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The winter of our discontent: Heating in Oxford's student accommodation

Oliver Adelson reports.

Winter in Oxford is decidedly cold. Starting in October, temperatures drop from over 20 degrees Celsius to freezing, sometimes overnight. While many student rooms at Oxford's colleges still have vestigial fireplaces, the heating today runs almost entirely on gas and electricity. This system is certainly efficient, but it does give colleges the ability to control the heating that students receive in their accommodation. And what happens when colleges turn the heating off?

Heating and health

All student accommodation is required to be kept at a safe and healthy temperature, defined by the NHS as above 18 degrees Celsius for bedrooms and above 21 degrees Celsius for living rooms and other communal spaces. Below these temperatures, the NHS warns, people are more likely to suffer from weakened immune systems and fall ill. And the illnesses can be serious. According to the NHS, lower room temperatures make occupants more susceptible to increased blood pressure and can increase risk of heart attacks, strokes, and chest infections.

The policy that colleges should adopt seems fairly straightforward in theory – keep the student accommodation at a safe and healthy temperature. But in practice, there are many questions that arise with no clear answer.

Must colleges turn the heating on at night? Should students have control of the thermostat in their room? When in autumn should colleges turn on the heating? The policies that colleges adopt in light of these complications are crucial and influence how frequently students get ill during Oxford's

short terms, where missing even a few days due to illness can be an enormous setback.

On or off at night

Many colleges have policies of keeping the heating on during the night, albeit often at lower temperatures than during the day.

At Corpus Christi College, for instance, the default temperature for student rooms is 20 degrees Celsius during the day and 17 degrees Celsius at night (10 pm to 6:30 am) and "non-peak hours" (10:30 am to 4:30 pm). For students who desire warmer temperatures, there is also a "comfort mode" that

boosts the daytime temperature to 23 degrees Celsius and the nighttime/non-peak temperatures to 20 degrees Celsius.

Other colleges have more controversially experimented with turning the heating off completely at night.

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Image credit: Jessi Korte via Pexels

Weather alerts issued as the River Cherwell floods

Sam Freeman reports.

The River Cherwell, which flows through the county of Oxfordshire and central Oxford, burst its banks on Tuesday following a period of heavy rainfall. In response, the Environment Agency issued flood warnings across Oxfordshire. The chaos comes after Storm Henk caused national disruption, with heavy rain and gusts of wind in excess of 80 mph being recorded in parts of the UK.

The severity of the flooding prompted a visit to Oxford by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. Meeting with Environmental Agency workers in Osney island, he expressed his hope that "we're past the worst of it." In a subsequent public statement, the Prime Minister drew attention to the work done by the government to bolster flood defenses, stating that £5.2 billion of funding has been invested in defenses since 2020.

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Students in four-star hotels following accommodation construction delays

Éilis Mathur reports.

More than 120 students from two Oxford colleges are being housed in four-star hotels fol-

lowing delays in student accommodation construction.

For over two months, around 100 students in their third year at New College have been staying in the Leonardo Royal Hotel, and this

term, 20 St Peter's Students have been booked into Voco Oxford Spire Hotel. Both colleges pursued this option after delays in construction. St Peter's College told *Cherwell*: "The occupation of its new student residential de-

velopment, Castle Bailey Quad, was unavoidably postponed until January 2024 due to supply chain issues."

Both New College's Gradel Quadrangles and St Peter's College's Castle Bailey Quad originally had expected

completion dates of Summer 2023.

The Leonardo Royal and Voco Spire hotels have amenities including indoor pools, leisure clubs, spas, and a Marco Pierre White Steakhouse.

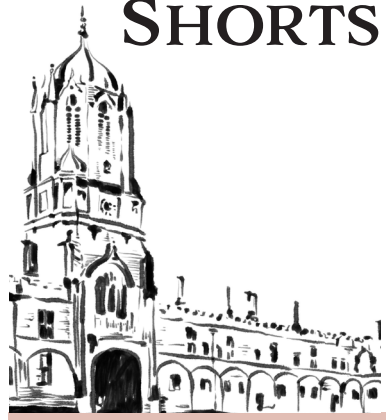
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GLITTERBALL
AN ENCHANTED FOREST

2024
GLITTERBALL

OXFORD'S LGBTQ+ BALL
FEBRUARY
23RD 2024
OXFORD TOWN HALL

NEWS SHORTS



Oxford's Covered Market among UK's favourite

The Covered Market in Oxford ranks fourth among the UK's favourite markets, according to Capital on Tap. The investigation considered the number of days a market is open, its demand from Google searches, and average Google ratings. The Covered Market currently has nearly two thousand monthly Google searches and over nine thousand Google reviews. It ranks below London's Camden Market and Portobello Market, as well as Manchester's Bury Market.

Murder on the Dancefloor tops US Spotify charts

The Saltburn-featured Sophie Ellis-Bextor song "Murder on the Dancefloor" has reached number one on the US Spotify charts. Originally released in 2001, the song plays during the final scene of the film. It ranks in the UK Billboard Top 10 after having not charted in over 20 years.

City Council to decide on new leisure provider

At its 24th January Cabinet meeting, the City Council will consider Serco Leisure's 10-year contract to run Barton Leisure Centre, Ferry Leisure Centre, the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre, Hinksey Outdoor Pool, and Oxford Ice Rink. Serco Leisure proposes significant investments including new gym equipment, new spin studio, new group exercise studio, and soft play & TA-Gactive facilities.

Exclusive: Dominic Cummings, Lil Pump, and Gabbie Hanna to speak at Union

Oliver Adelson reports.

Cherwell has gained exclusive access to the Oxford Union's Hilary term card. The line-up of speakers set to address the Union includes British political strategist Dominic Cummings, rapper B Pump, and American internet personality Gabbie Hanna.

Strategist Dominic Cummings served as Chief Adviser to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson from July 2019 to November 2020, when he resigned following an acrimonious split with the prime minister. Cummings is also known for his role as "the mastermind of the Brexit campaign" and for his breach of Britain's COVID lockdown restrictions during his controversial trip from London to Durham.

Lil Pump is an American rapper whose discography includes "Gucci Gang" and "Harverd Dropout." He has collaborated with rappers Kanye West and Lil Wayne, and his song "Welcome to the Party" was used in *Deadpool 2's* soundtrack. Part of his notoriety comes from his encoun-

ters with the law – in 2018 he was arrested for discharging a weapon in an inhabited place and driving without a license, and, following a parole violation, he was forced to serve a short prison sentence.

Gabbie Hanna is founder and host of *The Gabbie Show*, a YouTube channel that has garnered over 100 million views since it was launched in 2014. She is also a singer-songwriter and a *New York Times* best-selling author.

The Speaker of the House of Commons, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, is also set to address the Union this term. Other speakers on the Union's term card include Robert Peston and Kisha Koria – who together will be talking about their new book, *Bust?: Saving the Economy, Democracy, and our Sanity* – and Molly Bloom, author of *Molly's Game*, a memoir later adapted into an Academy Award-nominated film.

This term's debates will include a debate to mark the second anniversary of the start of the Russia-Ukraine War, an all-women feminist Valentine's Day debate, and a debate titled "This House Does Not Know What Labour Stands For." In ad-

dition, there will be prizes for debate floor speeches, such as a one-night stay at the Randolph Hotel and a dinner for two at The Alice.

There will also be a special head-to-head discussion on free will. One of the experts debating the issue will be Simon Blackburn, who was previously a fellow at Pembroke College and who authored the book *Think*.

Social events this term will include a Casino Royale ball sponsored by ATIK Oxford, a Burns Night ceilidh, a Valentine's Day dinner, and an end-of-term President's drinks reception.

Discussing the upcoming term, Oxford Union President Hannah

Edwards told *Cherwell*: "I'm thrilled to present a Hilary 2024 term card with such light and shade in its line-up. One day our members can come and question leading political figures, such as Dominic Cummings, and the very next day they can hear from entertainers such as Lil Pump."

"As ever, debating is very much at the heart of this term card, and with Oxford the current World Champions (as of this week), I hope everyone can get involved in this term's debates, whether it be a comedy motion or questioning what Labour stands for!"

Image Credit: Barker Evans via Wikimedia Commons



Short-term contracts put Oxford University academic staff at risk of poverty

Martha Smith reports.

An employment tribunal will be convened in Reading this January to look into problems associated with short-term and casual employment contracts at Oxford University, identified by the UCU (University and College Union) as a significant cause of poverty.

The tribunal has been organised in light of a survey conducted in Trinity term of 2023 by the UCU, which later led to an October 2023 report written by the UCU in conjunction with academic staff currently working within the university.

The report drew attention to the prevalence of poverty among Oxford University's academic staff employed either

by colleges or by the OUDCE (Oxford University Department for Continuing Education) – in the report, hundreds were said to be affected. This high risk of poverty is both caused and compounded by the fact that staff find themselves in a precarious ongoing cycle of short-term job contracts which, for some, has reportedly lasted for decades. 44.9% of those surveyed reported feeling "very bad" about their job security.

The report found that those paid by the hour often have an overall pay which amounts to less than the National Minimum Wage, while those who have a set wage tend to be on "casual" short-term contracts with an income 60% less than the average UK annual household income.

The UCU laid out their aim in

writing the report: "First... to raise awareness in Oxford... for the staff employed by the Collegiate University, it specifically aims to produce useful knowledge for local campaigns. Secondly... [the report] is intended for Senior Management at the University and its constituent Colleges."

A spokesperson for the UCU has stated that, though the subject of the report is largely a systemic issue, employers still have the power to make change.

Oxford academics Rebecca Abrams and Alice Jolly spoke out about the "inappropriate precarious casual contracts for teaching staff" almost a year ago. They have since spoken at the Watford employment tribunal on 16 November 2023. Their complaints will continue to be addressed at the tribunal taking

place in January.

The report also refers to the unmanageable workloads faced by academic staff who occupy casualised roles and must juggle multiple roles which "together amount to far more than full-time equivalent hours." Women, who, according to the survey, are more likely to occupy casual roles, are particularly impacted.

The lack of longer-term contracts helps uphold a lack of diversity at the University, according to the UCU.

An Oxford student told *Cherwell*: "It is shameful to see reports of these contracts employees are made to suffer. Being a student at this world class institution I want to feel pride in my time here but instead I feel disgusted at how the university treats its staff. Demands for fair working conditions and pay are nothing more than reasonable and I hope the University takes a New Year's resolution to guarantee this."

In light of the information released in the Union's report, a spokesperson for Oxford University has said that the OUDCE is currently in the process of reforming its structure following an external review. Changes to the employment structure of the OUDCE are set to be implemented in the academic year of 2024-2025.

Image Credit: Michael D Beckwith via Wikimedia Commons



Oxford hospitals declare increased pressure level amidst strikes

Emily Henson reports.

Oxford's John Radcliffe Hospital has announced increased levels of pressure in the midst of junior doctor strikes lasting six days. An Operational Pressure Escalation Level (OPEL) 4 has been declared, the highest level on the framework, signalling an increased risk of compromised patient care and safety.

Junior doctors have taken part in over 30 days of strikes since March 2023, demanding a 35% pay increase. Last month, negotiations broke down between the British Medical Association and the government, leading to a three-day strike in December and the subsequent action this year. The six-day strike is the longest industrial action in NHS history, lasting from the

third to the ninth of January.

Alongside Horton General Hospital, John Radcliffe has asked staff to take steps to ease pressures on services, including discharging patients as soon as they are ready to leave and re-scheduling some elective procedures. In line with national aims, accident and emergency departments are being prioritised over non-urgent needs. Chief Operating Officer Sara Randall said: "We are working with our systems partners to ensure that patients who are ready to continue their recovery at home and leave our hospitals are able to do so in a timely manner. This frees up beds for patients who need to be admitted."

Oxfordshire hospitals have been under increasing strain, with only 62% of A&E patients being admitted, transferred or discharged within the four hour



Students in four-star hotels following accommodation construction

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New College and St Peter's College have offered the students residing in hotels compensation in the form of gym access, free meals or meal credits, and moving assistance. Transportation vouchers, such as bus passes, have also been provided for students between the city and hotels, which lie one to three miles outside of Oxford center.

Despite the funding provided by St Peter's College and the building contractors of New College to finance the hotel rooms, which typically cost £100 to £150 per night, students are still paying rent – albeit at a reduced rate. St Peter's College told *Cherwell*: "The College...reduced impacted students' weekly rent rate over the delay period in compensation for the delay." This policy proved controversial among New College students since, in a similar situation with Exeter College in 2016, students did not have to pay rent.

The reaction among students at St Peter's seemed slightly more positive, and a student told *Cherwell* that the news of the temporary hotel housing was "received super well" and students even made jokes about "swapping this four-star hotel for a house share in Cowley."

This accommodation crisis reflects a broader trend in Oxford of student enrolment outpacing the quantity and affordability of student accommodation. In the last decade, the number of students at the University of Oxford has grown by over four thousand while inflation has increased the cost of renting and construction.

In 2018, a delayed opening of a graduate center at Keble College led to hotel rooms being booked as temporary accommodation for second and third-year students. A similar solution was also suggested by St Catherine's College's JCR due to the RAAC (reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete) crisis back in September.

Talking to *The Times*, the Warden of New College, Miles Young, acknowledged the desperate need for student accommodation. He pointed out how New College has "sunk dramatically in terms of competitiveness through our inability to house a whole year of undergraduates in college accommodation, when our peers do."

New College has asked benefactors for sums reaching £25,000 per bedroom for a building which will house 94 students.

As of this term, students at both colleges have been able to move out of hotels and into the newly finished accommodation buildings. St Peter's College informed *Cherwell*: "The College has opened the buildings and moved students into their rooms in Castle Bailey Quad as of January 2024."

target. Last winter, Oxfordshire went into OPEL 4 for one day, while remaining in OPEL 3 across the season. Ms Randall observed: "As is often the case at this time of year, the Trust is under a lot of pressure with high numbers of patients attending our hospitals and many of those needing to be admitted. Increased attendance at A&E departments, staff shortages, and reduced patient discharge have contributed to the increased pressure, accompanying the industrial action."

Ms Randall commented on the strikes: "This industrial action is

going to be very challenging for us because the beginning of January is always a particularly busy time for the NHS. We are working hard to ensure the safety of all our patients, and the wellbeing of our staff."

"It is highly likely that waiting times for our urgent and emergency care services will be longer. Our Emergency Department colleagues are working exceptionally hard, and have to prioritise patients who genuinely need emergency care."

Image credits: Jackie Bowman / CC BY-SA 2 via Geograph

South Park to be restored following Bonfire Night damage

Ellie Yau reports.

The Oxford City Council has pledged to restore the city's South Park "as soon as the growing season permits." The beloved park sustained significant damage to its grounds during its Bonfire Night fireworks display on 5 November last year. The Charity Fireworks Display, now in its 55th year, is organised by the Oxford Roundtable, which deemed November's display a "great success." In an announcement after the celebration, the Oxford Roundtable said that "more than 20,000 people attended and [they] were hoping to raise £50,000 for local charities."

However, due to heavy rainfall in the week leading up to the event, the grounds had become overly saturated and particularly vulnerable to the heavy machinery used for the display. Locals noted that this was a usual occurrence after Bonfire Night and that they "have pleaded repeatedly with organisers" to ensure the ground is protected with sheeting – a policy reportedly rejected by the Oxford Roundtable "on the grounds of cost." One local even noted that the day after the celebration, lorries took surplus pallets to be burned on the remnants of the previous night's bonfire, creating a "bonfire of the vanities."

When approached for comment, Neil Holdstock, chairman of the Oxford Roundtable, said he was "absolutely heartbroken" after being "bombarded [by a] small number of residents," contrasted with mostly positive feedback. He noted that the group, entirely composed of volunteers, did not get paid to organise the event but "are doing everything they can... as they do every year" to re-

pair the park grounds.

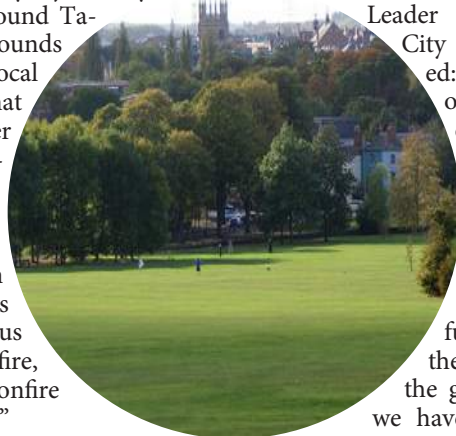
Despite a claim by Oxford Roundtable Representative Christian Petersen that the areas affected "could have recovered by Christmas," the wrecked grounds have continued to affect the park's walkability throughout the winter period. Signs have been posted near the damaged areas to inform passersby of uneven, muddy ground.

In response to about 40 lodged complaints, the Oxford City Council launched an inspection of the grounds and announced that no long-term damage had been caused. However, it will be necessary to reseed and level areas of the park, which will be possible during the germination season in the spring; local stakeholders such as Friends of South Park and Oxford Preservation Trust will be kept informed of the restorations. The council has also revealed that the Oxford Roundtable will fund the repair work, and they are in discussion with the group on how to best protect the park going forward while preserving the iconic Bonfire Night celebrations.

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Oxford City Council, stated: "South Park is one of the jewels in Oxford's crown... After all the rain we've had, the heavy plant used to take stalls and the funfair on and off the site churned up the ground in a way we haven't experienced before. There are lessons to be learned to prevent this happening in future. We will of course ensure the park is fully restored, as soon as the growing season permits."

"At this stage I don't want to rule in or out any options. I will also ensure we engage with the wider Oxford community before any final decision is taken."

Image Credits: Bill Boaden / CC BY-SA 2 via Wikimedia Commons



CROSS CAMPUS



Harvard enters leadership crisis as president Claudine Gay steps down

Claudine Gay resigned from her role as Harvard's 30th president after only 185 days of her tenure. This follows backlash from her congressional testimony and accusations of academic plagiarism. Gay was previously the Dean of Harvard's renowned Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and will resume her faculty position having given up her presidency. The university's provost Alam M Gaber will act as interim president until a suitable successor is found.

Yale early acceptance rate reaches historic low

Only 709 students, or 9 percent of applicants were admitted into Yale's Restrictive Early Action programme this year, marking the lowest acceptance rate since Yale adopted its current non-binding early admissions model in 2008. On the other hand, early acceptance programmes traditionally favour deferral to the "regular" pool over outright rejection. Despite this, a staggering 70 percent of early applicants to Yale were completely denied admission, a 241% rise since 2008.

Cambridge University involved in legal disputes

The "Chancellors, Masters and Scholars of the University of Cambridge" filed an opposition request, along with 350 pages of evidence over the company Cambridge Neurotech's attempt to trademark its own name. While the university does not claim to own the word "Cambridge", it is able to object to usage of the word that could "lead to confusion over ownership or affect their own branding."

Weather alerts issued as the River Cherwell floods

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While conceding that a large number of people were affected, Sunak sought to emphasise the number of homes estimated to have been spared flooding due to the defence systems, claiming that “over 49,000 [homes] have been protected from flooding.”

The statement came following criticism from the Leader of the Opposition, Sir Keir Starmer, who took to X to issue a message of condolence to those affected as well as write that “people’s lives shouldn’t be upended by extreme rain” in an apparent swipe at the government’s perceived failure to adequately prepare for the extreme weather. Members of the Shadow Cabinet likewise accused the Conservatives of being “asleep at the wheel” with regard to the flooding.

The Liberal Democrats similarly issued a swift condemnation of the government’s preparations. Speaking on Friday, the party’s spokesperson

for Housing and Communities, Helen Morgan, accused the government of “disgracefully slashing” budgets for flood protection and demanded an immediate reversal of the policy.

While the MET office has predicted drier conditions going forward, 32 of the flood alerts issued last week remain in place as of Monday 8th. Additionally, a yellow warning for ice was issued on Monday morning imploring people to be aware of potential disruptions as conditions turned cold over the weekend. This subsequently prompted a statement from Oxfordshire County Council warning that disruption due to ice would be “exacerbated” due to the significant volume of standing water on the roads.

Last week several colleges of the University of Oxford, particularly those adjacent to the Cherwell, were affected by the higher river levels. Lady Margaret Hall, located near the river, communicated via Instagram that the floodwater had made it as far as the college hockey pitch.

