. I would knock Blakeys into the bottom of my loafers to achieve this effect at school. Perhaps even the most individual expressions of style bear the imprint of the expectations they seek to escape.

The uniform has an afterlife. Its influence can persist long after we have left the school, sporting club, or other institution that first imposed it. For some, that is embedded in the ardent desire to escape from it, and for others a pleasure in the community it invokes. Both are equally valid reactions to its influence. I still find myself glancing behind me, expecting to hear a shout about the length of my skirt. For many, coming to Oxford is the first time living away from home and being surrounded by a set of new peers – and also the first time we have total reign over our own clothes without judgement. So how we choose to exercise that freedom carries a degree of interpretative value. And no, I almost never wear studs.

Image Credit: Rüya Oral, with permission.

Why are so many singers wearing masks?

Leandro Landolina discusses the latest music styling trend

We can all name at least one musician who has performed behind a balaclava, helmet, or hood. Whether to preserve anonymity, cultivate mystery, or construct an entirely new artistic identity, masking the face is common among those under the limelight.

Mask-wearing among musicians is hardly new. The French electronic music duo Daft Punk famously traded their faces for futuristic robotic helmets in 1999 – certainly an upgrade from the black fabric bags they donned in their early days. Similarly, the oversized, two-tone wigs the Australian pop singer Sia is known for have become a hallmark of her style, while the American music producer Marshmello fittingly sports a white, marshmallow-shaped helmet punctuated by a black, cartoonish face. Names like Deadmau5, MF Doom, Planningtorock, and Angine de Poitrine might also spring to mind.

One of the most recent faceless sensations, EsDeeKid, is a Scouse rapper who has exploded out of the UK underground scene. His meteoric success has seen him allegedly signing the biggest-ever record deal for a UK rapper, all while keeping his face obscured.

From late 2025, rumours that the rapper was actually the actor Timothée Chalamet made it as far as *The Guardian*, *GQ*, and *Rolling Stone*. This theory, often but not always tongue-in-cheek, eventually led to Chalamet featuring on a remix of EsDeeKid's '4 Raws', with the accompanying video accumulating over 40 million views on TikTok and over 15 million on YouTube.

Fascination with EsDeeKid's 'true identity' – synonymous with his government name and facial features – reveals a curious assumption: that the obscuration of his face is deemed an obscuration of his identity as a whole. Yet there is actually a great deal we know about him: that he is from Liverpool, that he grew up with a single mum in a council house, that he has a penchant for marijuana, that he hates when the plug uses AI art. Without a face to tether them to, these details are somehow insufficient. The face rules all: conceal it and identity melts away.

For many musicians, the unavoidable anatomical fact of the face is a burden, and masking up hardly eliminates the public's fixation on it. The rumours surrounding EsDeeKid exposé this thirst for the face, with one user on the r/EsDeeKidd subreddit



confessing that their "head is churning out crazy ideas about who he really is … I can't stand the desperation". Rather than accepting the concealed face, fans claw at the mask, superimposing recognisable faces onto the void it creates, even if only as ironic placeholders. On a societal level, it seems that we cannot look away, that we are pathologically incapable of laying a face to rest.

Yet, is a faceless singer such a surprise when the voice is supposedly the locus of transfixion? Most listeners familiar with an artist can instantly identify them at the sound of their vocals. The face, however, remains the seemingly irreducible nucleus of identity, even in its absence. EsDeeKid's balaclava is arguably as iconic as his Scouse accent, the absence of his face equally as remarkable as his music.

The desire to conceal one's face extends far beyond the music industry, and while it may evoke associations with criminality, it can also stem from entirely innocuous motivation – think of the self-described intergalactic space warrior and UK politician Count Binface, frontline healthcare workers, and religious veil wearers. Yet beyond political satire, medical necessity, and religious motivation, facial concealment is a growing response to increasingly pervasive surveillance in the UK and beyond. With extensive CCTV networks, commercial biometric authentication, and the rise of facial recognition technology, faces are no longer merely means of expression and communication but sources of data from which identity can be constructed, recorded, and tracked. Perhaps, then, in the 21st century, masks offer relief from the omnipresent gaze which renders faces readily observable and knowable objects.

Here lies the paradox of the modern face: at the same time as identity is seen to crystallise on its surface, this surface is increasingly malleable and transformable. The musician SOPHIE, for instance, leans into the plasticity of the 21st-century face in her well-known music video for 'Faceshopping', in which her digitally rendered face is twisted, remoulded and spliced.

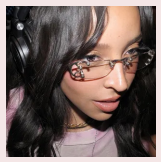
As both surgical and digital technologies make faces ever easier to transform, the notion of the all-telling face becomes increasingly difficult to sustain. Vis-à-vis the unknown, the question remains of whether the facial imaginary will warp accordingly.

And so, we wonder: will tomorrow's musicians hide their faces or invent entirely new ones, polyfaciality trumping the mask? If so, what exactly would a 'face reveal' reveal if yet another is ready to take its place?

Image credit: 'Sia live in 2016', CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons

MUSIC

What's Oxford listening to?



Jane at St Hughs recommends *Popstar*:

"Seeing Tinashe receive her highest Pitchfork rating in her nearly two-decade long career is huge for those of us who cheered when her '2 On' had it's TikTok heyday."



Tom at Lincoln recommends *Dopamine Chamber*:

"Really love the new direction Fontaines D.C. took in this album. It's grand, exhilirating, but dark and disconcerting. They are the best band of our generation."

Image credits: 'Popstar' and 'Dopamine Chamber' via Pitchfork.com

Why 'No Bad Memories' is my album of the year

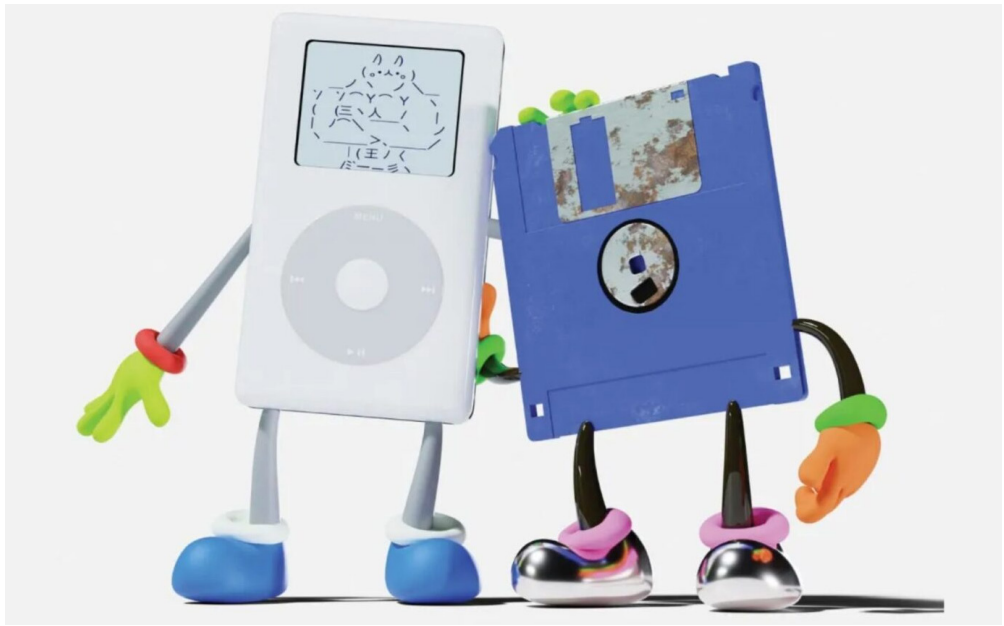
WILLOW JOPP

After a lovely evening celebrating one of my best friends' birthdays on 15th October, I returned to my room filled with a sense of hope for the future that I hadn't felt in quite some time. It had been around a week since I'd returned to Oxford for my final year, but the dread that once accompanied this change had slowly given way to an understanding that this would be a particularly beautiful period of my life. I knew I was living through a moment I would look back on fondly, and, perhaps due to my drunken state, I found myself completely in love with my surroundings and the people in my life. As I sat on my windowsill, I received a notification about the release of an album that I had been excited for for the past few months – The Avalanches' *No Bad Memories*. Listening to it, it felt as though every feeling I was experiencing – nostalgia, a childlike joy – had been meticulously assembled into one album, and I fell for it instantly. I didn't expect how perfectly my personal happiness would fit an album so preoccupied with the sounds of old advertisements and obsolete electronics, filled with the relentless optimism of a world that believed the future could only get better.