St Hilda’s was similarly troubled, releasing a social media post

showing the extent of the flooding which had submerged large parts of the college’s gardens.

Christ Church’s Instagram page meanwhile reposted an earlier image from a student, remarking that Christ Church Meadow had become a “lake” with the image showing large parts of the meadow to be underwater.

Within Oxfordshire, residential streets in the town of Abingdon, six miles southeast of Oxford, suffered property damage after being covered with flood water with flood defences being overwhelmed.

The flooding has also led to travel disruptions, with the A34 closing on Tuesday before being re-opened on Thursday. The Oxford bus company also released a statement via X calling the flooding on Abingdon Road “increasingly concerning” and warning that all services operating in the area were “suffering severe disruption.”

For more up to date news about the flooding please visit: check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk

Image credit: Peter Trimming / CC BY-SA 2 via Wikimedia Commons



Oxford researchers unveil Neptune’s true colours

Selina Chen reports.

A team led by Professor Patrick Irwin of Oxford University’s Department of Physics found that Neptune and Uranus are both pale blue-green, not deep navy blue as is commonly believed. The main purpose of their study, published in the *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*, was to explain why Uranus’s colour changes throughout its year.

Scientists have also long been puzzled by why Uranus is greener during its summer and winter but takes on a blue tinge during its spring and autumn. The planet’s spin patterns – with one of its poles pointing toward the Earth and the Sun continuously during its solstices – contributes to differences in its reflectivity.

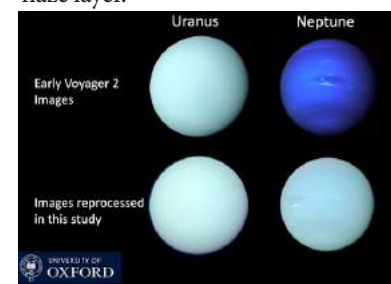
Through comparing the spectra of Uranus’s poles to its equatorial regions, the Oxford researchers found that poles appear greener during solstices because of a lower concentration of methane and increased reflection from methane ice particles. Their study settles the question of why Uranus’s colour shifts over its 84-year orbit around the Sun.

In order to figure this out, two clashing observations about the colour similarity between Neptune and Uranus had to be sorted out. Irwin said that this endeavour “opened up a complete rabbit hole for me as I learnt how the eye perceives colour and how sRGB monitors reproduce colour im-

ages on a screen.”

It turns out that photos showing a blue Neptune had been edited to make dark features easier to see, a fact which “became increasingly overlooked with time, and gave rise to a long-standing misunderstanding on what the true colours of these two planets actually are” according to Irwin.

Rebalancing old images using data from the Hubble Space Telescope and European Southern Observatory’s Very Large Telescope, the researchers found that both ice giants are similar in shade. Compared to Uranus, Neptune is slightly bluer due to “a thinner haze layer.”



When asked about what remains to be discovered about these two planets, Irwin pointed to our inability to explain the overall variation in absolute reflectivity depending on Uranus’s distance from the Sun. However he is hopeful about the new high-precision data from the JWST: “As soon as we’ve figured out the best interpretation of the observations we’ll let everyone know!”

Image credit: Patrick Irwing, University of Oxford

Oxford Vice-Chancellors’ compensation passed £1 million

Selina Chen reports.

Due to sabbatical payment for former Vice-Chancellor Professor Louise Richardson, Oxford University Vice-Chancellors’ compensation passed £1 million in the last financial year; this figure includes the market rental value of their accommodation.

Richardson received £289,000 for her time in office from August to December 2022, when she left Oxford with an additional £423,407 – equivalent to a year’s salary – as “payment in lieu of sabbatical” (as agreed upon when she took office in 2015, according to the University’s newly released Financial Statements).

Vice-Chancellor pays are set by the Committee to Review the Salaries of Senior University Officers (CRSSUO), which in 2019 decided on a 8.4% increase in the role’s salary, previously set in 2009. Before the increase, Oxford’s Vice-Chancellor remuneration ranked 11th nationally; now it ranks second after the £714,000 received by ICL’s Alice Gast.

However, Richardson chose not to take the increase until after the pandemic, when she received £542,000 for her work in the 2021-2022 financial year. The figure

includes her basic salary, a one-off payment for exceptional leadership during the pandemic, and the market rental value of the University-owned accommodation in which she lived and conducted duties – a chargeable benefit for tax purposes, but not money she actually received.

Professor Irene Tracey, who took office at the beginning of January 2023, received £336,000 for her work until the end of July. Tracey chose not to take the 2019 salary increase in light of the current economic situation, so her pay adjustment matched the national awards for all higher-education staff. She also waived her entitlement to a sabbatical for when she leaves office.

According to the University’s financial report, Richardson’s total pay is 6.9 times that of average academic staff and 12.2 times that of all university staff, while the ratio for Tracey’s total pay is 6.5 times and 11.4 times greater, respectively.

Oxford University and College Union (UCU) Committee told *Cherwell*: “Whilst Oxford University’s Vice Chancellors continue to receive six-figure salaries, the pay and conditions of many staff who work to make this University a world-leading educational institution continue to deteriorate.”

2023 saw industrial action organised by Oxford’s UCU over salaries,

working conditions, and pensions. What *The Economist* calls the university’s “other diversity crisis” further highlights Oxford academics’ low pay and short-term contracts.

UCU’s recent report on casualised staff at Oxford’s colleges and the Department for Continuing Education found that 64% of hourly worker respondents receive a real

wage that falls below the Oxford Living Wage (£11.35/hr). Hundreds of University and College staff members are also effectively locked into a cycle of short-term contracts. In January 2023, two lecturers who were on fixed-term personal services contracts for 15 years sued Oxford over the “Uberisation” of their contracts. Head of University

Communications Stephen Rouse told *Cherwell*: “The organisation is highly complex and competes with other internationally preeminent universities to attract and retain the highest calibre academic talent and leadership. Recruitment of senior academics in this challenging market is a key responsibility of the Vice-Chancellor.”

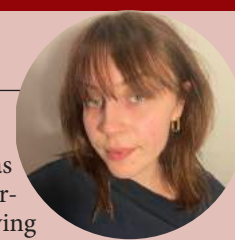
Analysis: ‘Oxford, do better.’

Violet Aitchison comments.

Reflecting on the past year, characterised by disruptive strikes from both lecturers and markers at the University of Oxford and nationwide, it becomes unnerving to discover that those at the head of the university are earning salaries equivalent to the top 0.5 percent of the country. Salaries that are offensive when we consider how little of an increase those striking were asking for. Hundreds of graduates were affected by these strikes, with students not receiving their official grades until months after normal scheduling, many even reporting fears that they wouldn’t even see their dissertations marked at all. Now, this isn’t to disregard all of the hard work done by the Chan-

cellors. As we’ve been told, the job is complex, and to keep a person of such talent, competitive salaries are necessary. However, this doesn’t seem to apply to the lecturers. Throughout my short year-and-a-term at Oxford I have seen multiple tutors who helped me immensely during my first year, leave because they were offered a better position from another university. These statistics make clear where Oxford’s priority lies, and it isn’t exactly the best look. Although, if we were to play devil’s advocate, when I think about the salaries of many footballers, suddenly we might think this circumstance is more deserving. It’s reported that the average earnings for a Premier League player is over four million pounds, with play-

ers such as Erling Haaland receiving fifty-one million pounds. In this sense, I’d rather someone furthering the education of students to be awarded a higher salary than another footballer. While this perspective doesn’t fully address the significant salary gap, it prompts a critical examination of who bears the greatest responsibility for this discrepancy. The figures provoke discomfort and raise questions about the university’s future course of action. As these financial disparities persist, it remains to be seen how the University of Oxford will navigate and address these concerns.



The winter of our discontent: Heating in Oxford's student accommodation

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At the beginning of Michaelmas 2023, *Cherwell* investigated Keble College's new policy of cutting nighttime heating and the opposing student petition that resulted from the policy. One Keble student recently told *Cherwell* that despite the student petition and increased pressure on the college to keep the heating turned on at night, Keble refused to go back to its old policy. Instead, it set up a complaints form for students adversely affected by the lack of nighttime heat.

One of Keble's stated reasons for limiting the amount of heat consumption was the college's determination "to take action to address the climate crisis and become more sustainable." However, some students have expressed scepticism that these environmental reasons, and not penny-pinching, are the true motivations behind the college policy. "They turn it [the heating] off ... at night under the guise of sustainability" one student told *Cherwell* on social media.

Another student at St. Catherine's College told *Cherwell* that she faced similar problems with insufficient heating in student accommodation, saying: "They'll tell you to fill in the maintenance request form, they come and 'fix' it and it still doesn't work so I've had to borrow a portable heater from the porter's lodge in winter. They told us the heating is off from 11 pm - 6 am officially."

A second-year Lincoln College

student complained about a lack of transparency on the issue of nighttime heating. She told *Cherwell* that, as a night owl, she preferred to do her work later in the evening but that it was "difficult to do work in [her] room when it's freezing." She further claimed that she did not remember receiving any advance communication from Lincoln

"They'll tell you to fill in the maintenance request form... and it still doesn't work."

stating it would be turning her heating off at night.

The hunt for warm October

The task of deciding when in autumn to turn on heating in student accommodation proves contentious each year. Colleges generally turn heating on sometime in October, but many have historically delayed the introduction of heating to the last possible moment and only reneged after significant student pressure.

During Michaelmas 2023, with temperatures regularly dropping below 10 degrees Celsius, St. Hugh's College elected to turn on the heating on 13 October ahead of the scheduled 31 October. A facebook post from the St. Hugh's JCR President at the time read: "Complaints have worked and college will be turning on the heating early (today) instead of the 31st."

Even after this announcement, however, students reportedly faced issues getting heating in their rooms. The college sent another email on 17 October that read: "As



the system has been switched off for months over the summer and has had to be turned on in a hurry without the usual pre-checks, we experienced some start-up issues in a few isolated parts of the site earlier this week."

A first-year St. Hugh's student told *Cherwell* that she did not accept the claim about "a few isolated sites" since the problem "was happening a lot in the main building." Another St. Hugh's student informed *Cherwell* on social media that in order to get the heating turned on students "were literally buying thermometers to show the college it was colder than 16 degrees in rooms."

In response, St. Hugh's told

Students were "buying thermometers to show the college it was colder than 16 degrees in rooms."

Cherwell: "It is our policy to turn the heating on early in the event of a cold weather snap such as the one forecast on 16 October 2023. The decision to turn on the heating was routine and not in response to any student complaints. The College did receive reports of problems with the heating in some buildings on 16 October, but these were all resolved either later that day or the following morning."

St. Hugh's was not the only college accused of employing this tactic. A Pembroke College student told *Cherwell* that his college did not turn on the heating in his room until three weeks into term (mid-to-late October). By this point, temperatures were already regularly falling below 5 degrees Celsius.

Pay as you go

Another issue colleges must contend with is how much to charge students for heating. Most colleges solve this problem by adjusting the fixed total accommodation fees to reflect the cost of electricity and gas.

According to one second-year student at Jesus College, however, the cost of heating at Jesus' off-site accommodation is not factored into the fixed accommodation costs. Instead, students pay for the heating that they use during term. While this might seem like an efficient way to ensure that students use what they pay for and pay for what they use, in practice, it has the effect of incentivising less affluent students – who are

looking to save money wherever possible – to freeze. One Jesus student affected by this policy told *Cherwell*: "My flatmates and I all winter have avoided turning the heating on because we know the energy prices are both expensive and opaque."

He continued ironically: "Sometimes it is funny to wake up and see your breath condensing in a cloud of fog but I believe the experience overall has brought us together as friends and certainly saved us a few pound sterling."

This policy of "pay-as-you-go" has attracted criticism similar to the criticism levelled against the policy of providing financial scholarships for high preliminary exam results. In both cases, detractors allege that the students who are the most well off and who thus require the least help are the ones who receive assistance, while the low-income students who are already at a disadvantage only fall further behind.

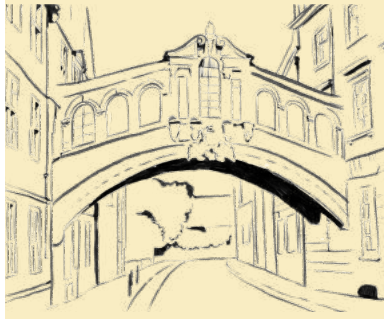
In response, some say that in the real world, people pay for heating on this basis. But others argue that at university, accommodation should be egalitarian, not differentiated based on ability or willingness to pay extra for utilities as essential as heating.

This list of issues related to heating in student accommodation is by no means exhaustive. There were dozens of student complaints submitted to *Cherwell*, and they all deserve attention for which there is not sufficient space in this investigation. What should be clear is that with so many students suffering from lack of heating in their accommodation, we are in the winter of our discontent. And glorious summer won't be here for a while.

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Do you take collections seriously?



Future me will appreciate it!

Alfie Roberts

Let's be real. Collections probably are not that serious. However, I find pretending that they actually are to be the easiest way to motivate myself in the vacation, when the last thing I want to do is go over tutorial notes that I still don't understand. So, yes, I convince myself collections are serious; after all, I will definitely use the notes I make when it comes to the real thing.

Sometimes (when I feel like it)

Violet Aitchison

If you had asked me this question last Hilary, my answer would have definitely been different. But, after a year at Oxford, I've realised they're just like any other mock. The fancy name doesn't mean they are more important. Whilst I don't neglect them, I also no longer keep myself up at night worrying about the outcome. It's a great way to build up resources and consolidate knowledge, but not worthy of all your time and attention.

Been there, never again!

Alicia Martinez Patino

Everybody recognises the flaws of an exam-based education until collections roll around. My first collections weren't ideal: rather than strengthening my knowledge, I endlessly worried over what I perceived as an unworkable syllabus. Whatever the results, I was left dissatisfied: I had sacrificed my holidays while never feeling like I'd done enough. For both my health and academic performance, I consider collections simply another necessary part of my degree.

Weaponised incompetence, laziness, narcissism? Fathers at Christmas

Violet Aitchison

Another Christmas came and went, and with it, I got to witness the adult men around me get away with doing little to nothing. For many years it has been a running joke in my family, as well as online, that dads will always be as surprised as their children to find out what presents they gifted them. In the past, I've found this joke amusing. However, as I get older and I really get to witness the amount of effort my mum puts into Christmas, the charm of this 'joke' has faded, and instead, I've been left with a sour taste in my mouth.

Perhaps what tipped me over the edge this year was a specific incident on Boxing Day. My mum had spent days cooking dozens of different dishes, adhering to everyone's likes, dislikes, and dietary requirements, all whilst ensuring they were all classically festive dishes. My dad, on the other hand, made one dish. A mezze-type dish. If this were another thing made by my mum, it would be a perfect side dish that we would all enjoy, but not focus on. But as it was the one thing he made, it somewhat became the centrepiece, or at the very least, the hot topic of conversation.

Initially, the conversation was in jest. Irony and sarcasm were certainly at the heart of what was being said. However, when the talk and jokes continued throughout the day, into lunch and past it, it started to feel less funny. Ul-

timately the attention was still on the 'mezze platter' and my dad. Despite the fact my mum was the true hero of the day, weekend, and Christmas period, she was overlooked. It was expected of her. Of course she'd do it all, deliciously and effortlessly. Because that's what she always does. But one sprinkle of effort from my dad and forget Jesus! My father was the new king of Christmas.

Now, this isn't to go in on my own dad too harshly. Despite what you have just read, and may have consequently assumed, I am extremely fond of him, and I think of him as a thoughtful and generous man. The issue is not with him specifically, but it's the culture our society has perpetuated which has allowed even the best of men to do the bare minimum. And more sadly, all the hard work put in by brilliant mothers to become overshadowed.

Even more tragically, I have seen many worse cases online. Women who fill their own stockings and buy their own presents on top of doing all the cooking and organizing for the day. It's not that I believe these men are horrible people. I don't think they'd want their wives and children to be gift-less or upset on Christmas day. It's just that they know the women in their lives are always going to pick up the slack. Because quite frankly, what would happen if they didn't? Would Christmas be cancelled? Would turkeys be burnt? Would the illusion of Father Christmas be ruined for young children everywhere?

I don't think that many husbands, fathers, and grandfathers across the globe are that innately incompetent. However, I do think we've allowed them to become so. And that doesn't mean the onus is on the women in their lives to teach them how to roast a potato or know what their children would like for Christmas. They should be capable of sorting that out themselves. But I'm also not sure we can continue letting them get away with it. And because this issue is so widespread, it stretches much further than Christmas.



Until we reach a place where we share domestic labour, we can't truly hope for proper equality. Mothers will always come home from a full day of work and know what is in the fridge, ready to cook for supper. The façade that women love 'having it all' is not true, because really, it's not like men have ever even tried. It has historically always been the women's role to

juggle everything all at once, and we are expected to be grateful that in recent years we have been given the opportunity to balance domestic work with a job outside of the home. It isn't that women are better at multi-tasking or enjoy taking on the mental load. Because, of course, cooking for hours is tedious, wrapping presents can become boring, and writing Christmas cards is

"...many men in our lives have come to believe they are allowed to be lazy..."

repetitive. But they've put in the time and effort needed to become good at these things so to reach the expectations society has set them. And most of us could achieve this too if the buck stopped with us. But, instead, a dangerous cycle has been created where many men in our lives have come to believe they are allowed to be lazy, or in the rare cases they are not, that they should be especially praised, as this is all they know.

Truthfully, I'm not sure I can sit through another Christmas where I watch my grandad park himself in front of the television, drinking wine from noon, whilst my granny labours away in the kitchen from morning until mid-afternoon because 'that's how it's always been.'

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The Debate Chamber

Martin and Raghav go head to head, debating whether living in or out makes more sense.

Picture the scene. It's 4am; you've just come back from a night of drunken debauchery, and you collapse back into your bed, hoping to drift off into a drunken stupor. But then the realities of student accommodation intrude. Your noisy neighbours ensure you won't be getting any sleep for the next few hours, because you happen to live with the loudest people alive - their laughing, shouting, crashing, moaning, and creaking is enough to make you mad. Even if you manage to get over all of that, however, you'll only get a few hours of slumber before your scout bursts in, and the filth you've been festering in, all the dirty clothes and unwashed plates, have been grimly exposed to the world. Such is the



life of an Oxfordian. Oxford student accommodation fulfils the bare minimum standards of shelter (and even then, not always - ask your Catz friends), but your room isn't really your room at all. Instead of privacy, you get endless awkward encounters with your neighbours. Instead of freedom, you get domestic totalitarianism - vacate your room too slowly, put a poster up where one shouldn't be, and you'll be whacked with a fine. And that's not to mention the agonising moving in and moving out you'll have to perform every term.

It was only when I visited a friend's private accommodation that I realised things can be different. People could put posters up where they wanted, rearrange their furniture, even smoke indoors. But even better was the genuine sense of community you get in accommodation when you've all picked your neighbours. To live in college accommodation, by contrast, is to enter the world of JG Ballard's *High-Rise*.

I admit am biased by the great experiences I've had living in college, so the matter seems simpler to me. But discounting my personal beliefs, living in is better than living out.

The clearest benefit is convenience. Living out means heading out of town and into deepest, darkest Cowley, or the unexplored reaches of Summertown. There are some who'd prefer this; to be away from the hustle and bustle, closer to Iffley or Jericho. But it also moves one further away from lectures and tutes, adding a good 10-15 extra minutes of a walk. I can walk across the road to the Taylorian and then pop out to Hussain's for a kebab. You can't get that convenience living out.

For those fortunate enough to live in annexes, living out means continuing that relationship with your college. But for those renting privately, dealing with landlords can be a pain. We take for granted how smoothly college maintains facilities, and we get to bargain collectively for rent.

Living in takes away a whole layer of stress.

There are undeniably benefits to living out. You can stay with your friends, which can make your flat feel a lot fuller. Cooking is typically easier. They may even allow you to keep your stuff in your room at the end of term; imagine not having to empty it out! But these benefits aren't impossible living in too. I live with my friends and I'm content with the kitchen and room I've got, especially considering the price.

The truth is, it really depends on your college. What does it offer, and what's the alternative? It's best to evaluate your situation independently. And I believe that if we look at the average tradeoffs available to the students of Oxford, we'd probably find that living in makes more sense.



Bled dry: the financial plight of international students

Alicia Martínez Patiño

Oxford is committed to ensuring that no one who is offered a place is unable to study here for financial reasons." The financial anxieties of those browsing the Oxford University website will likely be soothed by such a reassuring message, highlighting the institution's commitment to accessibility. The prospective international student may later be a bit confused by the Undergraduate Financial Guide, circulated across the different colleges at the beginning of the year. When advising students on how to assess financial struggles, the document simply asks: "Did you ensure that you would have sufficient funds to cover all costs before you came to Oxford?" If there was any hope of softening the financial blow of overseas tuition, it is surely long gone.

Oxford is undoubtedly expensive. Whether from the UK or overseas, university in general is always an extra expense for all, in tuition and in living costs. It doesn't help that, at £9,250 per year, UK higher education is among the most expensive in Europe (for its own home students!). Consequently, the satisfaction of getting accepted can be eclipsed by concerns about covering the costs. Financial anxieties are a reality for the vast majority of students; these worries are certainly not alleviated for international students, who must come to terms with the fact that the already daunting price of Oxford can be more than four times higher. Course fees for 2024 range from £33,050 to £48,620, and even the less expensive humanities degrees, like History or Law, remain at £38,550.

On top of the significant fee increase, overseas applicants cannot access the state-funded UK student finance scheme, or even Oxford-specific bursaries. We have no general financial assessments or needs-based loan schemes. I remember studying for some of my last high school ex-

ams and procrastinating by using the scholarship search tool on the Oxford website. Unsurprisingly, the results came up blank every time. International students are limited to the very few private funds designed by individual alumni or external organisations that offer limited grants targeted to specific groups, like nationals of certain countries or particular degrees. If you don't fall under the eligibility requirements, there is nothing else the University will do. The widest grant available is Reach Oxford, which includes a list of 'low-income countries.' Regardless, only around three of these grants are given each academic year, and the eligibility requirements automatically exclude many countries.

Clearly, financial support for international students is less than ideal, and many resort to private loans (and possibly lifetime debt?). But, in the commendable effort of advocating for much-needed change, some arguments for financial support for international students make the mistake of disregarding the importance given to home students. Oxford University is a public institution, so a significant proportion of its funding comes from the state; more than £100 million a year come from the UK public sector just in research funds, per the University's Financial Statements. Oxford is funded by taxpayers' money, a demographic in which international students are not included. A university like Oxford, where excellence is possible precisely because of the British population's financial contribution, must commit to ensuring the highest level of accessibility for home students. The support given to home students is still not perfect, and it is surely reasonable for UK universities to focus on access for UK students.

However, it seems nonsensical to accept that a university with an endowment of £1.7bn can only choose between one or the other. An institution that boasts about the large proportion of international students within its student population can-

not afford to leave them to fend for themselves. If Oxford wants a shiny website advertising a "ready-made international community" and a commitment to making "significant contributions to society – locally, nationally and internationally", then improving support for home students should not come at the cost of ignoring access issues for international students.

From conversations with other international students, some of the frustration caused by the lack of resources has been inevitably directed back to our home countries. Oxford is a competitive university, and it's easy to question why our governments won't encourage us to get a good education and fund our degrees. But this is naïve: if your home country refuses to finance your Oxford degree, it's likely because it already has decent (or good, or excellent) public universities. A case may be made for STEM students, but what does an EU country like mine have to gain from my post-Brexit, English law degree?

However, international students are not the only ones who benefit from studying here. At the end of the day, an overseas student is just like any other. Applicants receive offers based on their potential, regardless of origin. Presumably, any university will want to help the people it selects to actually be able to study there. Advertising a competitive admissions process would, in the same way, surely mean that there is interest in hosting those who succeed in it.

It is also simply not accurate to say Oxford is only interested in international students for the high fees – before Brexit became effective, EU students paying home fees were still consistently being accepted. But even if this were true, I don't think anyone expects international tuition fees to suddenly drop to £9,250. A general, needs-based student loan system for overseas students from any country would allow for some financial relief for students (without doing away

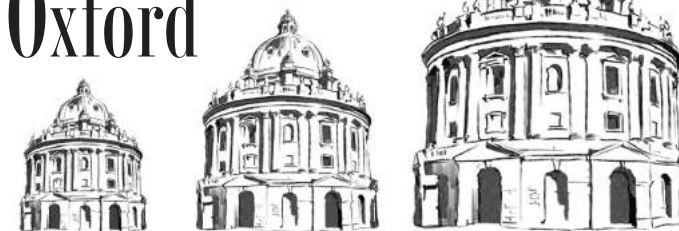
with higher fees altogether).

Additionally, diversity is beneficial to any university campus, a goal towards which support for overseas students is also key. As the University tries to fight its elitist reputation, it seems counterintuitive to restrict international entry only to those who are privileged enough to pay out of pocket while pushing any others towards substantial debt.

Studying abroad is supposed to

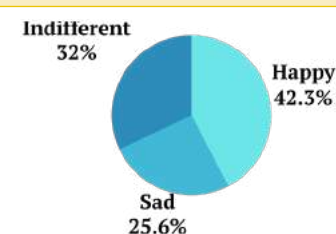
be a uniquely enriching experience, which Oxford prides itself on providing for international students. But, with a lack of financial support, the University simultaneously continues to cater this opportunity to a select few. The financial treatment of international students is both exploitative and hypocritical, especially coming from an institution that seems to milk its image as a global community.

The view from Oxford

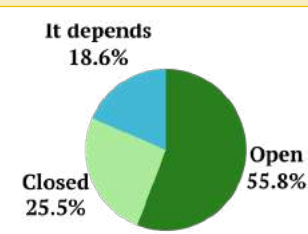


This week, we asked our Instagram followers...

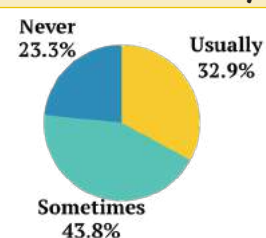
How do you feel about halfway hall?



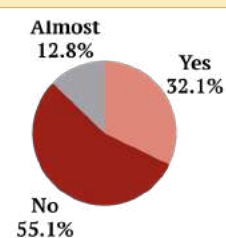
Do you prefer open or closed book exams?



Do you take collections seriously?



Have you broken any New Year's resolutions?



A crash course in British Politics

This week, **Roy Cohen** introduces himself and his plans for the column



If you are reading this you most likely live in the United Kingdom. You might also, like me, be new here. As a first-year international student, I suddenly find myself in a country that is not only deeply entrenched in a long political turmoil but also approaching a general election. Never having learned much about British politics, and having lived in the country for just over 100 days, I find it confusing and, honestly, scary to know that my everyday fate lies in the hands of people I know nothing about, and in a process I am lacking a thorough understanding of.

Throughout Michaelmas, I was busy getting to know people, Oxford, and coffee shops. Starting

to find my balance, I want to look further than the next tutorial. I want to appreciate the great political moment I found myself, being in the midst of the country going to the polls; the same country that brought us the steam engine, Brexit, and Liz Truss versus the lettuce.

Yet, to fully appreciate it, I need to know much more. The goal is to get to a place where I know enough to at least truly understand political news without googling five different terms a minute. This is how this column was born. I decided to change things for myself by learning and gaining a better understanding, and to offer the main lessons to

other international students who are surely in a similar situation.

Before we begin, let me start by introducing myself, and disclosing to you what my biases might be. I am a 22-year-old Israeli first-year PPE student. For the past four years, I've worked as a researcher, focusing on geopolitics, and in my spare time, I read, cook, and work to advance peace and justice. My opinions are undeniably on the left side of the political spectrum, I strongly believe in human rights and international co-operation, and I think democracy is so much more than voting once every four years.

In the next eight weeks, this column will include articles explaining all you need to know about the upcoming British elections. From basics such as the election process and who the party leaders are, to more advanced topics such as recent developments in both parties and top issues for this election. Being

far from an expert myself, I will give you the main points from articles, podcasts, and lectures on the subject. I intend to use diverse news sources, such as *Politico*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and *The Times*, trying to rise above particular ideologies and political spins, and give you the general, overarching facts you need to know.

I am not looking to convince you of a certain opinion. I hope, rather, that my personal opinions will be unnoticeable to you as the reader. I hope that you will find

in this column explanations and facts, rather than thoughts and opinions. I hope you will find this to be more of a shared course than a political rally.

Most importantly, for this to be a useful endeavor not just for myself, I would love to hear your thoughts, feedback, and questions at roy.cohen@hmc.ox.ac.uk. Until next time.

Find the second installment in Week 1's print edition.

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Adidas, Auden and, the author

Olivia Boyle goes through the Zoom-sphere with Mark Ford

Professor Mark Ford is a poet, a regular contributor to the London Review of Books and the New York Review of Books, an academic and tutor at UCL. He has both his BA and DPhil from the University of Oxford as well as a Kennedy Scholarship from Harvard University and a visiting lectureship at the University of Kyoto.

The emails I exchanged with Mark Ford had the paw prints of a poet: frequent ellipses and the sparing sign-off ‘M’, like our interview, only leaves one wanting more.

In conversation, his answers were vibrant, and full-bodied. They took us everywhere from a backpacker’s unwitting exchange of Reeboks for ‘tatty Adidas’, to Twitter’s role in the election of Oxford’s Professor of Poetry, to Bob Dylan.

As podcaster alongside Oxford don, Seamus Perry for the London Review of Books, Ford is a master of both spoken and written criticism. I was interested in his relationship with the two entwined yet vastly different worlds of premeditated essays and riffing conversations.

So, I asked what label he would give himself - podcaster or poet, academic or author? “They’re all connected in various ways. I don’t really consider myself any one thing foremost except when I’m doing that thing.” At any given moment he might be “writing my book on Thomas Hardy so I feel I’m a Hardy critic” - the app I recorded our conversation on had transcribed that to be “hearty critic”, which would arguably be another fitting label - at another point when “I’m tinkering with a poem, I feel like I’m a poet.”

With such freedom, Ford exists multiform in the ether, that place where podcasts will float forever more. For this reason, writing down his ideas will reign supreme over recording them through the foam of a microphone. Ford related: “writing is my *raison d’être*. No, I wasn’t put on Earth to write but writing is the thing I find most gratifying. And there’s a sense that something that gets published does exist. And in a library, potentially forever.” Even if the rolling waves of a riffed conversation is fun - especially with someone you’ve been through seminars with as Ford did with Perry - “podcasts will disappear into the ether in

however many years time.”

As for the writer, inspiration exists in their mind in the abundance of metaverse podcasts. “[Written literary] criticism you can get going on almost any time. Poetry’s a bit more difficult to access. The process of waiting and getting going on a poem is in the lap of the gods.” Poetry, Ford told me, has its own ether: “it all comes from a dreamy, less professional state of mind.” As such, there is an unparalleled “kick” from the so-decided end of a poem against the soft press of the stop-recording button.

“The process of waiting and getting going on a poem is in the lap of the gods.”

And, of course, there ain’t no Keats nor Tennyson to rival in the podcasting world. I sense from Ford relief that “you’re always conscious, as a poet, that it’s not as good as ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ or ‘Ulysses.’” But, as he assures me, it doesn’t matter when you’re writing poetry for poetry’s sake.

If poetry is written for the sake of its words, where does the poet and their biography fit into all of that? To this, Mark Ford spectacularly scrutinises, in awesome succession, the ideas of Paul Muldoon, I.A. Richards, and D.H. Lawrence who all willingly stand for the separation of art from artist. Though, as Lawrence posits, we may not be able to trust the teller, Ford believes in “creating and communicating with a more general audience” which has an enthusiasm for a “contextualised poetic narrative” as opposed to focusing on the “internal patterning” of granular poetic technique.

Where it all gets a bit psychedelic,

then, is when the poet deliberately merges the real and unreal. And Mark Ford has palpable fun with this. “I suppose that most people who enjoy poetry see little point in calling it real or unreal. And they are surely right,” writes John Bayley in the 1962 lecture that Ford referred to as the reason he reads Keats the way he does now. For Ford, sometimes it can be “criticism which is the most powerful”. It can be conflicting perceptions of reality - a critic’s interpretation will never be the same as the poet’s own - which make “experiencing life and literature invigorating, original and fresh.”

But nothing would be as powerful, it seems, as the dubious tea leaves that appeared at the bottom of a bottle of wine shared with strangers on a train from Barcelona to Madrid. This, as I was informed, is behind his poem ‘Unreal’.

“Your poem, ‘Unreal’,” I asked incredulously, “was it in fact unreal?”

And, unlike the poems which come to him in his dreams, he said, “No, that one is completely true.”

On this train, “I was 21. I was in a carriage with two guys who were very friendly and gave me some wine to drink. [A few beats...] When I woke up, I was in Madrid and the train had been stopped for a couple of hours. And the weird thing was [though this already seems a bit strange], these people took my new Reeboks and left me with a pair of quite tatty Adidas shoes. So I was padding around Madrid for the next four days trying to get my passport and some money.”

Much of ‘Unreal’ does take place in Ford’s dream state - just when the tea leaves hit. It is “a catalogue of cities whose name derives from Adidas shoes and I was slightly parodying T.S. Eliot’s use of cities in ‘The Waste Land,’ an equally unreal poem. Yet, attaching it to a poet-past makes the poem more real even if that is to recount a state of



unreality. You see, you get intriguingly “topsy turvy”, a phrase which Ford made multiple use of throughout the interview.

Just as Ford attended Bayley’s seminars with future co-host, Seamus Perry, these metaphysics must have rung prophetically real. Unreality paves the way to Ford’s current reality.

Last year, Ford was in the running for Oxford’s Professor of Poetry. It’s apparently a piece of cake: “you just write a brief blurb and then you contact your friends and ask them to vote for you.” Ford modestly forgets to mention that you must have a substantial inventory of Auden (Professor of Poetry 1956)-tier poetry to be nominated. And a relatively small number of enemies to be elected. Ford told me “there were about 300 votes cast for Auden. Now, I think about 900 people vote. But there must have been 100,000 more who might have voted.” I think he leans towards suggesting the position has become about who you know, rather than what.

Ford said: “It was a lark and it was good for me really. I plotted out the lectures I would have written. I listened to Alice Oswald’s lectures which came from a rigorously, mystically almost, poetic kind of perspective. But I’m an academic, I give lectures on academic subjects and that’s what I feel comfortable

talking about.” So all in all, “it would have been fun.”

In the sphere of unreality, I wondered if the incumbent Professor of Poetry, A.E. Stallings’ Twitter activity could have had anything to do with her recent success. Ford, who is not active on social media, proposed that “social media alters much of what gets picked up and becomes current. But, I’m a bit fuddy-duddy that way and I suppose I feel I don’t quite have time for it. But

“You’re always conscious, as a poet, that it’s not going to be as good as ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ or ‘Ulysses.’”

that could be a foolish thing to say because there’s no point in writing lots of things if no one hears about them.” If social media were the only way to get readership, Ford would get involved. For now, it’s not. For now, you can toy with the belief and disbelief, reality and unreality of

A new LRB podcast series on political literature will be released this year. With enormous thanks to Mark Ford for giving his time for this interview.

Quickfire Questions

Which film, old or new, are you most looking forward to watching?

I’m really intrigued to see the Timothee Chalamet Bob Dylan film. I’m writing a lecture on Dylan at the moment. It’ll probably be terrible but I’m intrigued to see what it will be like.

Would you ever go on University Challenge?

Absolutely not.

Who was your childhood hero?

When I was about five, it would have been a footballer. This is going back to 1967 so Geoff Hurst who had just scored a hat-trick in the World Cup. I didn’t watch it though; I remember my mum asked me if I wanted to watch the World Cup and I said I wanted to play in the garden.

The Gatehouse's Community Café

Olivia Boyle talks to The Gatehouse about the role the café has in supporting Oxford's homeless community

The Gatehouse is an Oxford-based charity providing shelter, food, and a communal space for “adults who are homeless, vulnerably housed, on low or no income or simply looking for community.” It was set up originally as a winter daytime shelter by a group of nuns over 30 years ago.

The Gatehouse must be one of the only social enterprises in Oxford where an upsurge in usage is not necessarily a good thing. Since 1988, it has been providing support and sanctuary for Oxford's homeless community. A large part of its role revolves around offering meals on a near daily basis at its Community Café. At a time of global inflation and increasing food scarcity, this Community Café has never seemed to be more needed. So, *Cherwell* met with key organiser and manager, Zoe to discuss the role of food in supporting those in need in Oxford.

Six nights a week, The Gatehouse serves a variety of tea, cakes, jacket potatoes, toasties. Its website states:

“In 2022 the café and the community centre served up 10,000 meals to over 400 guests including over 6,000 baked potatoes to people who are rough sleeping, on low income or/and are vulnerably housed.”

Zoe said, “We've diversified our food range. We offer jacket potatoes four nights a week. We offer fresh homemade soup in the winter period.” And reaching out to

local businesses, The Gatehouse has “a partnership with Gusto, Italian and every so often they provide pizzas.”

In the past, food was donated by “about 36 food groups made up of various church groups, faith groups, and general members of the public who would donate sandwiches.” But, as it did with everything, the impact of COVID-19 changed everything.

Many of the people who had

“We used to get food from 36 food groups but since COVID, we're down to about 12 now.”

been donating since The Gatehouse first opened were elderly. Zoe continued: “we lost a few members due to COVID sadly so we're down to about 12 food groups now. We're about two-thirds short of what we need to keep providing.”

Despite the building pressure of food costs, restaurants are pitch-

ing in. Christmas dinner was provided by Hawkwell House in Iffley; there is an occasional KFC night; the Oxford Food Hub collects leftover food from supermarkets and places like GAIL's. But “in terms of regular support, there isn't necessarily one set company.”

Does support come from the University at all? Beyond annual grants - which operate on an ‘money for food or money for another project, not both’ basis - some colleges will donate food. But, despite sentiments of goodwill, this isn't always helpful. “A lot of the food has been cold, not re-heatable leftovers that we end up throwing away.”

The Gatehouse's Café may be volunteer-run but it prides itself on its disciplined efficiency and providing the best level of service it can to those in need. In 2015, it was awarded two food hygiene ratings of five as proudly displayed on The Gatehouse's website. Zoe praised the dedicated team: “all the credit goes to the staff and the volunteers in the Café because they work so hard and stick to our strict policies.”

Happily, there is always an abundance of people who want to help.

Working on the reports for 2023, Zoe found that volunteers and donations have saved The Gatehouse about £10,000. But the economic instability that has been milling since the Pandemic began has left a sharp dent in what the Community Café can afford to provide.

“Our average weekly food bill since COVID has risen from £150 to £350 per week. The Cost of Liv-

“We're now seeing people with jobs and ostensibly normal lives who, on top of rent and bills, just can't necessarily afford to feed themselves.”

ing Crisis also means a massive loss of donors.”

National austerity is not just changing prices, it is also changing the demography of who needs the support of charities like The Gatehouse. “Historically, we were

well known for helping people with substance misuse issues. Whereas nowadays, we're not only seeing more people with mental health issues, but we're also seeing people with jobs and an ostensibly normal life but, on top of rent and bills, just can't necessarily afford to feed themselves.”

While offering food to those in need is the crux of the work of the Community Café, the space it provides for people to meet and shelter is equally important. And without nine volunteers per night, it cannot open, providing instead a takeaway service. Volunteer numbers have always fluctuated with the shape of the Oxford term as students come and go. But since the Pandemic, numbers are only just beginning to stabilise again. Zoe said that probably “60-70% of our volunteers are students. So moving online during COVID hit us really hard.” Other volunteers were elderly. “For a year or so we were operating on skeletal staff.”

Even now, student holidays jeopardise the consistent service The Gatehouse can provide. If there was one thing that could be done to help, Zoe said, “I would try to encourage anybody who's wanting to volunteer or donate to spread your help across the year.”