How do you describe The Avalanches to somebody who has never listened to them before? They are an Australian 'electronic' group (I use inverted commas because the term feels inadequate in this instance), somewhere between Daft Punk, Nujabes, MGMT, and DJ Shadow, yet vastly different from each. Their music comes from exploring what happens when disparate, unrelated sounds are placed alongside one another. Since the release of their beloved 2000 debut album, *Since I Left You*, they have been making infectious and danceable tunes by compiling countless samples, sound effects, and audio clips, and have garnered a passionate fanbase, myself included.

No Bad Memories, their fourth album in their 32 years together as a group, is no different. Like its predecessor, 2020's *We Will Always Love You*, it is, at its core, a concept album. But while their previous album looked to space and the future, *No Bad Memories* looks to the familiar, preceding each track with distorted jingles or glitchy ads for a myriad of fake products, each with its own aesthetic, making the album experience feel like flicking through vintage radio stations or Saturday morning TV. Its sounds sometimes overwhelm or outright sabotage one another, but somehow this makes the album feel even more alive. The 'core' tracks themselves are bouncy, fun, and make use of Mort Garson-esque synths, colourful guitar, pulsing bass, and glittery pads. The myriad of features are a testament to the friends The Avalanches have made across their career, with frequent collaborators like Jamie XX, Panda Bear, and Rivers Cuomo alongside newer voices like Portraits of Tracy. The feeling of friendship that is so integral to the album is part of what makes it so enjoyable for me. The lyrics talk about being together forever, having all the time in the world, and giving everything you have to those you love, creating a joy and sense of fun that felt genuinely refreshing to hear. Contemporary music is often expected to justify itself through the seriousness of its themes, but *No Bad Memories* doesn't need to offer a manifesto. It knows it can be excessively cheerful and still be worth taking seriously. Its nostalgia is an attempt to recover the pleasures that remain buried within the discarded sounds of the past.

The role of advertising in *No Bad Memories*, the language that permeates it like a computer virus, is part of what elevates the album above an average dance album. TV and radio commercials are obnoxious; every product wants to occupy as much of your attention as quickly and efficiently as possible. On *No Bad Memories*, as strangely comforting as they sound, adverts bombard you, constantly interrupting each other with promises of making you better, faster, more beautiful. Advertising is always in love with the future. Every product promises a better life just around the corner. The strange thing about hearing



these sounds now is that so many of the futures they once promised have become obsolete. The phones, software, and products may be gone, but their jingles remain, still insisting that tomorrow will be better. The album is fascinated by the commercial machinery that shapes our desires, but it is also fascinated by its sounds. It is at times dizzying and confusing, but in the age of AI, data scraping, commodification of social media interaction, and marketing from big companies trying to come off as humane, *No Bad Memories* is imagining techno-optimism.

Artist Richard Hamilton famously described Pop Art as "popular", "transient", "expendable", "mass produced" and, ultimately, "big business". These are precisely the qualities *No Bad Memories* celebrates and subverts at once. Like British Pop Art of the 1950s and 60s, The Avalanches assemble music using the most recognisable sounds of the modern world – the language of advertising – turning them into something both hopeful for the future and nostalgic for the past (or as my mother put it when she listened, "a collage of joyful loveliness").

This is why *No Bad Memories* has stayed with me: it has taken the disposable sounds of a bygone, more optimistic age, and turned them from music intended to sell into music which makes us feel something. I don't necessarily think the album is arguing that the past was a better time, or that the future will be. It is simply finding beauty in the sounds that were once left behind. The future may not be as bright as those old adverts promised, but while listening to *No Bad Memories*, at least, the music makes it feel that way.

Image credit: 'No Bad Memories' via albumoftheyear.com

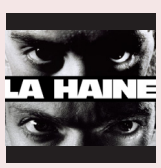
FILM & TV

What's Oxford watching?



Willow at Christ Church recommends *Wild Horse Nine*:

"Watched this film at the Venice Film Festival and it was electric. Completely hilarious in a way only Martin McDonagh could create. Amazing performances, tear-jerking in parts, and a must-watch for everyone reading this right now."



Hamza at Wadham recommends *La Haine*:

"Had to rewatch this given everything going on in France at the moment. A great exploration of the impact of the French Government and police on its youth, police brutality, poverty, and other extremely timely topics. Topped off with some of the best cinematography I've ever seen and you've got a modern classic."

Image credits: 'Wild Horse Nine' and 'La Haine' via letterboxd

Complex and compelling: 'The Traitors'

***Alice Rubli** on the newest celebrity season of the beloved reality competition show*



Reality TV series *The Traitors* has returned with its celebrity version and has topped viewing charts for a second time. People are hooked on the show where logical reasoning and random chance are simultaneously at play, in a game full of drama, tension, and cliffhangers.

The theatricality of this show appeals to more than one of the viewers' senses: outrageous outfits are flaunted, peacocks strut around the grounds, and intense soundtracks heighten the suspense. The premise is simple: a group of Faithfuls must attempt to identify the Traitors before they are murdered to claim the prize money. However, the show is rather bigger than the sum of its parts might suggest. Let's consider the parade of outlandish outfits as contestants enter the breakfast room each morning: Maya Jama (a current celebrity Traitor) waltzes in wearing a huge furry cardigan by Agro, and Joe Lycett sports a lilac feathered shirt. The daily fashion parade has not always been part and parcel of the show; in the earlier, non-celebrity series of *The Traitors*, participants wore normal, everyday clothes. This new fashion trend fits well with the elaborate aesthetic of the TV series, with drama and tension at the heart of the game. Claudia Winkleman's wardrobe is striking: her chunky high-necked jumpers, tartan skirts, and fingerless gloves make quite an impression. So, whether you're a Traitor or a Faithful, your outfits matter.

Outfits might seem insignificant, yet appearance and how the players present themselves are key to this show. In every series of *The Traitors*, one of the first things players look for is a 'change in behaviour' after Claudia has picked her Traitors. The clues to a contestant's identity as Faithful or Traitor are few and far between, so it is essential that the players maintain composure if they don't want to be called out for behaving differently.

Actor Richard E. Grant certainly made a unique debut as a Traitor by announcing his true identity within the first five minutes. The ultimate consequence of this bizarre decision was his banishment, a seemingly obvious result, but it is worth considering how the players initially reacted to Grant's revelation. Some Faithfuls still believed that he was one of them, and the group considered the possibility that his absurd declaration is simply consistent with his chaotic personality. It is clear that all players' dispositions and character traits are being constantly analysed. For example, in the third episode, comedian Miranda Hart revealed her suspicions of mathematician and broadcaster Hannah Fry, who, having turned from Faithful to Traitor overnight, displayed much more anxiety.

The audience's omniscience at home is another crucial draw of *The Traitors*. The true detective work is in the hands of the players, whereas we at home have absolute knowledge and, therefore, the ability to criticise or applaud different styles of gameplay and decisions made by the players. We would not be able to congratulate Hart's careful observation of Fry if we did not know the full picture. The abundance of strategies employed by the players allows a diverse audience to identify with different game plans. Are you an Alan Carr, chaotic and underestimated? A Ross Kemp, suspicious of everything and anything? Or a Miranda Hart, quietly observant? The show is accessible, in this sense: not only can anyone apply to take part in the non-celebrity version, but viewers can also realistically think about how they would play the game while sitting at home.