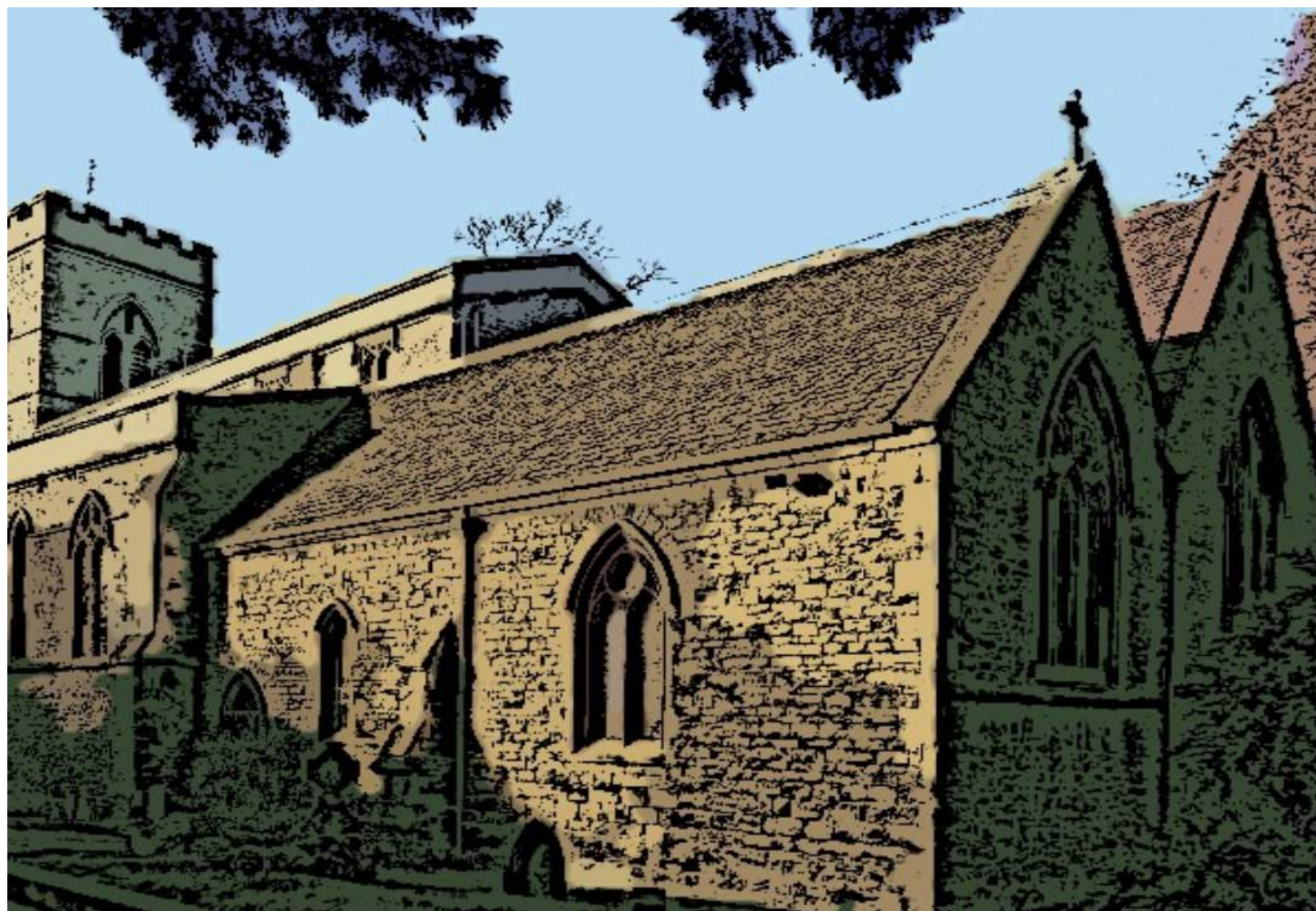
The Gatehouse provides other

“I would try to encourage anybody who's wanting to volunteer or donate to spread your help across the year.”

services for those in need - clothing, counselling, showers, community - but food, as Zoe put it, is the “vital lifeline”.

“There are some people that rely on us for food on a daily basis and without us, they wouldn't be able to eat.” But, it was emphasised that, until you see the Café in full swing, “you don't really get it.” Seeing volunteers and local communities band together to offer what everyone needs and deserves - the “vital lifeline” of food - “hits home a lot more when you see it in person.”

Volunteering opportunities are accessible throughout the year at www.oxfordgatehouse.org With thanks to Zoe at The Gatehouse for providing this interview.



CHERBADLY

Sonic the Hedgehog characters to speak at the Oxford Union

The Oxford Union termcard for Hilary 2024 has been released, announcing the forthcoming slate of guest speakers for this term. In an unexpected move, however, all of the speakers announced so far are characters from the video game series Sonic the Hedgehog.

The term will commence with an appearance from the speedy blue-haired protagonist himself, who will speak in favour of the motion 'This House Believes That One Gotta Go Fast'. Other debate speakers include Knuckles the Echidna, who will argue against 'This House Believes Brute

Force Is Never The Correct Option', and Shadow the Hedgehog, who will argue in favour of 'This House Believes the 2005 Shadow the Hedgehog Game Was Good, Actually'. Meanwhile, Miles 'Tails' Prower will deliver the new annual Yuji Naka Memorial Lecture on bionic helicopter engineering, despite being canonically only eight years old.

The Union has been strongly criticised in the past for hosting controversial speakers, and as such there is speculation that the Sonic direction is a conscious attempt to avoid that sort of backlash this term. However, the termcard has still generated con-

troversy over the announcement of a talk by Dr Ivo 'Eggman' Robotnik. Eggman, a renowned roboticist and evil villain, is a highly contentious figure for his pro-conquering-the-world stance.

Hannah Edwards, President of the Oxford Union, told Cherwell: "As the Union begins its third century, I thought we should do something that symbolises our drive towards rapid progress into a new age. Members will have the opportunity to hear a diverse range of perspectives from characters who often aren't given the platform to speak, and from a media property many people hold very dear

to their hearts. I know I for one am particularly excited!" she concluded giddily, taking off her jacket to reveal a Sonic the Hedgehog T-shirt.

Asked why she went all in on Sonic specifically, Edwards merely commented 'Duh, because he's so fast!' She then took off running around the Union debate chamber, as though to demonstrate the concept of speed, only stopping when she crashed into a chair and dropped all of her rings.

Speaking on behalf of the rest of Edwards's committee, Union Secretary Julia Maranhao-Wong apologised, saying: "We didn't know she was going to do this."

2005: Bop goes up in flames

Brought to you from the
CHERWELL
archives

By Kelsey Moriarty



The repair of Radcliffe Square's historic cobblestones is finally underway after a year of delay, writes Sam Counsell. It will be carried out in six phases, moving round the Rad Cam in sections to reduce disruption to pedestrians. It is hoped that the project will be finished by Christmas. The cobbles and Yorkshire Paving of Radcliffe Square date back to the eighteenth century, and while patch repairs have been attempted on several occasions none have been very successful. Between 10 and 20 percent of the current stones will be reused, the rest replaced with larger river cobbles. Most of the Grade II listed Square is owned by the University, which is meeting more than half the cost of the £500,000 project. The remainder has been contributed by the City and County Councils.

Bops burnt out at LMH

NUSSAIBAH YOUNIS

A student dressed as an Egyptian mummy was set alight at an LMH Halloween bop on Saturday night. Teddy Hall postgraduate student Hamish Stewart was set alight outside the LMH bar in which the bop was taking place. Helene Wilde, a finalist at LHM who was at the bop said that "at about 12.15 the Head Porter turned on the lights and announced that a boy had been set on fire outside."

The Porter demanded that the culprit own up and when no-one did, he declared that "there would be no more bops for the rest of term." Wilde added "There was a real atmosphere of shock. Attempts were made to restart the bop but the Porters shut it down." One LHM finalist who wished not to be named said "These guys came to the bop and they just wouldn't leave."

Thames Valley Police received a call at five to one on Sunday morning, but the incident was dealt with by the Head Porter and no police assistance was requested. Hamish Stewart refused to speculate on the nature of the incident but says he sustained no serious injuries. He described the injury as "a bit like sunburn, but it was alright in a day or so" and that now he is "absolutely fine."

JCR president Joe Collenette said "The Dean has asked me not to comment until a further investigation has been conducted." Junior Dean James Panton said that there is currently "internal discussion" concerning the incident and that the college "can't give any comment" until the investigation is complete.

November 2005. It was a mere year away from the hazy louche setting that defined Saltburn so clearly – and this story from Halloween is living proof. The article centres around LMH postgrad Hamish Stewart, who was completely bizarrely set on fire whilst dressed as a mummy. The article does not make the reason behind the spontaneous pyrotechnics immediately clear, or even what specifically made the mummy costume so flammable, but it appears quite the lucky escape for Hamish Stewart, who said he was "absolutely fine". He described the very easily life-changing incident

as "being a bit like sunburn, but it was alright in a day or so". He also quite mysteriously refused to speculate on the nature of the incident.

What is quite interesting about this article is its length and positionality. One would think that such an incendiary event (ha) would do better than a singular column of the fifth page. The placement does seem quite strange considering the utter insanity of the situation. In all fairness, it's difficult to see what there is to say about the incident. It would have been a developing story and the content seems quite scarce – in-

deed, there were no comments from college administration or the JCR. It's also distressingly unclear if the LMH bops actually did stop after the incident – there were no comments from college administration or the JCR.

Another item of interest found in the 2005 Cherwells (that may be expanded upon in a future edition) is the 'Fit Northerner of the Year' feature, which includes photos of Oxford students from different areas of the North and invites readers to pick the most attractive. It's so refreshing to know that in 2005, the Scouse v Manc debate was still blazing (no pun intended).

John Evelyn

12th of January 2024

A Happy New Year to all of you and welcome back to 'the historic occasion that is the first term after our bicentenary.' John Evelyn wonders whether that actually had any influence on the speakers that have been confirmed for this term. Finally, the Union can have some fun with a contested election and rumour has it, it'll be more than just 2 slates battling it out. Will there be flips, drop-outs, or secret conversations around Frewin court – of course there will be, and your friend John Evelyn will be listening very carefully to the gossip and reporting it here for all of you to enjoy (or start to panic over).

One of the big questions looming over Frewin Court in recent weeks has nothing to do with the upcoming election, but the results of the previous. Mr. River, after being convicted of electoral

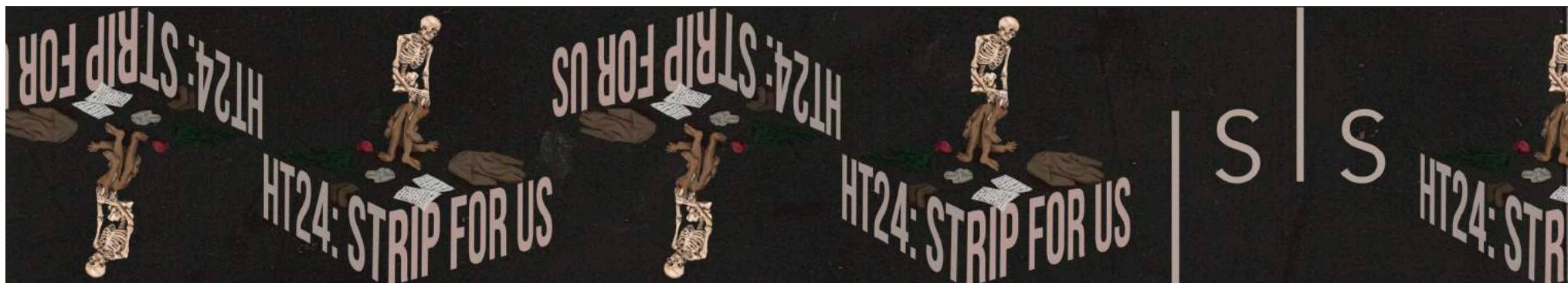
malpractice, has been banned from entering the premise of the Oxford Union till after Trinity term. Yet, the appeal process has not begun, leaving us with no President-elect technically. Oxfess had a large debate about the topic, including talk of a 'Stop the Steal' and 'Let's storm the union'. Unfortunately, to do so, somebody would have to open our extremely heavy gate. A task even the Gym Rat struggles with. In what seems to be an unbreakable bond of unity, obsessed with Watson and del Rey's Biggest Fan are bound by the hip in their determination to work together electorally even though one of them doesn't even have a spot on Goldilocks's committee. Similarly, John understands Leon Boy and The Neighbour have a close rela-



tionship too, even after their disagreement over who would be the TFC delegate. It seems like the president-elect of an Oxford political society is making their return to the politics of Frewin Court, and similarly to del Rey's biggest fan, has found themselves in a position where they opted in to do vac days, yet to Goldilocks's dismay, no names left the dashboard of the diplo-brat.

The return of the Donnies is upon us. Following an unsuccessful bid for a slate ban and the removal of the Union's grandfather in Hilary, the Barrister's determination to rule over Frewin Court was not diminished. He seems to be under the belief that a purely postgraduate slate could challenge the duopoly of RO world's chosen one and Teddy's Panda. With Teddy's Panda relying on the votes of some postgraduate students himself, how will the Barrister assert his dominance over postgraduates – an SBS officer perhaps – or will he set Teddy's Panda excessive reading in their tutorials together?

Trinity term's social media ban debate is coming to fruition this term and everyone seems confused with this new rule. Hacks up and down Frewin Court are asking questions of what they are and what they are not allowed to do on social media. It'll be up to the mystical world of the ROs to determine that, potentially after their termly secret meeting, where tradition is upheld through song, dancing and drink. Will the Union rulebook finally fall into the hands of the Marxist? Tune back for my next edition in a few weeks. In the meantime, Oxford coffee shops will be raking in business from all budding hacks discovering newfound friendships in freshers.



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Anuj Mishra
Editor-in-Chief

Welcome to the first instalment of the three hundredth volume of *Cherwell*! As our nameplate each week declares, we have been “Independent since 1920”. And that, indeed, is a unique accolade – only three student papers in the country can profess to have complete editorial and financial independence from their requisite University and/or Student Union: *Cherwell*, *Varsity* (at Cambridge), and *The Student* (at Edinburgh).

But, alas, freedom of editorial expression can be tested to its extremes when the paper in question is almost exclusively circulated on

the campus of one university, among students of the same. The archives contain many instances which put our independence to the test, most entertaining among which was the *Cherwell*-ban of 1946. An issue of the paper came under Proctoral penalisation for the crime of publishing an undergraduate sex survey – Binti and I can only pray that this term’s ‘sex-vestigation’ doesn’t meet the same fate.

Silliness aside, there is, of course, a lot of merit in being the campus ‘free press’. We look forward to another term of holding the University to account, reporting on SU shenanigans, as well as the scandalous goings on at a certain institution just off St Michael’s Street.

Whether you’re here for the headlines, the Jevelyn shade, or just the puzzles at the back (in which case you probably aren’t reading this...), welcome back to Oxford, and to *Cherwell*! We have a couple of new features in store, including a brand-new Agony Aunt (who is ready and waiting for your problems) as well as a reintroduced archive column (because we had to milk the 300th volume thing to the full extent). For now, enjoy the week 0 issue, and have a hot-girl Hilary!



Olivia Boyle
Deputy Editor-in-Chief

“He needs me, he needs me, he needs me, he needs me...” Behold the crafty genius of Harry Nilsson’s lyrics to the song - you guessed it - ‘He Needs Me’. Forget *The Shining*, Shelley Duvall’s Olive Oyl was her crowning performance; the lilt of her youthful, squeaking timbre is less spine-chilling when it’s well-placed in a mediocre, box office slump of an eighties musical comedy.

I should clarify that I have not seen *Popeye* (1980) so much as I’ve listened to the full soundtrack - A

and B side - to the film on repeat. Nilsson’s composition is moving, it’s witty, it’s life affirming. It is a true turning point in the musical history of *Popeye*, the sailor’s identity.

It self-evidently reaches its lyrical peak with:

“And I yam what I yam what I yam and I yam what I yam and that’s all that I yam ‘cause I yam what I yam. And I gots a lot of muskle and I only gots one eye. And I never hurts nobodys and I’ll never tell a lie. Tops to me bottoms and me bottoms to me top. And that’s the way it is ‘till the day that I drop. What am I? I yam what I yam!”

Now, you must listen to the recording in full. The demo versions are a chocolate box for the ears. With the base guitar strumming in jazz-café-chic, Nilsson perks up every now and then with things like: “you know the last time you came, you came in like you waited a long time and then you came in. That was perfect.” Pearls of pure wisdom.

He may have put the lime in the coconut with *Popeye* but, I unashamedly love the soundtrack.



Bintia Dennog
Editor-in-Chief

Welcome back to the city of dreaming spires and yet another volume of *Cherwell*. As we enter our 300th volume (see the front page!), it’s nice to reflect on *Cherwell*’s rich, and at times tumultuous, history.

When rummaging the archives last Hilary with Olivia, we were hoping to find some sort of juicy information on Rishi Sunak’s time at Oxford (lesson learned, he was practically invisible). At least, flipping through the old *Cherwell* print editions proved to be entertaining. Given, what I presume must have been much looser libel laws, the editors didn’t hold back. Jevelyn, for

one, took no shame in name-dropping - and college-dropping! - people, adding the occasional topless, or in some other way problematic, image along with it.

However, Sunak isn’t the only prime minister we’ve scoured the archives for and most certainly will not be the last... when I attended my first News meeting all the way back in week one of Michaelmas term 2022 (time really does pass strangely in the Oxford bubble), Olivia and I, both being Lincolmites, decided to collaborate on a piece about Liz Truss’ controversies during her studies here. Sitting in the Lincoln JCR Kitchen, we then compiled the information we received from the archives in a semi-readable way, only for the editors to (rightfully) rewrite half of it. Fun fact: we also kept the door shut during the writing process, thinking the information we had was top-secret (in hindsight it was slightly less riveting than it seemed...).

Putting together the paper this week after looking through the archives yet again, I can only hope that our stories will match those of the 2000s (perhaps without getting us sued...) and that *Cherwell* will remain in its pride and glory.

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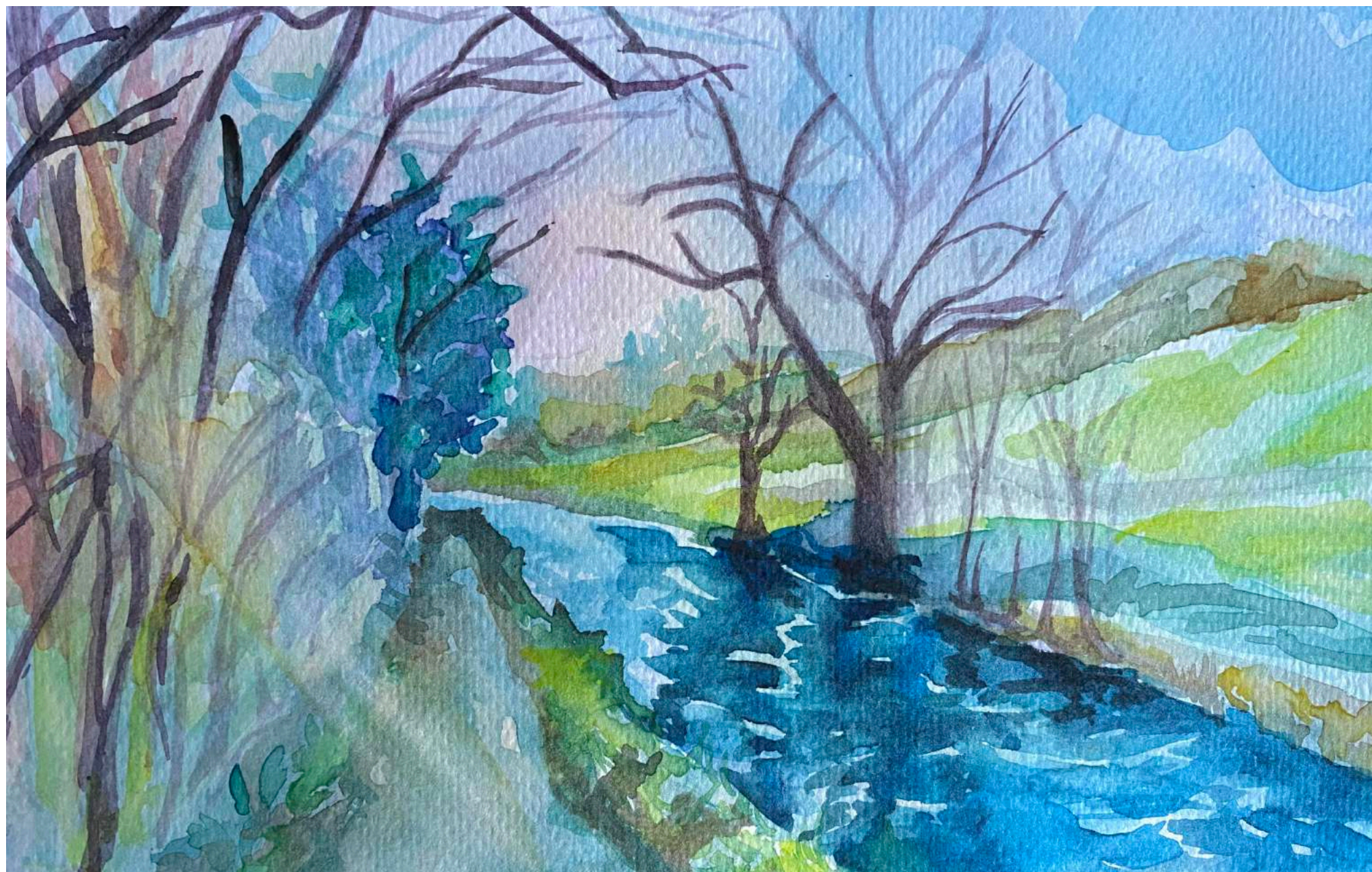


Illustration by Amelia
Dovell

Breaking the ice on seasonal depression

Nina Naidu explores how Seasonal Affective Disorder impacts student life at Oxford

January creeps in, bringing a chilly breeze that hints at the grasp of winter. The temperature steadily drops, barren trees shiver, and the landscape transforms with misery as leaves surrender to muted tones of grey and frosty whites. The iconic Oxford puffer remains a seasonal staple, sunglasses and sandals hibernate as darkness encroaches after 4pm lectures, courtesy of our faithful companion – daylight savings. Though the days may be getting longer, winter has arrived without warning, disrupting the warm, sun-soaked optimism of summer.

Despite endeavours to romanticise the grey January skies with caramel-waffle oat lattes and charming cat-eared crochet hats, the reality often falls short as damp jeans cling to your legs in the drizzle, and sunlight becomes a rari-

“The challenge lies not only in the miserable weather itself, but in maintaining a sense of well-being amid the doom and gloom...”

ty. The dream of idyllic scenes in cafes on rainy days, adorned with fairy lights and hot chocolate, seems just that. A dream. While

the allure of becoming an academic weapon in the Radcam is tempting, the thought of battling through lethargy and lugging a heavy blanket to every study spot is too daunting. Venturing beyond the comfort of your room simply does not feel worth the energy, especially when confronted with near-freezing temperatures.

In this environment, it's hardly surprising that motivation dwindles, leading to a reluctance to go outside. The struggle is felt by many, reflected in the statistics – approximately 2 million people in the UK experience Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) during winter. The challenge lies not only in the miserable weather itself, but in maintaining a sense of well-being amid the doom and gloom.

Could you be dealing with SAD?

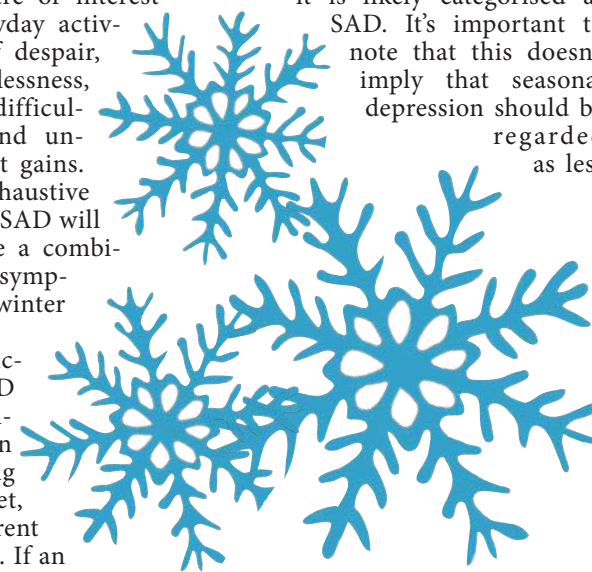
Seasonal Affective Disorder, cleverly abbreviated as SAD, is a

type of depression with symptoms often present in seasonal cycles. The NHS website lists some of the following symptoms related to SAD: a persistent low mood, a loss of pleasure or interest in normal everyday activities, feelings of despair, guilt, and worthlessness, lethargy and difficulties sleeping, and unexplained weight gains. While not an exhaustive list, people with SAD will often experience a combination of these symptoms over the winter months.

The key distinction between SAD and general clinical depression lies in the timing of symptom onset, indicating different causative factors. If an

individual predominantly experiences depressive symptoms during the autumn and winter months, with a noticeable improvement or remission in the summer, then

it is likely categorised as SAD. It's important to note that this doesn't imply that seasonal depression should be regarded as less



severe or that individuals cannot experience SAD during the summer, and understanding these nuances is crucial, as SAD, often nicknamed “winter blues”, SAD is unrelated to the stresses associated with certain times of year (such as Christmas), but rather due to the shift in daylight hours.

While SAD is more common in people who have pre-existing mood disorders such as depression or bipolar disorder, and diagnoses are more common in women than men, these symptoms can affect anyone. Given the UK’s distance from the equator, Oxford students are particularly susceptible to the negative effects of seasonal transitions. Combined with the constant stresses of university work, it is inevitable that at one point or another, most students’ mental health and well-being will be impacted.

The science behind SAD

While the causes of seasonal depression are not entirely known, it is thought to be due to daylight savings causing shorter, gloomier days. When the clock goes back, reduced exposure to natural sunlight disrupts the body’s circadian rhythm. Sunlight aids the levels of molecules that maintain normal serotonin levels, so the reduction in sunlight hours significantly decreases serotonin (responsible for affecting mood). Furthermore, the change of season can disrupt the balance of melatonin (responsible for sleep) in the body, leading to sleeping difficulties such as insomnia, fatigue, and difficulties waking up in the mornings.

These shifts, alongside an overall decrease in vitamin D, drain energy and motivation, and impact concentration, mood, and overall well-being – certainly not ideal for a student.

Seasonal depression and The Student

The onset of seasonal depression is a familiar experience for me, as I find my mood waning when the days grow shorter. The

“These shifts, alongside an overall decrease in vitamin D, drain energy and motivation, and impact concentration, mood, and overall well-being – certainly not ideal for a student.”

shift from summer to winter feels particularly abrupt, contrasting with the gradual return to warmth in the summer months. The prospect of venturing out and putting effort into one’s appearance diminishes as layers of Uniqlo heat-tech become a necessity to combat the biting cold. Even the glamour of ancient Oxford libraries loses its appeal given their notorious chilliness – a deterrent especially when trudging all the way from St. Hugh’s College.

While cafes exude a cosy ambiance, they too present challenges. Rainy days attract huge crowds seeking refuge, making it a struggle to secure a quiet corner for focused work without further distractions. There’s an innate comfort in gazing outside and witnessing the radiant sunlight, a stark contrast to the dreary grey of fog. The carefree nature of summer feels like a distant memory, making it harder to embrace the challenges that come with the new season.

Interestingly, my experience of the seasons has undergone a significant shift since moving to Italy for my year abroad. Despite the cold weather in Milan, the enjoyment of summer-like temperatures ranging from 20 to 30°C throughout September and October extended the sense of summer. Even during lectures, the lingering warmth and the absence of the

need to bundle up like a snowman mitigated the impact of the weather on my mood compared to when I was in Oxford. This remains the case until later in Hilary as the days lengthen. Even when temperatures drop, the most distinct difference lies in the frequency of sunlight. Oxford often grapples with persistent grey days shrouded in clouds, whereas even a cold day in Milan tends to invite at least a bit of sun, making the chill more bearable.

Don’t just take my word for it. Leo Brnicanin, PPL finalist, shares similar challenges and understands the added difficulty of accomplishing tasks during the winter months. He attributes this struggle to the early onset of darkness and the pervasive cold weather, strengthening his desire for warmth and comfort under the covers rather than to study.

“In Oxford he associates the demands of work with the cold weather, only intensifying these feelings of hopelessness.”

cially while navigating the unique circumstances of Oxford. While conventional treatments for SAD like light therapy, wherein an individual sits in front of a light box emitting 10,000 lux every day, or taking vitamin D supplements are widely known, their accessibility to students can be a barrier. The repetition of advice to indulge in comforting activities, such as sipping chamomile tea or going for a walk, might seem cliché, but there is undeniable truth in the potential mood-enhancing effects of such simple actions, for it doesn’t hurt to at least try.

Fortunately, collective work stress sometimes means that there is a collaborative aspect of combating seasonal depression. Last year, my friends and I often committed to early morning study sessions at Pret, underscoring the significance of mutual accountability as I didn’t want to disappoint my friends (or myself). In the midst of academic pressures, the support of friends not only aids in overcoming morning lethargy, but also the sense of isolation exacerbated by the constraints of inclement weather.

Drawing from Leo’s experience, the strategy of rising earlier to confront responsibilities emerges as a shared proactive stance towards the day

not only enhances personal motivation but also resonates with taking back control amid seasonal challenges.

“In the midst of academic pressures, the support of friends not only aids in overcoming morning lethargy, but also the sense of isolation exacerbated by the constraints of inclement weather.”

So, it is undeniable that the pervasive impact of seasonal depression may not solely stem from the changing weather; rather, it unfolds within a complex interplay of atmospheric conditions, diminishing daylight, and the overwhelming academic demands placed on students. By acknowledging both the individual and collective dimensions of seasonal struggles, there emerges a pathway toward fostering a more supportive and resilient student community in the face of winter woes.



Reflecting on the weather in England, he noted that the cold often translates to rain, creating a dreary and muddy environment that further contributes to a sense of confinement. Interestingly, he also draws a connection between work and seasonal depression; when he’s back home in London, the opportunity to engage in winter activities in the city is more enjoyable when unburdened by work commitments, whereas in Oxford he associates the demands of work with the cold weather, only intensifying these feelings of hopelessness.

Now, what can we do?

Despite these winter woes, there remains a glimmer of hope, espe-

The EU's AI Act is significant for all of us

Clemmie Read investigates the world's first attempts to legislate AI

Oxford students have been no strangers to ChatGPT since its much-hyped launch in late 2022. Squabbles about the ethics of its use in research or essay-writing – balancing the potential for efficiency that it offers with the obvious problem of cheating – has acted somewhat like a microcosm of broader debates about AI over the last year. Its applications can be incredibly beneficial (as ‘work-hard-not-smart’ types can attest) but they are matched by risks and problems which, until now, countries worldwide have not been confident enough to regulate. But this is beginning to change; and whether you're a keen ChatGPT user or not, the regulatory future of AI will affect you.

It was certainly a long time coming: the European Union's much-awaited AI Act was agreed in the early hours of Saturday 9th December, after days of marathon trilogues (three-way meetings between the Parliament, the Council and the Commission) which spanned 22-hour sessions at a time, with the occasional break for the legislators to sleep. Critics understandably objected to this essay-crisis approach to one of the most important regulatory advancements of the century. But the regulators were racing to surmount objections from powerful opponents which could have delayed the Act by several years, as both member states and tech companies lobbied to limit the regulation. A landmark agreement was finally reached.

This surreal episode, live-tweeted throughout by those in the room, was itself only the final step in a legislative process which began in 2018, when EU regulators began working on the AI Act. Of course, this was long before the introduction of general-purpose A.I. models like ChatGPT, whose launch in November 2022 brought both generative AI and fears about its applications into the mainstream. The 2021 draft was torn up and re-written to address these developments. Consequently, the new act claims to be ‘future-proof’; whether or not we believe that laws which could take two years to enforce can govern the unknown developments to come, one thing is certain: the AI Act is a huge regulatory landmark. It is the beginning of a governance process that will determine the global future of technology, and the future of our society, altogether.

Oxford itself is at the forefront of these legal and philosophical debates, not only because its researchers pioneer crucial technological advance-

ments, but because the Philosophy Faculty now includes an Institute for the Ethics of AI, which launched in 2021 to conduct independently research into ethics and governance too often undertaken by the companies themselves. John Tasioulas and Caroline Green of Oxford's Institute for the Ethics of AI explain,

“The AI Act is a huge regulatory landmark. It is the beginning of a governance process that will determine the global future of technology, and the future of our society, altogether...”

the Act “strives to avoid the twin perils of under-regulation (failing to protect rights and other values) and over-regulation (stifling technological innovation and the efficient operation of the single market)” by taking a tiered approach. Different AI models will be treated very differently: ‘minimal risk’ applications get a free pass, but ‘general-purpose’ models like ChatGPT will have to provide full transparency about everything, from the content used to train the systems, to cybersecurity measures and energy efficiency. The use of AI for surveillance purposes (using machine vision for facial recognition, monitoring behaviours, and even predicting future behaviours, Minority Report-style) has largely been banned, except when it's exceptionally required for a member state's national security. These last two measures provided serious sticking points: law-makers disagreed about how far surveillance measures should go, and how much general-purpose models should be regulated (they were nearly excluded from the regulation altogether). But the result is on the stricter side, taking a strikingly bold position. The hope is that this won't preclude innovation: EU Commissioner Thierry Breton called it ‘much

more than a rulebook – it's a launch pad for EU start-ups and researchers to lead the global AI race'. Only time will tell if this ambition is realistic.

The road to regulation has been a long and fraught one. This is partly because its progress is so much more fast-moving than democratic legislation can ever be, and partly because of the obvious knowledge deficit. Technological entrepreneurs don't understand the law, and law-makers don't understand technology, so each thinks the other is missing the point, and leaves the two at a stalemate. The solution so far has been to let Big Tech just regulate itself – but the various privacy scandals in which the major companies have found themselves over the last decade have shown how little they can be trusted to hold to the rule of law. Think of Facebook's role in the Cambridge Analytica scandal around the 2016 elections, AT&T's role in Edward Snowden's disclosure of the NSA surveillance programmes in 2013, and the antitrust cases (abuses of their market dominance) that Apple, Amazon and Google have all faced in recent months.

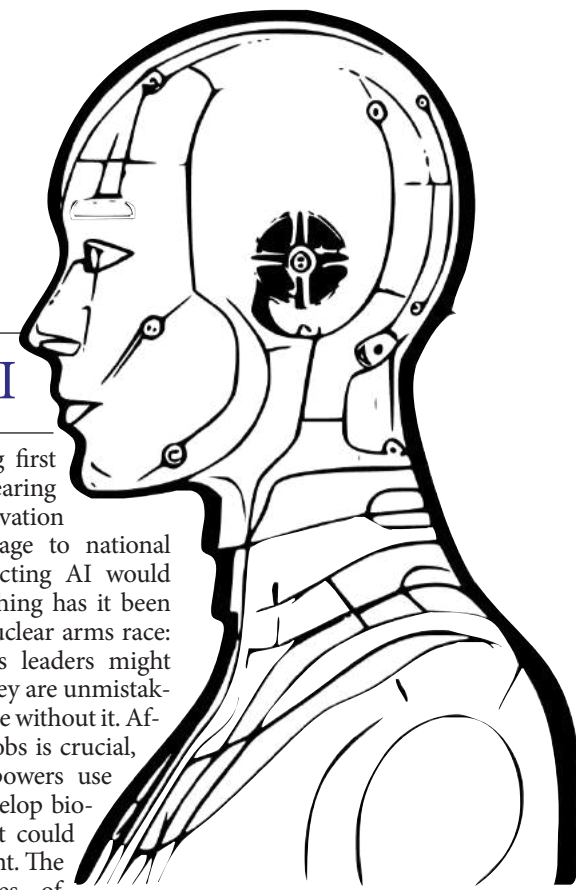
Combine this with the existential worries which have followed the release of general-purpose A.I. models, from fears of deepfakes and job losses to a vision of a future dominated by AI overlords, and the need for law-makers to step in is clear. These fears were only exacerbated by the recent chaos at OpenAI, which saw CEO Sam Altman deposed and reinstated within a week as the board divided over the importance of AI safety. Earlier this year, a group of AI scientists called for a six-month moratorium on developing the technology while regulation was worked out. This certainly seems like a good idea on paper, but how realistic it is has proved another question. After all, profit-driven entrepreneurs are unlikely

to take the jump, fearing both the hit to innovation and the disadvantage to national security that restricting AI would create. Not for nothing has it been compared to the nuclear arms race: whatever a nation's leaders might think of its risks, they are unmistakably more vulnerable without it. After all, protecting jobs is crucial, but if rival superpowers use outlawed AI to develop biological weaponry, it could become a moot point. The regulatory advances of the USA and UK remain embryonic compared with the AI Act. The US currently has an AI Bill of Rights but is unlikely to go much further given the current political gridlock. Rishi Sunak, meanwhile, somewhat modified his pro-innovation attitude by hosting a headline-grabbing AI Summit at Bletchley Park in November 2023, which produced a collective agreement to protect AI safety worldwide. But these nascent efforts have been firmly overshadowed by the EU, which has become the first jurisdiction to not just state but legislate. This is the world's first proper attempt to do so.

It's no surprise that this approach has come from the EU. Historically, the US' market-driven foundation has led to a laissez-faire legislative approach which promotes innovation and technological development above all else, while the EU's rights-driven model prioritises the rights of users, market fairness and upholding democracy over economic progress. This is borne out in recent EU acts, like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which caused a worldwide headache for tech companies and users alike. This was the first proper attempt at protecting data worldwide. Each approach

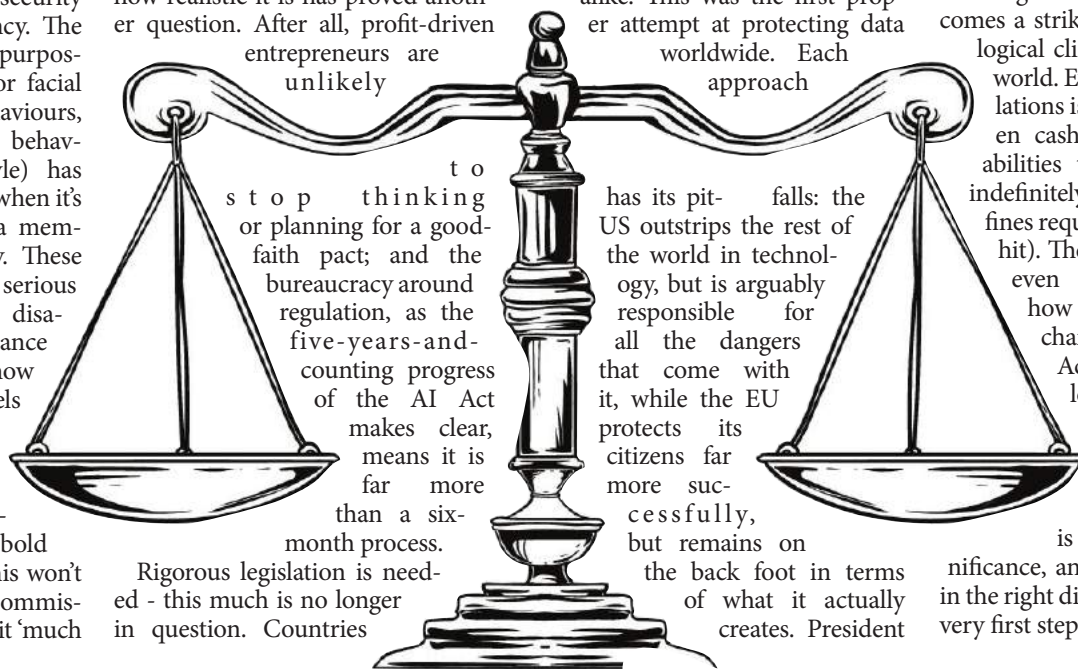
has its pitfalls: the US outstrips the rest of the world in technology, but is arguably responsible for all the dangers that come with it, while the EU protects its citizens far more successfully, but remains on the back foot in terms of what it actually creates. President

Rigorous legislation is needed - this much is no longer in question. Countries



Macron has publicly attacked the AI Act, complaining that “we can decide to regulate much faster and much stronger than our major competitors. But we will regulate things that we will no longer produce or invent. This is never a good idea.” Fears that the EU is becoming an unattractive environment for start-ups are rife, not least because it is far easier for cash-rich incumbent companies to get around the regulations.