The current series, and the first series of Celebrity Traitors, present celebrities in a novel way. The producers aim to capture a diverse viewership, and they achieve this by booking celebrities known to a variety of demographics. The game works by allowing the audience at home to discover new celebrities to root for. So, if you weren't a Kemp fan before, you might be now. In the first celebrity series, Joe Marler was not particularly well-known outside of his rugby fanbase. However, his excellent detective work as a faithful on the show propelled him to new celebrity status.

Whilst some might regard a reality TV series like *The Traitors* as lowbrow entertainment, perhaps it is simply because they haven't watched the show yet. Whether the players are celebrities or not, the draw of the series lies in the complex psychological gameplay and eccentric aesthetics.

Image credit: 'The Celebrity Traitors' via IMDb.

'Rule, Britannia' and the absurdity of violent patriotism

JOE HAYES

Submerged in the water, the juvenile Tall Jim has been "dragged out of bed" by Rob, his father, and Walshy, an implied family friend. The camera pans to Walshy, who feeds the boy a cigarette and whispers, almost neurotically, to hold the loaded flare gun "tight". It is a rather startling scene in which writer and director Max Fisher begins *Rule, Britannia* in collaboration with Choose Love, a global humanitarian organisation supporting displaced communities around the world. The three characters are on board a small boat, a flimsy England flag billowing amidst the sea breeze. A simply odd exposition is reinforced by the political indexicality of the small boat itself. Certainly, in today's British political climate, wherein these objects have become synonymous with violent debates surrounding immigration, and the subsequent dehumanisation of migrants, Fisher's setting presupposes an audience to whom these associations are already familiar.

This year alone, covert investigations by ITV Exposure into Nigel Farage's Reform UK found multiple elected councillors and candidates alike expressing racist views. Video footage demonstrated such individuals labelling Muslims as "parasites" and Black children as "animals" – inexcusably foul, discriminatory behaviour that, unfortunately, is not a surprising revelation with Farage or his factory of docile automatons. However, Fisher uses his short film to ask what could occur if the followers of such offensive ideals suddenly took action; ultimately, it is a depiction of physical violence as a means of politically coerced intervention that Rule Britannia concerns itself with. Cans of beer litter the stolen boat the trio are aboard. Rob wakes up – clearly having been inebriated the night before. Upon seeing this, it is clear that Walshy and Rob have not only been consuming liquor, but also the abundance of political propaganda that has, and continues to, intoxicate a multitude of people within Britain. Hence, Fisher is able to widen the scope of his allegory, harnessing the small cast as a microcosm for the wider population of the UK.

"Walshy, where the fuck are we, mate?" Rob shouts, disoriented, "Party's over, we're going home".

Inevitably, the ship of their patriotism, of their "MAKE ENGLAND ENGLISH" rhetoric (a small wooden vessel), sinks. Luke Jacobs' cinematography and Rob Hill's underwater camera operation elicit a distinct image that defines the irony at hand. While people who embody this ideology fall into the ocean and struggle to stay at the surface, the flag of England looms above, almost mocking the viewer from its elevated position relative to us and the characters. Whilst those in political influence may insert these ideas in the heads of civilians, it is the civilian who must enact the aggressive discrimination on a daily basis. Both moved and frustrated, I was taken back to the memories of my hometown – Blackpool. Civilians protest the presence of people staying in the Promenade's hotels, in particular The Metropole, perceiving them as 'others' who intend harm. It remains so frustrating, and Fisher's allegory seemed to both be reminiscent of what I saw, and also helped explain the psychology of it, even though this certainly does not rid people of their moral actions and offences against migrants. These are just people who want to live their lives in safety.

> The short film exposes how one can be so preoccupied with defending their nation that they forget it was likely shaped, in politics and culture, by international influences.

As Walshy and Rob drag the latter's son to "make history" (in the words of Tall Jim), it reminded me of the blind foundations upon which people have been seen to enact harmful rhetoric and hate crimes, a troubling reality I've already witnessed back home. Whilst I completely understand my own privileges, the foul reality masses of people are facing to this day continues to be dumbfounding.

Another sense of irony emerges upon the soundtrack; 'Blood on the Rises', an American wartime song, plays – potentially related to the patriotism we often perceive throughout the MAGA movement being inherited by British people. However, I found it interesting to understand how, as the cast were at risk of drowning, the background of their tragedy was not a British piece of music. Dare I say, even their nationalist roar seems imported? Something wonderfully absurd lies. Watching three self-proclaimed defenders of England nearly perish to an American military song is a form of irony difficult to ignore. Their purpose to maintain some sort of authentic 'Englishness' is tied to imagery of political movements indebted to locations across the Atlantic. Fisher's choice of music therefore prods at the contradiction behind the characters' patriotism and ideological stance. In what is allegorical, the short film exposes how one can be so preoccupied with defending their nation that they forget it was likely shaped, in politics and culture, by international influences.

Although Walshy bears a knife in his pocket to threaten anyone he finds on a small boat crossing the English Channel, he and the others are eventually saved by one. A brief moment of pure humanity is portrayed to the viewer; for a moment, the migrants and the English patriot connect, wherein political stances are stripped away from the cinematic context. This does not last for long.

"I'm taking you back where you fucking came from," Walshy growls to the people in the dinghy alongside him. For a moment, an uneasy tension begs the question of whether or not the whole cast's common humanity can entertain the idea of peace. Akin to the obvious danger of sinking, it is the elephant in the room – a glimmer of hope. However, Walshy's sudden outburst seems to speak towards the inherited nature of his prejudice. It's an ideological conviction that has been bred within him, and this is not merely biological family. Rather, it is inherited from those within political power whose hate speech is legitimised by a twisted popular sovereignty. Within this chaos, Walshey's threats are both fuelled by racism whilst still being imminently physical; a stark contrast saddens the viewer as the innocent, migrant child is literally held up against the ignorant Walshy, by a knife no less.

Conversely, they are performed – and not just in the literal sense of an actor playing the role of Walshey. Rather, Fisher seems to explore the idea that the nationalism being supposedly defended here is itself a performance, one which is contingent upon the constant identification of an 'other' against whom Walshy, and also Rob, can assert their 'Englishness'. The reemergence of threats, the combat knife he holds and his flimsy England flag start to morph into props in an elaborate theatre of patriotism. The migrants' rescue makes the absurdity of this performance strikingly desperate. After all, what is Walshy defending, truly? The expected answer of nation and identity seems to tie together, both being carefully crafted, perpetuated and expected of the character.

Rule, Britannia, in this sense, becomes not just an expression of concern regarding the risks associated with physical, political extremism. Fisher moreover demonstrates the sobering truth that it has become frightfully easy for hatred to evolve into a rehearsed, outward expression of belonging. It's almost habitual. The short film's conclusion is unresolved, yet painfully clear: the eruption of anger has not settled, and amidst the mania the dinghy becomes out of control. Unnoticed, everyone is now sailing forth into a storm, one that does not distinguish between race or nationality, migrant or English patriot. All are equally vulnerable to the dire consequences of hatred and discrimination, which has been allowed to spiral beyond control.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

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Acts of time, physical giving, and words of touch

Sahana Narayan discusses the history and significance behind the five love languages

There is something particularly unsettling about feeling useless in a situation. Call it hypercompetence or whatever other word you want, but as someone who likes to think of herself as relatively capable of fixing most things for the people in her life, I despise feeling unable to fix something for someone. This became particularly apparent the other day, when I spent nearly 16 hours at A&E with a friend, playing a unique and frustrating version of NHS waiting-room musical chairs – the only name I can think of for the absolutely absurd number of waiting rooms, seating orientations, and hospital furniture types we were acquainted with overnight.