What does this mean for the rest of us? It's fairly likely that the rest of the world will follow suit: Breton claims that “Europe has positioned itself as a pioneer, understanding the importance of its role as global standard setter”. This acknowledges the so-called ‘Brussels Effect’, whereby EU legislation often becomes global practice, partly because of its ideological influence, and partly because it's easier for tech companies to comply with EU demands worldwide than to adapt for different jurisdictions; hence Apple's new iPhone has a standard USB-C charger, not its distinctive lightning adaptor, because of a newly enforced EU law. If the effects of the legislation are detrimental enough to Big Tech, however, this might change, and the EU becomes a strikingly different technological climate to the rest of the world. Even enforcing the regulations is likely to be tricky, given cash-rich tech companies' abilities to appeal court cases indefinitely (or, indeed, to pay the fines required without much of a hit). There's a long road ahead, even before we anticipate how AI itself might have changed by the time the Act is enforced in 2025, let alone in the decades to come, and how the law might have to change to govern it accordingly. This Act is one of landmark significance, and an encouraging step in the right direction; but it's only the very first step.



Music

“The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess”: The Queer Pop Perfection of Chappell Roan

Joseph Lomax

Chappell Roan is the newest pop star who is quickly rising through the ranks, and charts. Her debut album: “The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess” has been on repeat for months now. I simply cannot get enough. She is confident, queer, and bold: her voice has the power and range of Rennee Rapp, Alicia Keys, while her lyrics are sexually charged and intensely catchy, reminiscent

of Charli XCX and Kim Petras. Her pop songs make you feel like you’ve just seen off a bottle of wine and you’re about to go and see a drag show. Her ballads, however, make you want to curl up and reminisce on your string of failed situationships (this is an entirely objective characterisation of course).

But to what can this emotional intelligence, lyrical playfulness, and distinct identity as an artist be attributed to? Chappell Roan is the over-the-top alter-ego of Kayleigh

Rose Amstutz. She is hyper-confident, hyper-sexual, and hyper-active. Kayleigh Rose Amstutz was born and raised in the immensely conservative Willard, Missouri. At 17, she was signed to Atlantic Records. She began her music career writing and producing in Los Angeles with Dan Nigro, most well-known for producing Olivia Rodrigo’s chart-topping debut album ‘Guts’. Chappell Roan felt on top of the world, signed before even finishing high school. Her single, ‘Pink Pony Club’, is a show-tune-inspired pop ballad, written after Roan visited a gay club in West Hollywood for the first time. The song brilliantly encapsulates the feeling of a small-town girl in the big city: “And mama, every Saturday/I can hear your southern drawl a/thousand miles away... saying/God, what have you done”. After its release in April 2020, Chappell was dropped by Atlantic after it underperformed. She felt her dream had been killed moving back to Willard, working to save up and move back out west. She gave herself a year to try and make it. Once back in LA, she continued to work with Dan Nigro, and was signed to Amusement, his imprint at Island Records.

Her debut album is both a romanticisation and lamentation of a young person’s discovery of sex, queer culture, freedom, and love. In an interview with Vulture, Roan described her music as being born out of a commitment to “stop trying to impress the music industry and start trying to impress gay people.” She is unapologetically queer, and being dropped has not deterred her from solidifying this as integral to her brand. The album feels like a reclamation of her teenage years: she is now able to celebrate herself and also be celebrated by others.

Her album cover pulls inspiration from the world of burlesque and drag, but also reminds us of homecoming, of high school. It is reminiscent of the days of VEVO, and when the VMAs were iconic. The tracks do the same thing: “Red Wine Supernova” explores the thrilling novelty of a queer hookup from a drunken, carefree perspective. She takes us through a land of make-believe: “Well, back at my house/I got a California king/okay, maybe it’s a twin bed/ And some roommates, don’t/worry we’re cool”. In the “supernova” of this song nothing matters, and she allows her audience to im-

agine, or reminisce, falling in love for the first time. That is certainly impressive. Yet, on Causal, she laments over the modern nature of relationships: “Knee deep in the passenger seat/and you’re eating me out/Is it casual now?” The song entirely reverses what Roan achieves in “Red Wine Supernova”: despite both songs being overtly sexual, “Casual” makes it jarringly unromantic and visceral. In “Casual” she is begging for the strings to be attached, while in “Red Wine Supernova”, the fun is in the fact that they are not.

“Red Wine Supernova” has all the shiny pop allure of Katy Perry’s “I kissed a girl” but from a genuine queer perspective, not one of fetishization. She told Vulture, “The only Grammy I want to win is album packaging.” Perhaps in wanting to win this zGrammy, she wants recognition for her tenacity as an artist. She knows who she is, and “The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess” is testament to this. She is creating near-perfect pop music, with herself at the centre: the rejection made her stronger, and this album is one major comeback.

Image Credit: Jason Martin/ CC BY-SA 2.0 Via Flickr



Art

Nuclear bombs and feminism: Monica Sjöö’s exhibition at Modern Art Oxford

Taya Neilson

Monica Sjöö: The Great Cosmic Mother. Based on the Modern Art Oxford posters, Sjöö’s activism appeared to be a driving force for social change. I, therefore, wanted to understand how her deep passion for female liberation could be communicated through her artwork and how the gallery would display such an important genre of work.

The first gallery room was like a white, empty shell, but it was Sjöö’s artwork that brought the space to life. The art installation was filled with repeated motifs and imagery of female spirituality and independence that juxtaposed the known adversities faced by women in a patriarchal society and empowered any person who entered the gallery on that day.

Sjöö’s stylistic block print letters in Back Street Abortion – Women Seeking Freedom from Oppression (1968) epitomise the hardship faced by women as a consequence of, as noted by Sjöö, ‘Medicine controlled by men’. Sjöö argues that the right to contraception and legalised abortion were not a decision of the mother. Instead, her

health and bodily autonomy was determined by the male-dominated system which shaped twentieth-century health care. The grief communicated by the figures in the painting acts as a record of the voices and protests of women in the past, like Sjöö, which greatly shaped the privileges of women today. In that moment I saw Sjöö not as an independent artist, but part of a collective group of women - a generation of women - fighting for liberation and justice.

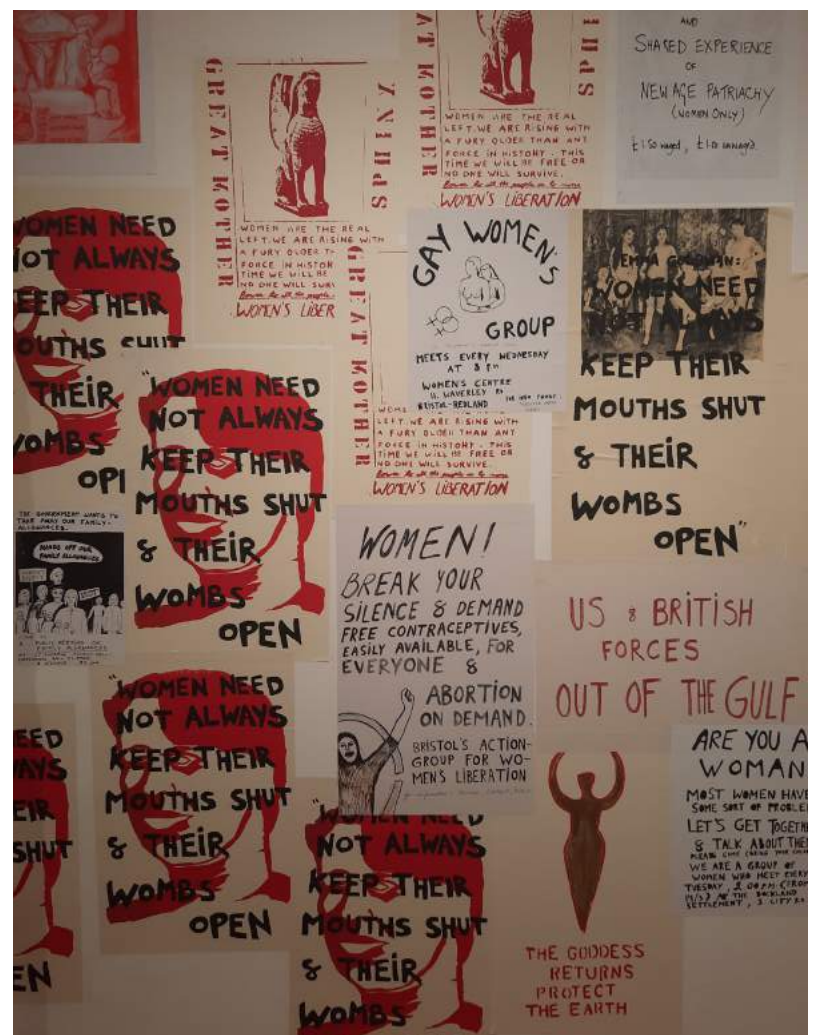
Her work was further contextualised through the use of photography and film recordings. The simplistic layout of the first gallery room is contrasted immediately by the collage of posters plastered to the wall. Sjöö’s poster Women need not always keep their mouths shut and their wombs open (1968) was scattered across the installation and encapsulated the battles faced by Sjöö and other contemporary feminists. Her political consciousness, fighting for the right to abortion and sexual autonomy were translated directly through her artwork on display. Her work felt tactile even against the wall and reflected Sjöö’s own activism as it transcended beyond the canvas.

From a recording played at the

gallery, Sjöö’s activism is evident through her participation in the Women for Life on Earth Peace March at Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp. Footage from the Greenham Common protests, starting on 27 August 1981, reveals how Cold War tensions were a direct and ‘dangerous expression of masculinity’ as noted by Niamh Walker. Military irresponsibility was challenged by the position of mothers protesting against the use of nuclear weapons. The women did not just defend their own position, but that of their children and of families that had no say in the war that was unfolding. Sjöö communicates this through her Women for Life on Earth banner, which she is also depicted holding on a postcard at the gallery.

Monica Sjöö’s work portrays the generational and collective experiences of women from birth to motherhood. Her role and position as a woman were constantly evolving and it was these experiences that she translated to the work she created. Her title ‘The Great Cosmic Mother’ can, therefore, only begin to portray the transcendental experience of Sjöö’s art.

Photography by Taya Neilson



Books

Making reading for pleasure pleasurable

Emma Jeffries

After spending an entire day in the library, the last thing I want to do to relax is more reading. And that's if I can even fit it into my packed term-time schedule. But in 2024, my New Year's Resolution is to read more pleasurable books. I want to find time to make reading relaxing again, and enjoy some books off my rather long TBR list. After being a bit too optimistic with my 2023 Goodreads Challenge, 2024 is going to be the year where I repair my relationship with books. But I'm also going to be realistic: studying at Oxford is a jam-packed lifestyle, and I don't want to miss a second of it.

For humanities students like me, low contact hours and high library hours are the norm. Whilst we may have loved reading as a child, for many it is no longer relaxing: reading has become irrevocably associated with work. But I remember going to the local library in the summer holidays when I was

younger, selecting the next book in the series I was reading, and then reading it all day on my bedroom floor. I remember not being able to put my book down, reading at my meals (which I was not allowed to do), and staying up past my bedtime because I just had to know what happened next. I remember reading being relaxing and fun, and that's something I want again.

But the big problem for me is that I don't feel like reading when I've finished work for the day. I don't find it relaxing any more. In term-time, I typically read one book, if any. So how can reading become pleasurable again?

Firstly, I am being less ambitious in 2024. Although I'd love to read War and Peace, this year I'm sticking to shorter books in simpler prose. I'm going to be reading contemporary fiction by bestselling authors of the last few years rather than enormous classic tomes, and I'm going to keep my pleasurable reading well within fiction. I do love non-fiction, but for now that's going to be reserved for my degree.

Secondly, I am going to listen to more audiobooks. The great thing about them is that they can be free: I use BorrowBox with my membership to Oxfordshire County Library, and there are lots to choose from. It's also good that you have a deadline, which motivates me to finish books. I'm planning to listen to audiobooks as I wander around Oxford this term, especially on my half-hour walk into town in the mornings (an advantage of living further out!).

Finally, I'm going to set aside some time specifically for reading. The time I currently spend scrolling through TikTok could certainly be reduced. I want to hear "put your book down" again, not "young people spend all their time on their phones these days". Don't get me wrong, I love having a phone, but I think I will find reading to be more relaxing than the information-overload provided by my device.

Reading can be hard in the 21st century, where we have been conditioned to have short attention

spans in order to process the vast amount of information available to us. Social media is much more attention-grabbing than reading, and movies and television more fast-paced; in this environment it can be difficult to keep going with a book, especially when they are slower or have sections which are perhaps less engaging. But I think that's what I need to relax. Maybe that's what we all need. I'm now nearly halfway through my degree at Oxford, and it sometimes feels as though I have hardly stopped moving or thinking since I arrived. I want to slow the pace of everything around me as I read.

It is entirely possible that 2024 will be another year where I do not meet my Goodreads goal-100 books last year was way off the mark. But that's okay. I want to read for fun, not for the sake of hitting a target. So much about life when you're studying is about achieving, and I just want reading to be about enjoyment. I will have succeeded if I have made reading for pleasure pleasurable again.

Introducing: 2023's standout reads

Nina Naidu

In spite of many trials and tribulations, I have once again triumphed over my annual 100-book challenge, surpassing it in 2023 by reading a staggering 114 books spanning various genres and authors. Pinpointing favourites is challenging, so instead after some contemplation I have opted to curate a short list of some of the most popular books of the last year.

We kick off with the much-anticipated memoir Spare (January 2023) by Prince Harry, the first book I read last year. Marketed as a tell-all ac-

personal anecdotes, including the infamous 'oscillating penis' scene, felt uncomfortably detailed, while others were simply mundane, like how he hallucinated that a bin was talking to him while on psychedelics. I had hoped for more insights into his experiences as a royal figure, rather than the predominant focus on his military service, which personally didn't captivate me as much. Despite these criticisms, it's a unique glimpse into an extraordinary life, and I hope Prince Harry found solace in sharing his story in Spare.

Onto the realm of fiction, we have Yellowface (May 2023) by Oxford

Yellowface, a satirical take on racial diversity in the publishing industry.

Yellowface lived up to my expectations of a riveting literary thriller. The novel boasts great pacing, immersing readers in June's gradual descent into madness. Beyond being a critique of the publishing industry, Kuang skillfully weaves her personal experiences into the narrative. The novel serves as a platform for discourse on societal attitudes, particularly on Twitter, towards successful women of colour. The incorporation of 'yellowface' as a narrative device certainly adds depth to the explo-

this dystopian novel from Lynch is certainly deserving of its top spot. As a dystopian Ireland slides into totalitarian rule, scientist and mother-of-four Eilish Stack is shocked to hear her trade unionist husband is being interrogated by the police. When her husband vanishes, Eilish is left having to hold up the fort on her own while caught within this treacherous, unpredictable nightmare. Lynch's descriptions are reminiscent of totalitarian governments all around the world, exposing the lived reality of many.

Although this is an unconvention-



count of a real prince exploring the inner workings of the Royal Family, and his eventual estrangement from the institution, Spare promised a riveting journey. Prince Harry reflects on coping with the public loss of his mother, Princess Diana, his struggles as the 'spare' heir, his military service, and his battles with substance addiction.

While I commend Harry's candour and sympathise with his struggles, I found the structural organisation of Spare somewhat overwhelming. There are definitely some endearing moments, such as his meeting Meghan, but at points, the memoir veers into oversharing. Some of his

alumnus R.F Kuang. This literary gem unfolds after the untimely death of Athena Liu, a prominent Chinese-American author. June Hayward, former classmate of Athena's, cleverly seizes the opportunity presented by her frenemy's demise, appropriating Liu's original manuscript that delved into the lives of Chi

nese labourers during World War I. In a bold move, June resorts to the controversial use of 'yellowface' to pass the book off as her own, and her overnight stardom is coupled with an escalating sense of paranoia. As an Asian woman, I was eager to delve into the buzz surrounding

ration of cultural appropriation, making it a thought-provoking read. While I found the Twitter discourse a tad repetitive and distracting, Kuang's storytelling prowess shines through, blending elements of satire, suspense, and social commentary. As a formidable contender in 2023's fiction releases, Yellowface is a must-read for those seeking both entertainment and introspection.

Last, but certainly not least, is the 2023 Booker Prize Winner: Prophet Song (August 2023) by Paul Lynch. The Booker Prize last year had some incredibly strong contenders, with three out of the six shortlisted being written by people named Paul, but

al read for me – I don't tend to read much political fiction – I was swept into the harrowing psyche of Eilish and her utter desperation to save her family, no matter what. It took some getting used to Lynch's writing style, which at times felt a little too intellectual for me, but overall I am glad to have read a book that platforms such an important narrative, making Prophet Song one of 2023's best reads.

2023 was truly a year of amazing writing, and I am so grateful to have explored such a wide variety of literature and non-fiction. It only makes me more thrilled to discover what 2024 has to offer!



WHAT'S ON...

The ultimate guide to what's happening where in Oxford!



Art: Colour Revolution

@The Ashmolean

21st Sep - 18th Feb

An exhibition that has been running for a while but is well worth going to see if you haven't already! From artwork to fashion, *Colour Revolution* takes a look at the much misconceived Victorian period, and dispels the myth that the era was purely grey and drab.

Books: Chaucer Here and Now

@Weston Library

8th Dec - 28th Apr

This exhibition looks at the wide range of interpretations of the works of the man often considered the 'father of English poetry', and how those interpretations have changed over time.

Art: Monica Sjöo: The Great Cosmic Mother

@Modern Art Oxford

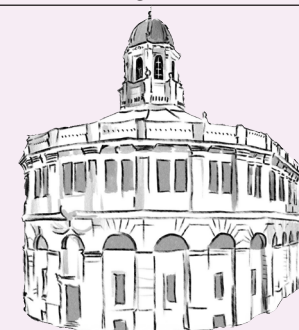
18th Nov - 25th Feb

Featured in our art article this week, this exhibition celebrates the artist's life work and the relationship between art, spirituality, and politics.

Film: Poor Things

@Phoenix Picturehouse

Emma Stone this week won a Golden Globe for her performance in this science fantasy black comedy about a woman who is resurrected following her suicide.



Fashion

2023 fashion - wrapped!

Eden Kilgour

As 2023 comes to a close, it's time to reflect on and deconstruct the year's most popular fashion trends. From the runway to the streets, the past 12 months have witnessed an eclectic assortment of nostalgia and chaos, with seemingly little rhyme or reason for such fads. However, it's no secret that the influence of TikTok on young people is accelerating not only the emergence, but also the extinction of such fashion trends.

Whilst some looks this year, therefore, may be here to stay, it seems as if the majority have died out almost as quickly as they were ignited.

One of the standout trends of 2023, the resurgence of which may point to the debut of Miu Miu's F/W 22 show, is 'ballet-core', a whimsical fusion of ballet-inspired fashion elements. On the runway, this can take the form of pastel, sheer chiffon and puff-

sleeve looks by designers such as Simone Rocha and Zimmermann. However, the filtration of this trend into everyday wear, encouraged and paraded by fashion icons like Ruby Lyn, sees garments such as ballet flats, leg warmers and even tutus and ballet cardigans exhibited in everyday wear. Whilst for some this may be reminiscent of traditional girlhood and femininity, ballet-inspired fashion has been depicted through many forms of media, from Black Swan

to the opening credits of Sex and the City. Having in fact been an influence on the fashion world since 1941, when fashion editor Diana Vreeland first launched the idea of ballet shoes as everyday wear on account of their lack of wartime restrictions, it is possible that this trend is not as fleeting as it initially appears. Although tutus may not become commonplace, it is arguable that more subtle allusions to the ballet-inspired aesthetic, such

as lace, wrap-tops, tights and Margiela Tabis may be here to stay.