In all of my considerations and calculations, I foolishly thought that we would be there for a few hours max because I've worked in my fair share of emergency rooms (or ERs, as we call them in the US), and I've seen how these departments tend to function. But those few hours turned into us camping out overnight in the waiting room(s), where my friend was very adamant that I did not need to stay and that I should go home and "get some sleep".

This was, however, impossible, since even if I had gone home, it wouldn't have been to sleep, but to bombard her with anything I could find (medical articles, possible treatments, reassuring texts) to make myself feel useful enough to alleviate her discomfort. Instead, I took occasional jaunts to the nurses' station, conducted semi-regular enquiries, and became a professional water-bottle-filler.m

My friend, an incredibly hypercompetent and hyperindependent person, could have handled whatever she needed to handle. But just because she could do it alone didn't mean she had to – even if my help was probably minimal, maybe nothing more than a warm body in the seat next to her.

In the days that have passed since the A&E adventure, I haven't thought much about the night we were there, or why I stayed. The passage of time, though arduous and frustrating (even downright ridiculous when we hit 4am with as many answers as we had questions), was still time spent with a friend. So, from my perspective, my staying was quite simple. Two plus two equals four. The sky is blue. You're stuck in A&E overnight? So am I.

I suppose you could call it quality time. Or an act of service. Or perhaps whichever love language it is that encompasses aggressively refilling someone's water bottle from a suspicious pitcher while silently cursing NHS waiting times. But maybe that's the point. We have become extraordinarily good at naming how we love, and considerably less interested in what loving someone actually looks like.

Ask someone their love language, and they'll probably have an answer. They might even pull out online test results. I indulge the conversation every time, and even find how a person interprets the languages quite telling. But ask someone when they last felt truly seen, and they might need a moment.

Interestingly enough, while the love languages have been a part of my (and many others') vernacular for many years, they were first introduced in 1992 by Gary Chapman, a Baptist minister, who found that people give and receive love in different ways. Using his anecdotal experiences from counselling couples, he created the five languages of love: acts of service, physical touch, words of affirmation, quality time, and gift-giving. His book sold over 20 million copies and has influenced clinical practice, such as how these love languages can teach us things about value-based care, therapeutic practices, and even drive public health messaging, such as the Alzheimer's Association's 2025 Love Language Campaign and ZERO Prostate Cancer's Caregiver Love Language Initiative.

> "Ask someone their love language, and they'll probably have an answer. They might even pull out online test results. I indulge the conversation every time."

And yet his work has been debated for years. One 2022 study found higher relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and empathy between couples with greater intra-couple love language matches. But recent research likewise finds Chapman's model to be overly narrow, saying that it does not offer a sufficient vocabulary for all that is encompassed in love. What do we do to ourselves by trying to find the vocabulary for loving behaviour? Does love, and the ways in which we show it, need categories?

I've been thinking about the spaces between these categories, whether they are those of Chapman's traditional five, or from a different model entirely. I think about the friend that remembers the date of an important meeting; the tenderness of a "text me when you get home" before you part ways; someone coming over to help you clean or organise when it's all been a little overwhelming.

These gestures aren't particularly extraordinary. And perhaps they do fall into the neat categories that Chapman gives us to talk about love. But there are also the words that touch and make you feel seen in a way that can sometimes feel exposing.

There's the way you give yourself to someone when you show them physical affection, be it platonic or romantic, because there is always a moment of sheer vulnerability when waiting to see how it will be received.

Read the full article online at cherwell.org

The psyche behind a museum gift shop

ABIGAIL CHRISTIE

Like most soon-to-be finalists, I spent the majority of my summer vacation after second year researching and preparing for my dissertation. But in the face of blistering British heat, and seduced by the temptation to soak up the opportunity to do very little, extensive research proved, under no uncertain terms, to be mildly challenging. However, what eventually incentivised me to put pen to paper was the excitement of seeing the objects of my study in person, at the British Museum. But, once I had made the very long and arduous journey from my middle-of-nowhere hometown to London, it wasn't necessarily the museum that I ended up being desperate to see before anything else. Quite shamefully, it was the gift shop.

Bathed in sunlight under the sweeping glass ceiling, the museum's gift shop was almost an exhibition in itself: it was the epicentre of buzzing activity, sprawled across the vast expanse of the circular Great Court. At the British Museum, the gift shop was not simply a means of exit, snagging your attention as you dragged your tired feet. It was as carefully organised, and as thoughtfully curated as the museum's galleries.

But there was something that tugged at my undulating admiration of the sea of souvenirs and replicas dotted across the shop. Maybe it was in the way an artefact as revolutionary and monumental as the Rosetta Stone was now available as a mass-produced box of bite-sized chocolates. Or perhaps it was the amusement at what appeared to be a Roman soldier, equipped with a shield and spear, but now reincarnated as a collectable rubber duck. But such gimmicks certainly aren't unique to the British Museum. Up and down the country, and across the world, there will be something in a museum gift shop that is so bizarre, and so far removed from its historical context, that it will make you pause and raise an eyebrow.

The bemused scepticism towards what might be for sale in a museum gift shop isn't, of course, a revelation. Each time I've found myself meandering through a gift shop, there is a quote that perches front row in my mind, one that guides my hand as I sift through the colourful displays, and squints disdainfully as I choose something to add to my ever-growing collection of miscellanea:

"*Endless processions of people in graceless clothing file through these palaces, staring at the gold cups and the silver bowls, which are not even used any more. Then they go to a sort of market inside the palace and buy pictures of these things, or miniature versions of them that are not real silver and gold. That is why I say trash.*"

Margaret Atwood, in *The Penelopiad*, puts these words in the mouth of Penelope, as she talks to the reader from the Underworld and reflects on the events of her life, as described in Homer's *Odyssey*. In this particular quote, Penelope is perplexed by the farce of modern museums: *we* are the "people in graceless clothing", museum gift shops are the "market inside the palace", and the historically-inspired souvenirs and knickknacks for sale are the "trash". The disdain towards this particular niche in the consumer market is palpable – to Penelope, we are philistines fumbling through the materiality of the past, and certainly not 'connoisseurs' of history.

Many people will doubtless share Penelope's criticisms, because there absolutely is something ever-so-slightly absurd about a Roman-duck hybrid, and its relevance to wider cultural history is questionable. Should this be perceived as reducing the achievements and culture of entire civilisations to mere merchandise? By their very nature, museums are institutions that are dedicated to preserving the often priceless, and typically one-of-a-kind, archaeological remnants of the past. There is a certain irony to all of this: these priceless objects, which thousands will flock to admire and observe every year, are replicated, mass-produced, packed in storage containers, stocked on shelves, and slapped with a price tag rounded to the penny.

Yet as someone whose desk is littered with ceramic miniatures – the Colosseum, an assortment of Greek vases, the Parthenon, you name it – and has carried a Roman coin replica on a keychain for years, this disparity has always felt difficult to reconcile. But now, having visited many gift shops, it seems this very contradiction is also its greatest strength. For many, an interest in history is limited to the words of scholars on a page and an artefact sealed carefully behind glass panes. Replicas and souvenirs offer access to history in ways the original objects cannot. At Oxford, I am in the unique and privileged position to be able to handle ancient artefacts as frequently as I write essays about them. For most, opportunities to tangibly interact with history, whether by handling an ancient vase or tracing the outline of a mosaic, are few and far between. The physicality of history has been an enduring passion of mine, so although I appreciate that reproductions and replicas cannot replace originals, what's inside a museum gift shop can sometimes offer something just as unique: history that can be carried home, where its provenance can become intimately intertwined with an identity and heritage of your own.

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HOROSCOPES



Aries

Your tutor WAS wrong about that essay. You did a great job.



Taurus

Four Candles tonight?



Gemini

Don't forget to say thank you to your scout.



Cancer

You really ought to check your emails more often.



Leo

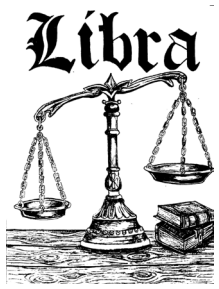
Going to a new library will give you tremendous luck.



Virgo

Everyone knows that Virgos wear the best costumes.

HOROSCOPES



Writing for *Cherwell* will bring you great fortune.



Be bold. Be brave.



There is no such thing as going out too much during Halloweek.



Be wary of a triple shot espresso before an essay.



Love can be found in Plush on Halloween… or so they say.



Stop talking in libraries. Everyone finds it annoying.

CHERWELL-FED

Cooking for friends: An apology, served hot

EVA ZIELKE

My friend said tentatively in the first week of living in our out-of-college house, just after they had put down a delicious plate of fish and rice: "It's probably a bit bland." Without us even having tried a bite, the review had already been spoken into existence. My friend seemed far more conscious of their imagined shortcomings, anticipating a judgement that hadn't even crossed our minds. Somehow, they seemed determined to make us aware of the meal's imperfections before we'd even picked up our forks. This led me to realise that cooks and diners are rarely eating the same meal.

In second year – and for those of you who were better than I was in first year and took advantage of the student kitchens, rather than tunnelling through your UPay in the first three weeks of term – the opportunity to cook for your friends is not only a bonding experience, but also a revealing exercise in how we judge ourselves. It can demonstrate just how differently we judge our own efforts compared to those of people around us, and how easily our hypercritical expectations can overshadow what we've actually achieved.

When you cook for your friends, you are not simply tasting the end result of the bolognese in front of you, but also inevitably comparing it to the slow-cooked beef ragù tagliatelle you had imagined making: the version promised by an ambitious recipe, slightly silkier, properly al dente, requiring the niche type of Parmesan you discovered too late. Your guest has the considerable advantage of never expecting this imaginary version, but we often forget this. Perhaps that's why, somewhere between hob and table, another course gets added to the meal: the apology.

"It's nothing", "ignore the burnt bits", "sorry, it's a bit dry", "I don't know if it's any good", "it looked better in the recipe". Most of us will have heard these phrases from hosts, whether friends or family, often before they have even finished handing out the plates, and certainly before anyone has even eaten anything. At university, when we're stressed about deadlines, buried under reading lists, or recovering from a night out, the act of buying ingredients, chopping, cooking, and dishing out an entire meal requires an enormous amount of physical and mental effort. And yet so many of us are determined to immediately insist that the thing we spent an hour making is "nothing". But why are we so intent on diminishing the gift at precisely the moment we give it?

For much of our time at Oxford, the food we eat doesn't necessarily demand this kind of vulnerability because it isn't really ours. In first year especially, meals can feel remarkably institutionalised. Hall decides what we eat and when we eat it, formals turn dinner into ceremony, cafés are excused as study venues, and even a humble meal deal gets crammed between a tutorial and the next thing on the calendar. Eating simply became another activity Oxford timetabled for us.

Of course, this isn't everyone's experience. Some arrive capable of producing dinner without consulting Google, cooking from their first week. But, for me, second year marked a change in my own, and many of my friends', relationship with eating. Going out for dinner with friends has increasingly turned into "do you want to come over for dinner?" instead. And I found that feeding your friends, rather than simply eating alongside them, felt like a surprisingly significant change.

Unlike cooking, few creative pursuits have such immediate audience participation. Nobody hands five housemates an essay and then watches their faces as they read it, anxiously interrupting after the first sentence to explain why it could have been better, had they not run out of time. The pre-emptive apology, therefore, offers useful insurance. We anticipate the flaws in our own efforts before others can, reassuring ourselves that, on the off chance our guest does find the pasta slightly overcooked, at least we got there to point it out first! What we believe is modesty can often look suspiciously like self-defence.

Student kitchens should really cure us of culinary perfectionism. I remember attempting a new-and-improved version of a teriyaki salmon dish I had made countless times at home. This time, however, I was faced with a hob that had only one tentatively working ring, and armed with a blunt knife of uncertain provenance that my housemate assured me they had washed earlier – hadn't they? If anything can teach us to abandon our expectations for restaurant-quality results, it's the experience of trying to cook something vaguely edible under these circumstances.

Oxford can also make us particularly attuned to evaluation, just as we expect the acceptance or rejection that our tutors frequently fire at us. It's unsurprising, then, that we treat dinner the same way: something is laboured at, produced, presented, and then awaits judgement. This pressure-cooker environment quite literally extends to the kitchen, and it's easy to forget that your friend coming over for pasta isn't a world-renowned chef in disguise. Looking at our own attitude to serving food to friends can be really valuable.

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A decade to celebrate: Spiced Roots turns ten

★★★★★

PRIYA BURROW

Ten years ago, a small Caribbean restaurant opened its doors on Cowley Road. This year, Spiced Roots celebrates its tenth anniversary, and Oxford has every reason to join the party. In that decade, it has given the city warm welcomes, packed evenings of music and rum, a home for its Caribbean community, and, not least, an octopus salad I have not stopped thinking about since.

Ask yourself when you last went to a Caribbean restaurant. Now consider when you last went to a French or an Italian one. For most of us, the latter comes far more easily, and that is a shame, because Spiced Roots is one of a kind. There is nothing else quite like it in Oxford, and a meal here makes a joyful case for why Caribbean food should take its place among the cuisines we ordinarily celebrate most. Its success is no accident. Since opening in 2016, Spiced Roots has taken the overall prize at the Oxinabox Food Awards and become one of the city's most cherished independent restaurants. Its owner speaks about it with infectious pride. The name honours his heritage, and he wants the restaurant to be a hub for people, as well as a place to share his culture. What is striking is how little credit he will take for any of it. He sees himself not as the author of his menu, but as the custodian of recipes long shared communally in Trinidad and handed down through his own family, in which his grandmother cooked and his aunt catered. "It's not innovative," he insists – rather, it is authentic and cooked the way it is supposed to be. Time spent across the islands explains why the menu celebrates the whole Caribbean, instead of just one corner of it. The experience starts the moment you arrive. We were welcomed with a hibiscus ginger beer, and every drink that followed matched its quality. The homemade ginger beer was unlike any other I have ever tasted – sweet yet startlingly fresh. Rum lovers are spoiled here too: the bar holds well over 100 sipping rums, and the team runs masterclasses for anyone who suspects, rightly, that rum deserves the reverence we usually save for cognac.

> Above all, Spiced Roots is a sanctuary for the wider community, and especially for Caribbean people in Oxford. It is a place to connect with heritage.

My friend and I shared a Kingfish Steak (£19.50) and the Boneless Curry Goat (£20.50). The Kingfish was extraordinary, with bold, beautifully judged flavours. The Curry Goat, marinated for 48 hours and cooked in goat bone stock with curry leaves, coconut milk, carrots, and potatoes, was hearty and warming in a way that felt almost familial, as though it had been made with care for generations. Both portions were generous, as were the doubles (£6.95): piled with chickpeas cooked with garlic, cumin, and curry leaf, finished with cucumber, tamarind, and hot sauce. Then came the Grilled Octopus Salad (£8.95), the dish that made the evening. The octopus is steamed, marinated in garlic, coriander, Scotch bonnet, and lemon, then finished on the grill and served over avocado, baby leaves, cucumber, and tomato beneath a bright pineapple chow. It arrived beautifully presented and tasted vividly fresh. It was the best dish of the night, the best I have eaten in Oxford, and genuinely one of the best things I have ever eaten.