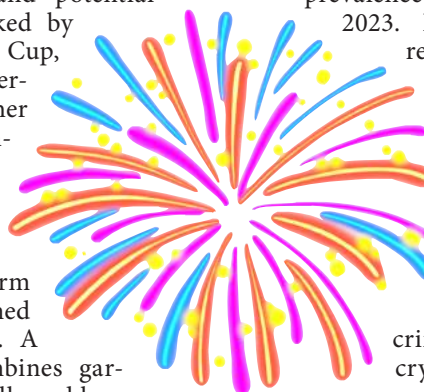
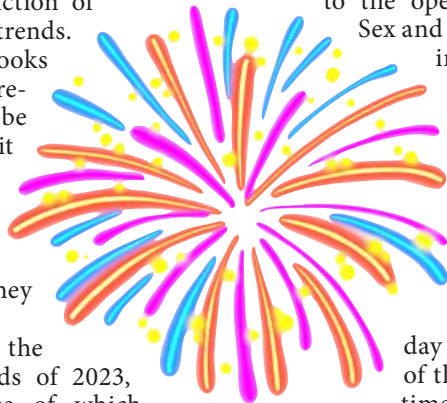
On quite the opposite end of the spectrum, and potentially initially sparked by the 2022 World Cup, comes the interesting and rather unexpected conflation of sport and femininity to create the 'blokette' appearance, the term of which was coined by Alexi Alario. A look which combines garments such as frills and bows with sportswear, particularly Adidas and football scarves, this has been pioneered by trendsetters like Bella Hadid. With this trend, comes the classic revival of Adidas Samba shoes. Unless you've been living under a rock, you've likely witnessed the frankly exponential comeback of variations of the Adidas Samba, Spezial or Gazelle shoe. These versatile and timeless shoes have been a go-to choice for so many this year, especially in their bold colour combinations of yellow, blue and red, indicative of the experimentation and expression of 2023.

Speaking of colour, whilst many argue that a colour in itself cannot be a trend, there's no denying the prevalence of red through 2023. From pops of red in accessories such as bags, tights and socks, to full monochrome such as that which saw Doja Cat adorned with 30,000 crimson Swarovski crystals for Schiaparelli during Paris fashion week, this colour has dominated the fashion landscape, adding vibrancy and passion to contrast the pastels of ballet-core.

Perhaps similarly embracing this flair, the 'pantless' trend has

taken the fashion world by storm and has seen Kendall Jenner and Hailey Bieber in the streets ditching their lower half and opting for options such as tights, hot pants, or boxers. Personally, however, I have to say that I have not witnessed this in everyday wear, and nor do I think I will. Whilst fashion icons have embraced this playful and rebellious look, challenging conventional expectations and encouraging a carefree attitude towards fashion, its impractical nature makes it unlikely to break into the mainstream.

As we bid farewell to 2023, the current fashion landscape reflects a perplexing amalgamation of versatile trends. Looking forward, this eclectic hodgepodge of styles raises the question of whether these looks will transcend into 2024, or remain rooted in the departing year.



Stage

The Little Big Things is the perfect little big thing for festivity

Harry Hatwell

Sohoplac is an extraordinary venue, an in-the-round space and the first new theatre in London's West End for decades. Used for new works and pieces which would not be attractive to traditional commercial venues, Nica Burns's venture at Sohoplac always offers something thought provoking, entertaining, and hitherto undiscovered. *The Little Big Things* was no different and made the perfect Christmas treat for any theatregoer.

Based on a memoir by Henry Fraser, *The Little Big Things* is a musical which tells the story of a teenage boy who suffers from paralysis from the neck down following a diving accident. The show explores his coming to terms with the accident and learning to adapt to his new, bounded life. In the process, he discovers things about himself, and the audience discovers new feats of human adaptability and resilience. Jonny Amies and Ed Larkin, who play the protagonist before and after the diving accident respectively, offer boundless energy and wonderful-

ly capture Henry's transition as he makes peace with his situation.

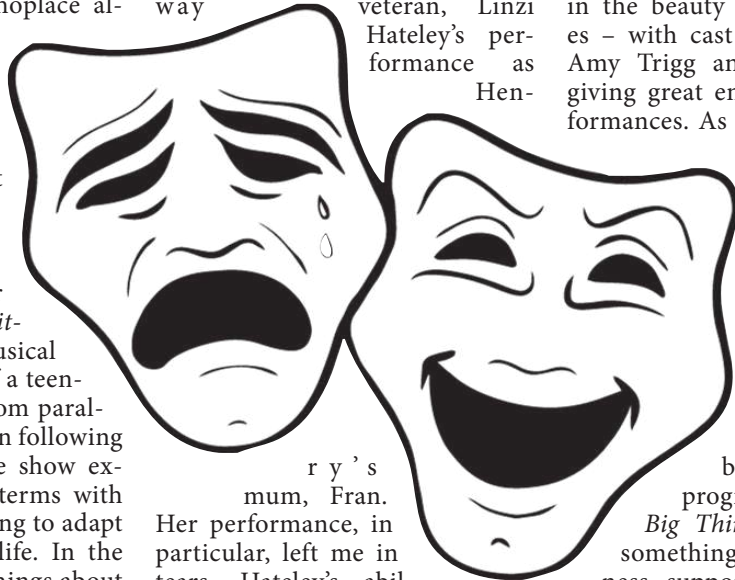
Nica Burns certainly took a punt with *The Little Big Things*, having signed up the production for a run whilst it was only in workshops. The result is a fresh British musical with some hummable tunes and great performances. Not least is West End and Broadway veteran, Linzi Hateley's performance as Henry.

Her performance, in particular, left me in tears. Hateley's ability to convey a panoply of emotions and to embody her character is stunning. It's worth a visit to Sohoplac just for the privilege of seeing Hateley in action. I must admit I was sceptical during the first act - the problem

being that not much happens. By taking so very long to set up the diving accident which the audience knows is coming, the first act was a bit too long for my liking. In contrast, the second act, and its presentation of Henry's transformation following the accident, was far more entertaining.

The Little Big Things is a lesson in the beauty of ensemble pieces - with cast members such as Amy Trigg and Malinda Parriss giving great energy to their performances. As the only West End venue which could accommodate wheelchair-using performers and the set-piece wheelchair lift at the end, Nica Burns has found a true gem in Sohoplac. Despite sounding a bit like a CBeebies programme, *The Little Big Things* does show us something about togetherness, support, and the human spirit. A great message for the festive season.

The Little Big Things: A New Musical by Nick Butcher, Tom Ling, and Joe White, plays at Sohoplac until 2 March 2024.



Stop me if you've heard this one before

Rufus Jones

All Purpose Poem for state occasions
by Wendy Cope

The nation rejoices or mourns
As this happy or sombre day dawns.
Our eyes will be wet
As we sit round the set,
Neglecting our flowerbeds and lawns.

As Her Majesty rides past the crowd
They'll be silent or cheer very loud
But whatever they do
It's undoubtedly true
That they'll feel patriotic and proud.

In Dundee and Penzance and Ealing
We're imbued with appropriate feeling:
We're British and loyal
And love every royal

Known predominantly for 'The Orange', a heart-warming poem that celebrates life's simple pleasures, Wendy Cope's warmth and wit shine throughout her first collection, *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis*, though especially in this week's poem *All-Purpose Poem for State Occasions*.

This poem's brilliance lies in how it has succinctly captured how a good majority of the British public feel about the monarchy. While it isn't perfect and it does have a lot of fusty traditions, they're uniquely British ones which unite us all (usually at the pub).

The poem's message isn't that simple, though, and I doubt Cope herself holds such a rosy view. The necessity of an 'all-purpose' poem

is hardly a compliment: what's unspoken is that we'd be drowning in (probably quite dull) poems if every minor royal holiday, gala or celebration warranted an ode. Why do you think it is the Poet Laureate only unholsters their pen at suitably momentous events like a birth or death? I'm sure even the monarchy's staunchest defenders could admit that 'Ode on His Majesty's Visit to the Clockmaker's Guild of Plymouth' would hardly incite the nation's royal fervour.

Not adoration, not denunciation... Cope's poem is warmly nestled in-between. Along with its clean rhyme-scheme and deceptive simplicity, it's the poem's abundance of good-humour that makes it so good.

Film

Review: Murder is Easy

Hassan Akram

Oxford is no stranger to culture wars. We know how little provocation such wars require, so it's unsurprising that the BBC's latest Agatha Christie series, *Murder is Easy*, has managed within a week of its release to precipitate a full-scale conflict. Director Meenu Gaur's decision to replace the retired policeman of the novel with a Windrush-generation civil servant has been variously praised (The Guardian) and denounced (The Telegraph) by all the usual suspects.

In 2024 — uncannily like in 1914 — the main causes of the Great War appear to be: militarism (“woke militance”); alliances (the BBC is said to be allied with the “woke mob”); imperialism (Gaur called the show “an allegorical story about colonialism”); and nationalism (the Daily Mail's review complained that “nostalgia for Agatha Christie's Britain... [is] a thought crime”). Art is rarely separable from politics, and it's quite clear that *Murder is Easy's* fiercest critics and admirers are reacting to its sociopolitical stance rather than to its value as a TV show, which deserves to be examined in its

own right.

Now, the aim of a detective story is to please. It must provide a puzzle; it must provide a solution; the author or director may embellish this basic framework with comedy, drama, romance, politics or anything else, but should never waver from the central focus of puzzle and solution, because then it would no longer be a detective story. Agatha Christie understood this, and, when you look closely enough, so does the BBC.

The plot isn't one of Christie's best (but then, anything would pale beside *And Then There Were None* or Roger Ackroyd) and it hasn't translated exceptionally well onto the screen. Quite often it feels convoluted and drawn-out, and it could certainly have been compressed from two episodes into one. Yet the only real test of a detective plot is

the solution: is it surprising and does it feel earned? The solution here ticks both boxes and, for that satisfaction alone, the series is worth watching.

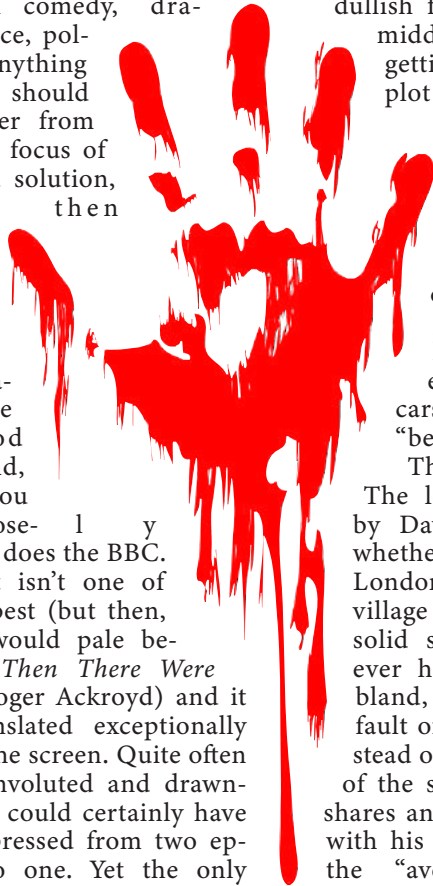
Even if, during one of those dullish few minutes in the middle where nobody's getting murdered, the plot fails to please, the cast and direction sustain the interest. Christie's distinct period flavour is reinforced by regular drone shots of a green and pleasant land, country houses, costumes, slick cars and references to “before the war”.

Then there is the cast. The lead role is played by David Jonsson, who, whether strolling through London or playing on the village sports field, has a solid screen presence. If ever he comes across as bland, that is through no fault of his own but is instead owing to the dryness of the script. Jonsson also shares an obvious chemistry with his fellow investigator, the “averagely observant secretary” Morfydd Clark.

Above all, what they have in common is an ability to wear period dress instead of being worn by it.

Penelope Wilton's role at the start is initially promising, but she is promptly bumped off and confirmed as a cameo rather than a character. Tom Riley's Lord Whitfield belongs recognisably to a now-obsolete “type” — the grand rich host of the country-house dinner — and he carries this off with enough of the right accent and mannerisms to be convincing. The best performance, though, comes from Matthew Baynton (fresh from his address at the Oxford Union). He is as charismatic and wild-eyed here as he was in his *Horrible Histories* days, if slightly more subdued, and his role as a eugenicist doctor is one of the show's highlights.

Murder is Easy is, on the whole, not the best Agatha Christie adaptation. Nowhere does it match the quick pace, witty script and characters, or deft direction of last year's *Why Didn't They Ask Evans*. Then again, there have certainly been worse adaptations. On Friday evening, in the empty few hours between the end of collections and the start of the Bop, this new show is an easy enough way to pass the time.



Forget Her Not: Rediscovering Women in Music

Keziah Mccan

Stumbling

Upon Fiona Apple's 1999 album *When The Pawn* actually inspired the concept of this column. I had heard of the American singer/songwriter before, but actually listening to her music was something entirely different.

I discovered that many others are unaware of Fiona Apple and her discography, and are thus also missing out. So, my mission is to enlighten, one underrated female artist at a time.

It's not just Apple's inimitable voice that captivated me over the winter vac, but the Joni Mitchell-esque emotional intensity and unique musicality of her lyrics. Fiona Apple defies genre typecasting, with each album containing a plethora: at once alt rock, blues and jazz, even infusing classical.

Fiona Apple McAfee-Maggart was born and raised in New York City with her mother and sister (though spent summers with her father in Los Angeles) and composed jazz pieces growing up. From the age of 12, she suffered from OCD, anxiety and depression, PTSD and an eating disorder following a traumatic event in her young life.

The powerful poignancy of her music cannot therefore be separated from the artist's experiences. Apple's debut album *Tidal* addresses and explores her trauma, isolation and woes. Its lyrics deal deftly with her personal life through oceanic metaphors, and we see her pain ebb and flow and rage below the surface, herself an emptied shell, helpless victim of “he” who “took my pearl” (from the album's second song, *Sullen Girl*). It is no surprise, then, that this young lyrical mastermind's debut album went triple-Platinum. But the album didn't achieve great fame until Apple's controversial, overtly sexual music video for the single *Criminal* earned her a Grammy Award for Best Female Rock Vocal Performance, and the album a spot in the Top Ten.

Since then, each of Apple's albums offer something unique and deeply personal, her lyricism plaintive, apt and soulful. Both album titles *The Idler Wheel* and *When the Pawn* derive from longer poems written by Apple herself, showcasing her great expressive ambition. Apple has earned herself a cult following over the years, spellbinding listeners with her poetry and stunning, rare contralto voice.

My personal favourite songs of hers? *I Know*, *Paper Bag*, *Slow Like Honey* and *Extraordinary Machine*.



THE SOURCE:

The Mermaid

Lucy Pollock

The mermaid is dying, and no-one cares.

She does not belong here, here in the suburbs

Where council-mandated hedges block her from the sea.

She does not belong where houses must fit an aesthetic.

She does not belong where those in mansions spit on the poor,

Where they would not deign to spit on her, desperate for water.

The mermaid is drying out, and no-one cares.

Her kelp-like hair turns to straw,

Her skin, now cold and dry, shrivels like a prune,

Her tail flip-flops next to a manicured garden,

Her gills gasp.

She loses control of her limbs, and is close to giving up.

The mermaid is gasping, and no-one cares.

Stuck here in the suburbs

Surrounded by people who can't understand what she is.

A man walks past, and scoffs at her vulnerability.

A kind woman pours the last of her Voss water on the mermaid's gills.

Everyone else walks past, avoiding eye contact.

The mermaid is on death's door, and no-one cares.

Her tail has stopped convulsing, now.

Her gills have stopped screaming.

Her last thoughts are of her brethren,

All too far away to save her.

Her last word is a strangled sigh.

The mermaid is dead, and now they care.

They pretend her dried-out hair was beautiful,

Pretend to ignore how the air pressure mangled her face.

Eventually, they say, “she was only a fish - look at her fins and scales”

And the corpse of the mermaid is taken to the fishmonger,

Destined to be this week's produce.

Wild Swimming in Oxford: ready to take the plunge?

Reuben Meadows discusses the growing love for swimming in Oxford's rivers amongst students

Wait, here in the river – the Isis? When I tell people I've just been out swimming this is usually the first question I hear. Assumptions of a gentle Iffley Sports Centre swim are soon broken and replaced by genuine concern. For most, jumping into the river is confined to a moment of fresher's week craziness – a punting stroke gone wrong, or a drunken hurrah into the Cherwell. Come Trinity, some may venture into Hinksey's welcoming waters. But in dreary Hilary? Well, that's just insane. But there's something addictive about doing something crazy.

I've swam in lakes and rivers for as long as I can remember but began swimming in Oxford almost a year ago in Hilary. While less than affectionately known as Hellary, a trip to Port Meadow can be a momentary respite from the library doom and gloom. It breaks up the endless rhythm of essays and tute sheets. You arrive early at Port Meadow. A morning chorus is building. Sunlight filters through the thin mist covering the

fields. It feels like a magical place, and a far cry from the High Street hustle and bustle. An escape.

On entering the water, you're shocked awake from the early-morning delirium in which you had convinced yourself this was a good idea. And it is a good idea – but perhaps the romanticised charm of these riverside pastures was a little too powerful. Too late now, you're standing waist deep and committed to the plunge! Adrenaline is surging. You imagine yourself somewhere tropical (southern Spain perhaps?) until a duck floating past reminds you of the cold-water plunge you're undertaking. It's 6 degrees, 8 am and most of a reading list is waiting for you back home. But the shock of the water helps put things in perspective.

It's an increasingly popular Oxford pursuit, and I'm glad to see more and more people heading out into the city's watery back garden. Port Meadow offers the chance to take a break from the internet frenzy – although I wouldn't blame you for sharing your open-water bravery with all your friends online! It's too good



to keep a secret. And it's a great chance to make some like-minded friends: whilst sharing a moment of numb glee, I have met some of the most open people along the Isis.

If you're not ready to brave the winter swims, you can wait till Trinity to try Hinksey: a not-so-secret paradise. It's now a well-known summer term destination. Oxford's Miami Beach draws in crowds of students during some of the year's hottest days, filling the grassy banks with the sounds of laughter, and the splash of an occasional tumble from the pontoon. Located on Abingdon Road, it might be a bit of a walk,

but it's worth it. Once a former gravel pit for the railway, natural springs have transformed the site into an Oxford oasis. You may see a red-crested pochard, or perhaps a lesser-spotted Engineering student.

If I've convinced you to give it a go, but you're not sure where to start, Oxford University's very own wild swimming society offers a great outdoor community and a safe way to start out. One of the most popular events is an 11 am swim on Saturday followed by brunch at St. Anne's College. Truly unmissable – the hash browns (and company) are to die for.

For me, swimming in Oxford

offers a chance to leave behind the stress of the Radcam rat race. While it certainly isn't a cure-all, I have found it helps me balance my student life. Not to mention, it's a fun way to surprise people. Standing on a silty bank of the river Thames as a cool rain begins to fall, I do sometimes question what I've got myself into.

But I couldn't go back. Whether you join us for an early Hilary dip or wait for a sunny afternoon in Trinity, do give it a go while you're in Oxford – it would be great to see as many people as possible get out and enjoy Oxford's amazing scenery.

Image Credit: Reuben Meadows

Cherpse

Cherwell sent two lucky readers on a blind date, here's how it went...

ROMEO	JULIET
<p>First impressions? They brought me flowers which was a bit of a surprise! Seemed super sweet and especially considerate about me being late.</p> <p>Did it meet your expectations? Yeah, I actually was expecting it to be super awkward but conversation flowed really easily.</p> <p>What was the highlight? We went for a little walk afterwards, which was lovely.</p> <p>What was the most embarrassing moment? Revealing my spotify wrapped... no further comment.</p> <p>Describe the date in 3 words: Friendly, calm, wholesome</p> <p>Is there a second date on the cards? Defenitely.</p>	<p>First impressions? They were slightly frazzled but apologetic about being late. A really positive and smiley person.</p> <p>Did it meet your expectations? It was a really lovely conversation. We had lots of things in common which was helpful, and even extended the date slightly.</p> <p>What was the highlight? I guess when I found out he had the 'Glee Cast' on his Spotify wrapped...</p> <p>What was the most embarrassing moment? When I spilled my coffee down myself, not exactly cute.</p> <p>Describe the date in 3 words: Fun, interesting, surprising</p> <p>Is there a second date on the cards? Probably!</p>

The patience of ordinary things

Evelyn Power discusses one small, mundane pleasure of life... This week, *she discusses the joy that can be found whilst packing...*



Pre-university packing is undoubtedly a chore. But it is more than the boredom of the task that makes deviations from it so enjoyable.