Yet the food is only part of the joy. The staff are kind and hospitable, plainly delighted to see you and proud of what they serve, and that warmth is why people keep coming back. Spiced Roots works as well for a single drink as for a full dinner, and the team caters for larger events too. Its calendar is a celebration in itself, with live music, Saturday sip-and-paint evenings, and cocktail-making sessions.

Above all, Spiced Roots is a sanctuary for the wider community, and especially for Caribbean people in Oxford. It is a place to connect with heritage: the owner grew up in the Caribbean, and he wants those in the diaspora to reconnect with their roots. The restaurant works in partnership with the Oxford African and Caribbean Society and, most significantly, is involved in the Cowley Road Carnival, where town and gown come together. We, as a community, have an obligation to support the sanctuaries of Oxford, and few are as worth celebrating as this one.

Ten years in, Spiced Roots is looking firmly ahead: to the carnival, to its work with charities, and to making the restaurant a place where Caribbean history is learned, as well as tasted. Visiting is about far more than trying something new. This is a restaurant whose impeccable food is somehow the least impressive thing about it. It has given Oxford a great deal, and the next ten years promise even more. Caribbean food belongs at the very top of Oxford's table, and so does Spiced Roots.

RECIPE

The Brookie

Ingredients:

- Butter
- Brown sugar
- Eggs
- Vanilla
- Plain flour
- Bicarbonate of soda
- Salt
- Cornflour
- Chocolate chips
- Dark chocolate
- Caster sugar

Instructions:

1. Mix together 115g butter and 125g of light brown sugar then add 1 egg and ½ tsp of vanilla.
2. Add 225g plain flour, ½ tsp of bicarbonate of soda, a pinch of salt, a tbsp of cornflour, then add in your chocolate chips, and place into the freezer.
3. Melt 100g dark chocolate with 100g butter then add 2 eggs and mix.
4. Next, add 60g plain flour, 20g cocoa powder and mix again, before adding chocolate chips.
5. Pour this mixture on top of your cookie dough and place in the oven (180*C) and bake for 25 minutes.
6. Leave to cool. Then enjoy! Serves a (college) family.

My quest to visit all 22 Bodleian libraries

JADE KOSCHE

Somewhere along the way in my DPhil, I developed an unusually strong interest in library toilets. This wasn't exactly the sort of thing I anticipated caring about when I arrived at Oxford. After spending eighteen months visiting every single library in the Bodleian network, I've discovered that the difference between a wonderful working library and a miserable one often comes down to the most mundane things: a comfortable chair, decent lighting, a desk at a height made for an average-sized human, and whether accessing the toilet requires a minor expedition.

Between March 2025 and October 2026, I visited all 22 Bodleian libraries, from the magnificent historic reading rooms of central Oxford to the obscure medical libraries tucked away inside hospitals. What started as a way of exploring different places to work gradually became a personal challenge. Once I'd visited enough, it seemed ridiculous not to finish. Of course, even counting the libraries is complicated, since the University spent much of my challenge rearranging its library estate. Several smaller faculty libraries have been consolidated into the new Bodleian Humanities Library at the Schwarzman Centre, while other collections have moved or merged. For my purposes, I counted 22 distinct library locations, treating the various reading rooms within the Old Bodleian, for example, as one library. And having spent hours actually working in each one, I have many thoughts.

Beauty is not everything

Oxford is hardly short of beautiful libraries. The Radcliffe Camera is iconic, Duke Humfrey's Library feels like something out of another century, and the Old Bodleian's Upper Reading Room is one of my absolute favourites. But my personal beauty queen is the Taylor Institution Library. Find a seat at the west-facing end of the upper gallery around sunset, and you'll understand why. Watching the evening light fall over Oxford from that magnificent old reading room is difficult to beat. Unfortunately, beauty doesn't necessarily translate into productivity. I want a chair that doesn't leave my back aching after six hours, a desk at a sensible height, and ideally somewhere to rest my eyes other than a wooden partition directly in front of my face.

The new Bodleian Humanities Library gets this balance remarkably right. It's modern, spacious, aesthetically pleasing, and genuinely designed for people to work in. The Old Bodleian's Upper Reading Room surprisingly also manages to combine historic grandeur with a comfortable working environment. Meanwhile, the Gladstone Link deserves an award for the least inspiring study environment. Essentially an underground bunker filled with bookshelves, it makes me wonder why anyone would voluntarily spend their afternoon there when Oxford has so many beautiful spaces above ground.

The surprisingly important business of basic facilities

The longer I spent exploring libraries, the pickier I became about things I'd previously taken for granted. Temperature, for example, can make or break a working day. During Oxford's summer heatwaves, I discovered that the Girdlestone Memorial Library at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre has wonderfully effective air conditioning. Forget the picturesque reading rooms: when it's unbearably hot outside, a tiny hospital library with functioning climate control starts looking extremely attractive. Then there are the toilets. Some libraries have conveniently located facilities. Others require you to navigate several floors, multiple doors, or narrow staircases simply to answer nature's call. At the Radcliffe Science Library, the number of times I found myself scanning my Bod card to get through yet another door made the experience feel vaguely reminiscent of a maximum-security prison.

More seriously, I spent part of this challenge on crutches after developing bilateral Achilles tendinitis. It gave me a very different perspective on accessibility. At the Vere Harmsworth Library, for instance, the lifts had apparently been out of order for a considerable time. I could, with difficulty, hobble up the stairs. But what about someone using a wheelchair? Having accessible facilities is rather meaningless if the means of reaching them don't work. The librarians were sympathetic and helpful, but the experience made me realise just how much Oxford's beautiful historic and modern buildings can fall short of providing genuinely accessible working environments for all readers.

The peculiar rituals of Oxford libraries

If there's one thing Oxford does exceptionally well, it's making an ordinary activity feel like an elaborate institutional ceremony. The Weston Library takes the prize for the most intense security procedures. Everything goes into a locker, water is forbidden, and upon leaving, you're asked to flip through your notes and open your laptop to prove you haven't somehow concealed a priceless manuscript inside.

To be fair, the precautions make sense. On one visit, I watched a researcher carefully unroll an enormous historical scroll across a reading-room table with a librarian's assistance. It was an extraordinary sight and a reminder that these aren't merely attractive study spaces – they're working repositories of remarkable historical collections. Still, there's something wonderfully Oxford about needing to prove you haven't smuggled a medieval manuscript out in your laptop.

The 'hidden gems'

One of the greatest pleasures of this challenge was discovering libraries I would otherwise never have visited. The Education Library is a particular favourite. It feels like a house converted into a library, with large windows, greenery, cosy reading nooks, and even rocking chairs. It also has two gloriously ergonomic workstations, although securing one can feel like winning a small lottery.

The hospital libraries were another revelation. The Cairns Library at the John Radcliffe is surprisingly spacious, although finding it involves navigating what feels like a hospital labyrinth.

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OXFORD *TINY LOVE STORIES*

Long after the last time she knocked, her quiet presence lingered in the corner of my room. The wall separating our rooms was thin; I still hear her singing. The boundary between reality and fantasy blurs, false memories born from the blanket of night that covered every whispered "I love you". Improvised dialogue consumes my thoughts, waking or otherwise. An unfinished, ever-drying oil painting outlines our empty shape, two figures made indistinguishable. She once told me there was no color in her world without me; while my days are now grey, at least my memories of our unrealized past are technicolored.

Anonymous

CHERPSE.

Oxford's blind dating

An evening at the LJ Cocktail Bar: Will the *Toy Story* references kill the Buzz before it's even begun?



Mr To-Infinity

First impressions?
Reassuringly normal (who knows what a blind date can yield, even one arranged by the fates of *Cherwell*'s Cupid). She was beautiful, slightly flustered.

Did it meet your expectations?
She was great. Smart, funny, candid, beautiful. We got on well and had a nice time. So yes.

What was the highlight?
Talking about folk music, her love of Dylan, and learning about the novel she wants to write and why.

What was the most embarrassing moment?
Probably the leaving and sensing her not really feeling a spark or desire to date again – then a slightly awkward hug, and feeling my 'let me know if you'd like to do something again' sort of fall to the ground with a sad thud, like an undesired Woody and Buzz Lightyear at the start of *Toy Story 4*.

Describe the date in three words:
Fun, surprising, disappointing.

Is there a second date on the cards?
I would have loved to. Not that I necessarily felt I'd met the love of my life, or even of Michaelmas, but I certainly felt that a second date would be desirable. Alas, I fear: no.

Miss You've Got A Friend In Me

First impressions?
We met at a completely empty cocktail bar, which meant that we had to order our drinks immediately, before we'd even learnt each other's names. He was very courteous considering I was late, and our conversation started with us exchanging nightmarish dating app stories.

Did it meet your expectations?
Yes, I had a fun night and it was great to meet someone new.

What was the highlight?
The highlight of the date was that he actually listened to me! It's a skill I've found severely lacking in men I've been on dates with. He even made jokes recollecting things I'd said earlier in the conversation!

What was the most embarrassing moment?
When I was late – I left things very last minute, and he later told me that he'd gotten an Uber there just to make sure that he was on time for the date! I was mortified.

Describe the date in three words:
Relaxed. Sweet. Good-cocktails!

Is there a second date on the cards?
Unfortunately there just wasn't really a spark, but I had a really good evening.

A sport inspired by Harry Potter has come into its own



GAVRIELLA EPSTEIN-LIGHTMAN

It isn't often that fiction becomes reality. But that is exactly what has happened to Quidditch, now named Quadball.

The sport originated in the pages of the Harry Potter books in the late 1990s. A few years later, in 2005, two students at Middlebury College, Vermont, decided to transform an imaginary sport into a real one. Devoid of flying broomsticks and magical spells, the students nonetheless created a sport fit for muggles. Since then, it has grown rapidly and is now played in more than 40 countries worldwide.

Quidditch arrived at Oxford in 2011. The Oxford University Quidditch Club (OUQC), founded by student Angus Barry, was one of the first of its kind in the UK. In time, the club's membership grew large enough to accommodate two teams: the Radcliffe Chimeras and the more relaxed second team, the Oxford Quidlings.

The rules of Quadball might appear complex but are, in reality, surprisingly simple. There are seven players per team, each of whom plays with a broomstick (or PVC pipe) between their legs as a handicap. The keeper guards their team's three hoops; three chasers try to throw a volleyball (or quaffle) through the hoops to score; and two beaters throw bludgers (or dodgeballs) at opponents to immobilise them. Twenty minutes into the game, a referee acting as the snitch, wearing a yellow flag, enters the field, and each team's seeker must catch it.

Watching Quadball for the first time, I was taken aback by the chaos of the sport: with four balls in play simultaneously, it is akin to watching three different sports at once. To seasoned Quadball players, like current OUQC Captain James Kramer, the chaos is what makes the sport so enthralling. "Once you've played for a while, you get a better reading of a game, and the chaos becomes a tactical opportunity," Kramer tells me. "There's so much opportunity for tactical depth, exciting plays and innovation."

Recently, the sport has distanced itself from Harry Potter. In 2022, the sport's international governing bodies announced it would change its name from Quidditch to Quadball, citing Rowling's "anti-trans positions". This came in response to JK Rowling's controversial comments about transgender people, but also as part of an effort to establish an identity for the sport independent of its fictional origins.

"We clearly were Quidditch when the sport was founded, but I do think the sport has moved as far away as it can from that," Kramer tells me. Whereas a decade ago, 90% of players were Harry Potter fans, now "in the two years I've been at the club, I don't think we've had a single person join who is a Harry Potter fan," Kramer adds. "We have built an identity as Quadball, and we have a very LGBTQ+ inclusive community," he says.

> "It's quite weird to get a message from a coach saying, 'Hey, do you want to go and play a sport internationally?'" Yates tells me. "I felt like I can't really turn that down, can you?"

Kramer tells me that he was initially uneasy about trying out Quadball as a fresher because of its connections to Harry Potter. Its Quidditch origins were a "barrier to entry" rather than what drew him to it in the first place. "It was only when I did see it for what it is as an actual sport with its own community and own identity that I joined," he says.

At a recent Quadball training session, I spoke to star performer Thomas Yates, who began playing the sport only last year. Since then, his rise in Quadball has been dizzyingly fast. At the British Universities Quadball World Cup, he played well in a match defined by muddy, wet conditions, and he was scouted by Team England. He subsequently attended England training sessions and played his first international match over the summer. "It's quite weird to get a message from a coach saying, 'Hey, do you want to go and play a sport internationally?'" Yates tells me. "I felt like I can't really turn that down, can you?"

The OUQC has enjoyed a surfeit of incredible moments, but one match in particular elicits excitement at its mere mention at Quadball training. It was the final of the British University Quadball Cup in 2026, pitting arch-nemeses Oxford against Cambridge. This was a match defined by delicate skill, fierce tenacity, and tactical nous. After a hesitant start, Cambridge rediscovered their form, inching ahead of Oxford in goals. They had control of the dodgeballs, and momentum was in their favour. There was one snag: Cambridge did not have the yellow flag (or snitch).

At twenty minutes, the flag runner entered play, confounding seekers on both teams with his unyielding athleticism and nimble speed. As he avoided capture, Cambridge surged ahead on the scoreboard, leaving Oxford staring down defeat. After 23 minutes of fruitless pursuit, Oxford had just three minutes before the game's time cap would automatically hand Cambridge victory. Yet, in those final precious moments, Oxford's seeker caught the flag. Two more goals in the last 90 seconds sealed Oxford's victory. It is no overstatement to call it a nail-biting finish.

"It is one of the highlights of my playing career," Kramer says. "I would say that's probably the most intense, exciting game I've played." He stresses that this was a very abnormal game – the time cap is typically applicable in just one per cent of games.

A more representative Quadball game was the semi-final against Edinburgh at the same tournament. It was played in terrible conditions – the ground was a mudbath. Oxford was three or four goals behind throughout, and was desperately trying to wrestle its way back into contention. Despair quickly became delight when the Oxford seeker caught the yellow flag, propelling the team to victory. "It was just so dramatically perfect," Kramer says.

As I left the Quadball training session on an incredibly cold October afternoon, I felt that there is a magic to the game that owes less to its Harry Potter allusions than to the bonds of community it creates.

Image credit: Ajantha Abey, with permission

SPORT SPOTLIGHT



***Freddie Lewis-Hedley** interviews Robin Munday, Captain of Oxford University Pistol Club*

When I sit down to interview second-year Ancient and Modern History student Robin Munday, he happens to be wearing his Swiss Glacier Pistol Club fleece. The Oxford University Pistol Club (OUPC) captain is right to sport his discipline with pride. In his first year at the club, the team beat Cambridge twice: in an official varsity match in Hilary, and an unofficial competition in Switzerland during the long vacation. A few further victories against other university teams in the summer also contributed to OUPC's "moderate success" last year, he tells me.

This year does not look set to disappoint either. Competition has not started yet, but since an appearance at Freshers' Fair, the club's weekly training sessions at Iffley Road Sports Centre are fully booked, and its group chat has over 200 members. "There are some very talented freshers," Munday tells me. "By and large most have never touched a gun before, but some of them have and are very promising shots." Munday mentions how some of the new members are getting to grips with trickier techniques, like aiming at targets that collapse when the bullet hits.

The incoming pistol shooters could not be in safer hands. "I'd always grown up around shooting," Munday says. "The first time I was on a shooting range I was a few weeks old, and I started shooting aged five, with an air pistol I got for Christmas. When I was six, I was on centre-fire, more powerful revolvers." Munday started competitive shooting at the 2015 Swiss Federal Shooting Festival aged ten, the youngest of around 35,000 competitors. He went on to win the under-21 division of the Swiss Feldstich contest in 2024, and a year later placed third.

His affiliation with OUPC, though, started well before its recent successes. Munday's parents met at OUPC as undergraduates. His father served as "one of the early captains" after the club broke off from the Rifle Club in 1976, and his mother became captain a few "generations" later. He still owns and occasionally wears a size XS OUPC polo shirt which the club gave his parents as a gift for him.

"For a very long time, I've wanted to become captain of the OUPC – I'm proud partly because I'm following in my parents' footsteps," Munday tells me. The club's events lined up for this year will certainly make his tenure an exciting one. "In a couple of weeks there's the Oxfordshire Rifle Association Gallery Rifle Championships, and, like every year, there's the Faded Blues." In part of the latter event, Munday tells me, OUPC alumni compete against current members, who, he adds, "are almost always defeated". Whatever the case, there cannot be anyone better placed than Munday, with his unique overview of OUPC's history, to take part.

UPCOMING

Rugby

6th November
Iffley Road
Men's Blues vs. Crawshays Welsh

Hockey

7th November
Away
Women's Blues vs. Marlow 1

Football

12th November
The McGroup Stadium
Oxford City vs. Oxford University

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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

PUZZLES

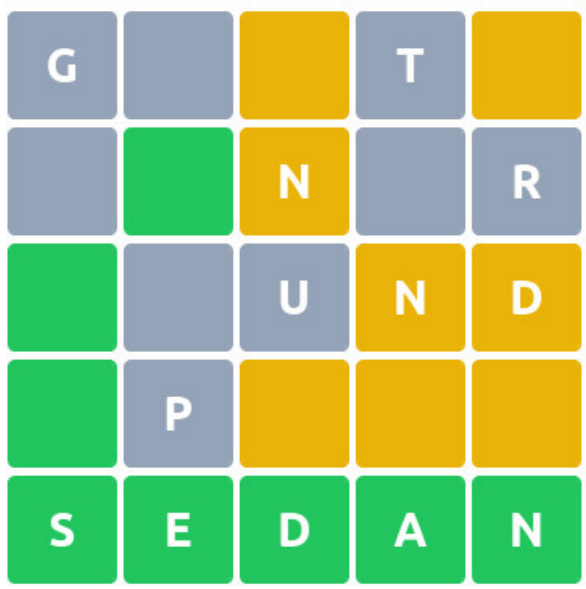
Butterfly Sudoku by ZOË MCGUIRE

This 12x12 grid is formed from four overlapping 9x9 grids that can't be solved independently. Good luck!

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

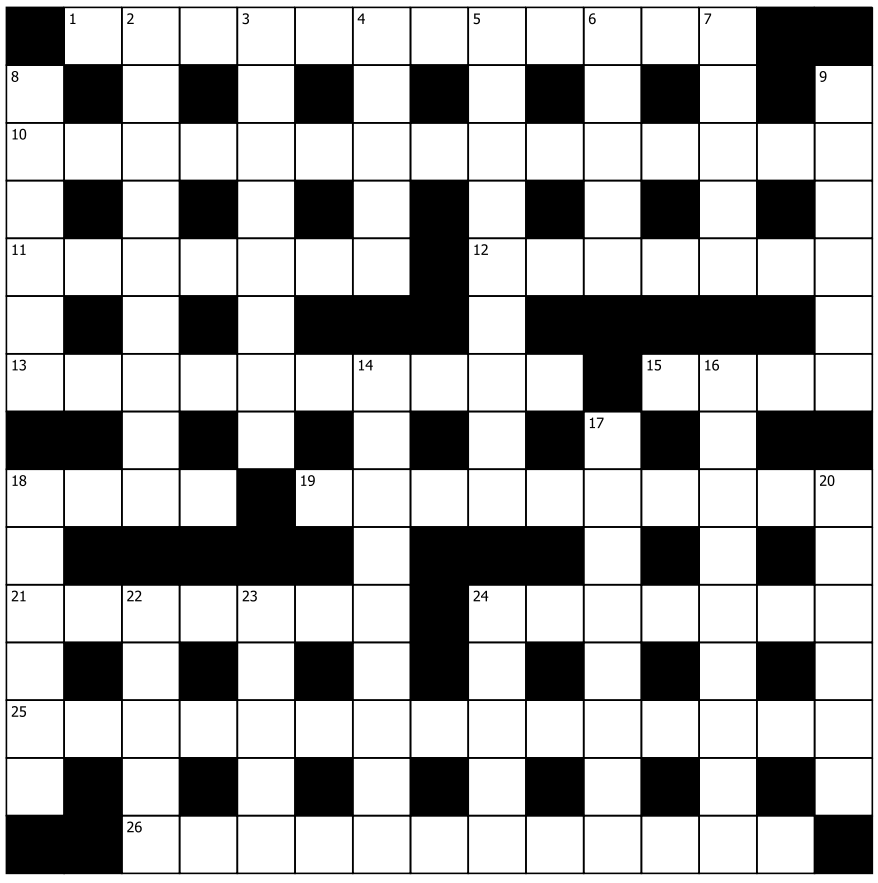
eldroW by NAT ELDER

Can you reconstruct the valid Wordle grid from the letters provided?



Cryptic Crossword by SQUAYMOUS

Difficulty: 5/5



ACROSS:

1: Severance in France? One forged memo plenty (12)
10: Warning to Icarus, melting... ouch! Hermes tense (4,5,3,3)
11: Defamation from second property adjacent to Queen (7)
12: Sob and point after regularly being in scramble (7)
13: Squaymous dropped into bubbling cauldrons, those which contain droplets (10)
15: Examine bottomless hunk (4)
18: Gives money for castration from a vet, moving tip to the rear? (4)
19: Man leaves YMCA to enter station, going away but not too far (10)
21: Early signs of loose bowel movement left in bush? Be afraid! (7)
24: Asked desperately for type of fuel after parking (7)
25: Nobleman finishing Hilary, tipsy entire term; a positive spin on 1A (5,10)
26: Crash around noon, with nervous tremors, leading to gathering of 13A (12)

DOWN:

2: Royal mint reconstructs standard (9)
3: Dirt from the pier, according to Spooner, won't take to water? (4,4)
4: Rule breaker gobbles human heart; a primate (5)
5: Hooray! Hiding deters criminal from a day ago (9)
6: Secretly get hiccups, in principle (5)
7: Delicious! Cheers son, thank you! (5)
8: Oxford magazine is poorly phrased and missing date (6)
9: Agreed piece with editor (6)
14: Getting better running agenda with new Democrat (2,3,4)
16: Soulless tutor goes around, greeting unready student preparing for exams (5,4)
17: Achieve stunt, according to Spooner, like in 3D (4,4)
18: Played snooker turn and noticed leader take off (6)
20: Untidy, wild nakedness (6)
22: Wading bird concealed in water, geese come back (5)
23: Overheard sheep with you and feeder (5)
24: Monastery has no unknown precedent (5)

Week 1 answers:

Dropquotes: "This Oxford, I have no doubt is the finest city in the world" – John Keats; "If a man has a mind to prance, he must study at Christ Church and All Souls" – Samuel Johnson

Cryptic Crossword: Across: FIGHTER; ON PAPER; SCOLD; INSTALLED; ERRORLESS; MANIA; EXPAT; ARISTOTLE; BOYFRIEND; CORGI; INGOT; TECTONICS; FANTASIST; FLAKY; YIELDED; RELIEVE. **Down:** FISHEYE; GEOGRAPHY; TUDOR; REITERATE; OASIS; PRAGMATIC; PYLON; RED TAPE; TAROT CARD; INDICATOR; TERMINATE; BRIEFLY; IN STYLE; GENRE; TRIAD; OFFAL