I try to avoid procrastination. I find it is generally an exercise in dread and guilt; more 'deer caught in the headlights of too many deadlines', than 'casual enjoyment of leisure time'. What little self preservation instincts I have in this matter, however, fall completely out of the window when it comes to the distractions I find during packing for my return to Oxford.

The ease with which I am entirely absorbed by the (re) discovery of my own

possessions is an offence with a myriad of causes. Latent hoarder-ish tendencies, the multiple misguided phases of my teenage years, and an embarrassingly eroded attention span

all play their part - but the clutter of an old bedroom evokes a tenderness

that extends far beyond the mere distractions they provide.

The detritus of our pasts reflect the hopes, ambitions and disappointments that accompanied them. What may appear to the untrained (or undeluded) eye as a wardrobe full of ugly hats and ill-fitting jumpers, contains the narrative of all the joys and pains and lessons learned of navigating a shifting identity, while also slowly realising that a 'signature hat' is a CBBC costuming prop, not a thing that any actual functional person should aspire to own. The rediscovery of a notebook half-filled with 'potential future catchphrases' is not only proof that in 2016 I truly considered saying 'schwing' at the end of every joke I made; it is an encounter with yet another discarded attempt at reinvention, a reminder of the old yearning for change.

How truly can we say that our past selves are gone, when there they are, right now - pressed between the pages of an old diary (in my case, rarely kept), woven into the fabric of a poorly-knitted

scarf, wound tight around gifted rosary beads from a long-forgotten Catholic education? How easy is it to put down what you're doing and hold a fragment of your own history in your hands? What version of you painted these walls and chose these posters and arranged these books? Do you miss them?

When I finally get around to packing my actual necessities, I will (tragically) have to leave behind my old fidget spinners and top trump cards, so spending so much time rifling through them may seem like a waste - but it provides a valuable space for reflection on the past, as we move into yet another new beginning. It's almost a story in itself, really; once, a girl lived in this room. She couldn't leave a beach without taking a pocketful of 'cool' rocks, and imagined a whole different life for herself every time she bought a new item of clothing. She isn't here any more, not really. But her dog-eared books and used-up perfumes and unfinished plans are. And so am I.

Looking for love?

Email lifestylecherwell@gmail.com or message one of our editors!



“Home is where the heart is..”

Disha Hedge

The Michaelmas vac is a strange part of the Oxford calendar. For freshers, it is the first time they will be making the return home - having to stuff overpacked suitcases and newly purchased stash into their car after just eight weeks here. Some return to tiny villages, others to big cities and others remain in Oxford. Others spend a couple of weeks on the slopes of Val D'Isere. Very few of us, however, are as lucky as I am to be returning to the land of Milton Keynes...

Going back can be a challenge. The student returns to a familiar land, but everything feels different.

“Very few of us, however, are as lucky as I am to be returning to the land of Milton Keynes...”

I just started getting used to being in Oxford again and suddenly it's time to move back. No longer are my weeks filled with hours at the Rad Cam, spontaneous Swan and Castle trips or Bridge Thursdays. Rather, I return home to find my younger sister has raided my clothes and makeup, and is somehow taller than me (although at 5'2, I have no right to act sur-

prised...). While I was busy in the Oxford bubble, the familiar parts of my hometown have also grown in their own ways (like the number of roundabouts for example).

In my opinion, a good vacation should always feature copious amounts of sleep. Even if your tutors may have fed you the age-old line of 'a vacation is just when you vacate Oxford and continue to work elsewhere', it is important to take a proper break and to help yourself recover after the trauma of an Oxford term. The lack of impending deadlines is an exhilarating feeling and the threat of collections is not quite enough to destroy that feeling either. I like my recovery days to be punctuated by long naps, mum's cooking and Netflix's 'Are you still watching?'. Although I found this term that Oxford managed to creep its way onto my screen regardless; thank you Saltburn and Wonka.

At some point, the time for the vacation staple arises - the big termly catch up with home friends. This consists of life updates and embarrassing 'remember when's' and before long all the time apart seems to just melt away. It feels like nothing has changed yet at the same time it feels like everything has. I catch myself accidentally letting words like 'Michaelmas', 'Hilary', or 'rustication' slip and have to make sure not to use the word 'Oxford' too much in conversation for fear of sounding absolutely insufferable. One of my friends has developed a Scottish

twang in her accent (studying in Edinburgh), another has spent two years in the real world working after deciding not to go to University. There is a bittersweet feeling as I remember how we have all grown as people but also how much our lives have grown apart over the last two years. People are starting to think about jobs and where they might want to settle down in the future. Others are taking the 'go with the flow approach'. It all feels as though it is moving a bit too fast.

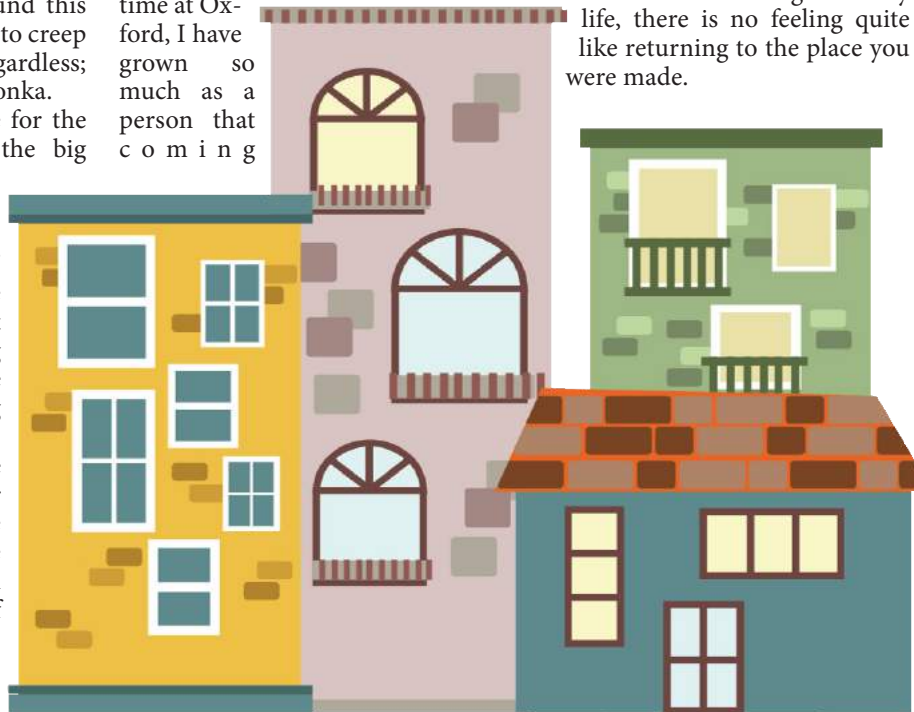
I often grapple with a persistent feeling of guilt about not staying in touch with home friends in the way I feel I should have. And yet, every year I also feel a sense of guilt for letting those earlier Oxford friendships wane. Throughout my time at Oxford, I have grown so much as a person that

home almost feels like a bit of a culture shock - even though I live only an hour's drive away.

It can feel like a bit of a conflict - the home where I grew up now feels like a waiting room before I get back to my 'real life' at Oxford.

“It all feels as though it is moving a bit too fast.”

It's been months, and soon it will be years since I walked down paths I used to take daily. But regardless of where 'home' is, or where it becomes throughout my life, there is no feeling quite like returning to the place you were made.



Dear Cherwell, I've reunited with my old crush!

Dear Cherwell. Happy New Year! Please help... I just went and fell in love with my old school friend over the Christmas vac! I'm a fresher and I used to have a huge crush on one of my classmates at school but I never did anything about it. Over the vac, we met up and began spending time together again. We spent hours walking our dogs together, catching up, and talking about our new uni lives. I don't know if it was the Christmas feeling in the air but I completely fell for him. Now I've moved back I miss him so much! I'm trying to stop myself from texting him all the time, but I just want to go back to our cute dog walks and talking about life! What should I do? - Confused at Christ Church

Dear Confused, Oh dear! It sounds like you've had a small dose of Christ-

mas romance. Firstly, let me applaud the self-reflection and maturity you're approaching this with. You're right to ask for help when you want to text someone 24/7, and ex-crushes are no exception - that's often a sign of getting too attached too fast.

Reconnecting with an old crush sounds like a fabulous Christmas present in lots of ways - and I'm sure that your weekly rendezvous made his Christmas vac too! After a period of anonymity in your new university life, returning to your hometown, as new, more grown-up people and finding that familiarity again can definitely be a source of comfort - and in your case, maybe even love. That said, this can be seen in two ways... I'm sure your friend is easy to get along with, and funny, and friendly as you observe in your longer letter, but I am hesitant to take this as enough grounds to be in love with him.

I wonder, do you think that after the new beginnings, friends, and craziness of Michaelmas term, the comfort of an old friend and its simple and easy companionship is more an accurate description of what's going on here? It sounds like you had entirely forgotten about this crush until you reconnected during the vac.

Either way, though, even someone you love doesn't need you thinking about texting them all the time! Don't forget to enjoy your time, and make the most of being back.

I don't mean that you should in any way end this friendship, or stop talking to him, but I instead think it could be good to reflect on what the connection really means to you, and whether the madness of moving back to Oxford has made you see it through rose-tinted glass. If this did turn out to be the case, that would be completely understandable.

However, as always, you know

yourself best. Whilst it may not be feasible to start a long-distance relationship whilst you're in different cities, if you think that you really are falling for this person, you shouldn't be afraid to voice your feelings. Being honest with important people in your life about your feelings is the bedrock of a good relationship - platonic or romantic. If you're certain of your feelings being something more substantial, I'd recommend speaking up sooner rather than later. There's nothing worse than living with unrequited love.

Falling for a friend is difficult, no matter the circumstances, but I think that once you get stuck into term, you'll find that your sudden romantic feelings will fade as quickly as they came. It is, after all, hot girl Hilary, and you may want to make the most of that!

Good luck!



Time for a hobby, honeybun. Get to wandering Port Meadow, start herding college cats. Make hay.



Keep watchful eyes on new tute partners; I've seen them watch you back.



Don't listen to me, listen to Fleabag. You already know what you're going to do; everybody does.



This is a new beginning. Cut your hair all wonky, learn a new dance, drop your ex a DM - wait, not that last one. Leave them where they belong.



Go far, far, away to find yourself. Come back and tell everyone your fantastical tales. Don't listen to them; they do want to hear it.



You're stronger than you realise; you could rip the phonebook clean in half. Send the text you've been avoiding.

Got a problem? Need some advice?

Email lifestylecherwell@gmail.com or message one of our editors!

♎ Libra



You've been inside too long; uncage the beast and flap your glorious wings.

♏ Scorpius



Accept those compliments. You're just too good.

♐ Sagittarius



Maximise time spent on useful stuff, and minimise time spent on fluff. Cut out vowels entirely. Tht's btr.

♑ Capricornus



Ask that person that thing. You know, that thing you wondered? Can't hurt.

♒ Aquarius



Learn Semaphore, signal across the RadCam and see what happens. There's fun to be found in total strangers: Hot Girl Hilary.

♓ Pisces



Look into insurance. Insure your laptop, your car, your heart - this year you'll claim.

A fresh(er's) perspective on Michaelmas term

Mair Andrews

When I transitioned from GCSEs to A Levels, my mum and I created a mantra: "you have txo float before you swim, otherwise you'll sink". It was a way for me to remember that I was learning, not just academically - but also personally. Sometimes, you have to let a new experience come at you like a tidal wave before you can try to interact with it, control it, and make the most of it. One of the first things I did after moving into my accommodation in Freshers' Week was to write this little mantra on a post-it note and Sellotape it to the wall next to my bed.

University life is completely alien to anything I have experienced before. You would expect the excitement of being an 'Oxford Student' to disappear - after all, everyone here got into Oxford. For me, it did not disappear exactly; it was buried. Everyone has their moments of being excited about being here, whether it is their first walk past the Rad Cam on the way to a lecture, or simply Matriculation, but no one says it aloud. The reality that I was attending Oxford University didn't hit me until I was taking down my room decorations at the end of term; I was imagining what I would

say to my friends from home about my first term, comparing it to their university experience.

I visited a friend at Nottingham University - my second week, her third - and I was outraged. She had not written a single essay while I had already written three, and we were both studying English. But still I felt like she had done so much more than me: her flat-mates made her social life look just as exciting as the one she had at home, while I hadn't formed a close circle of friends yet. It wasn't until that visit that I realised how completely different Oxford is as a university experience, defined by its short terms, heavy workloads, and small class sizes.

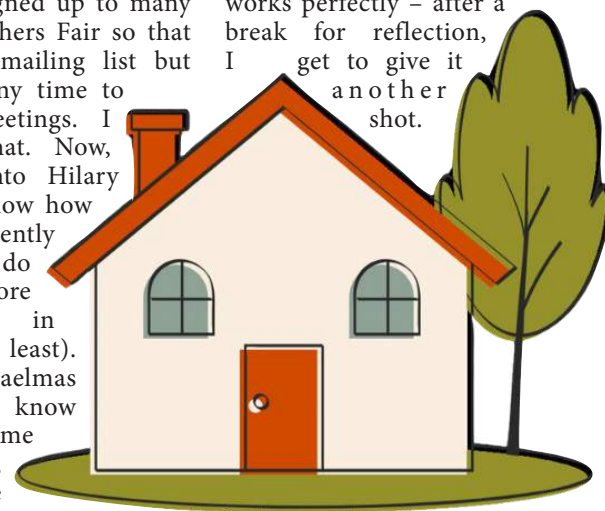
My social life was strange to begin with. Looking back at photos of Freshers' Week and seeing the crowd of people I befriended on day one, whom I have not since spoken to, is hilarious. Leaving Atik early on a Wednesday night because "I've got to translate some riddles tomorrow!" is never

something that I imagined people to accept without mockery, but being surrounded by like-minded people is not just a cliché from a personal statement: it's something that has made university life feel like everything I wanted it to be.

My approach to Michaelmas term was that it was a trial run for the rest of my university experience. I signed up to many societies at Freshers Fair so that I was on the mailing list but did not have any time to attend any meetings. I don't regret that. Now, I'm walking into Hilary feeling like I know how to live independently and how to do my degree (more than I knew in October, at least). With Michaelmas completed, I know how much time my degree takes, and therefore

how much time I have left to dedicate to societies and sports.

Stage one of my mantra has been completed: I have learned how to 'float' and how to get by at university. As I am packing my suitcase for Hilary term, I am preparing to start stage two - 'swimming', and thriving. The new term coinciding with the new year works perfectly - after a break for reflection, I get to give it another shot.



Lessons from the landing...

Katya Ferrier brings you a musing and a meal... This week, 'dough(nut) trust strangers'



Thursday evening. Eighth week. My head has finally stopped spinning after a tumultuous Park End (I think). A crinkled pastry bag is tucked under my elbow. I elegantly sit down on the landing of my college's only building which predates the Russian Revolution (yeah Hilda's!), lovingly refurbished with institutional blue-grey carpet which must be hiding a multitude of bacterial sins.

This landing is currently the locus that's fuelling my body. With fuel comes growth. Although I'm not sure I've grown many inches since October, this landing, coupled with yummy food and great company, has probably been the site of my most productive (emotional) learning this year. So, this column hopes to bring you earnest musings from an (at times) foolish twenty-year-old. And maybe some culinary inspo from my college's resident 'Ottolenghi-in-waiting' (a self-awarded title, sadly).

Firmly positioned in the corner of the landing, I begin to inhale a creamy and decadent crosstown doughnut (it was the end of term; needs must). I glance up at this evening's guest. My college daughter. Her azure eyes still twinkling with that fresher glow, she sighs before exclaiming: 'Never, ever, leave your bike unlocked outside the faculty on the weekend!'

Whilst this doesn't seem

like a particularly revelatory thought - to not leave your belongings unattended - this throwaway comment lingered with me as much as the flavour palette of Crosstown's Chocolate Truffle Doughnut still dances on my tongue six weeks later.

The notion of a silly fresher leaving their unlocked bike out in the world, putting all their faith into their newfound city, has a vague naivety to it that intrigues me. The fact I've spent less than a year actually in my university city, and yet have amassed friends that I feel I've known for years appears both bewildering and paradoxical.

Existentialism aside, I would have never built these friendships, without putting just a little bit of trust in the hands of complete strangers - leaving my metaphorical bike unlocked as it were.

With it being the month of new beginnings, maybe those who feel a little too settled in the Oxford ecosystem and those who feel that Oxford still isn't quite 'home', should have a little faith and welcome in some new characters. Leaving your 'bike' locked only limits your narrative. It can be all too easy to fall into a comfortable routine of library-lecture-bar-bed. Trust me (a stranger!!) and disrupt your daily ritual. January is too dreary after all.

Cherwell's Checklist

Our life editors' suggestions for what you need in your Hilary term starter pack

1 Strepils. Time to stock up your medicine cupboard. Lem-sip, Olbas oil, the lot. Even if you managed to hide from fresher's flu during Michaelmas, it's probably still lurking in a Bodleian library near you.

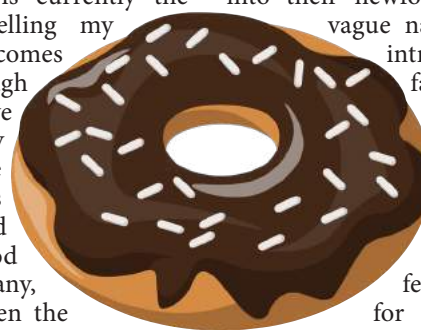
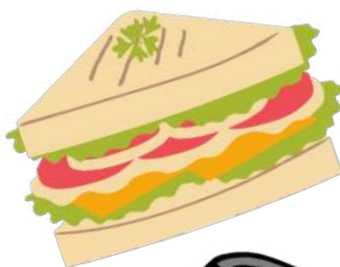
2 Caffeine. Did someone say a collections all-nighter? If your vac revision didn't happen as hoped, you'll find yourself in need of this liquid energy.

3 ATS Sandwich.* Making a less-than-excited return to your department? Stop off on your way to the Science Parks for a sandwich that is sure to turn your day around. *not sponsored by ATS.

4 Supermarket ready-meals. Is hall too expensive? Or perhaps you're out of the meal-prepping routine? Indulge in

a deliciously quick Saino's ready-meal. The cottage pie is a 10/10.

5 Hat & Gloves. This is Hilary. Not Trinity. Winter shorts-wearers beware. Wrap up warm, Oxford's ice age is upon us.



Flapping wings: taking the chicken scene by storm

Hassan Akram

There are two KFCs in central Oxford – one on Cowley Road and the other on Cornmarket – and until a few years ago their hegemony over the fried-chicken market seemed secure. Since then, the kebab vans have upped their game, and the little independent shops have also improved the general standard. By the time Popeyes arrived here in 2023, KFC was already in its twilight.

Popeyes has revolutionised the Oxford fried-chicken scene. It only arrived in the UK three years ago but has rapidly established itself as a force to be reckoned with. I can say without exaggeration that, in eighteen years of eating fried chicken far and wide, I have never – never – had anything better than Popeyes; and that, by the

end of this decade, Popeyes will have overtaken KFC as the largest chicken dealer in both Oxford and the whole country.

Now, the spicy chicken burger is the highlight of the menu. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of chicken burger: there is the flat, plasticky “steak” burger that you find in the kinds of shacks which, the next time you go there, have been closed down by the Food Standards Agency; and there is chunkier, better-quality “fillet” sold by KFC and others. Popeyes’ burgers are in the latter category. Twelve hours before serving, the fillet is marinated in a crisp, darkish batter of aromatic herbs which sprawls out in fat ridges; then is lathered with spicy mayo and topped off with gherkins (only if you’re keen on gherkins); before being slapped in between two hot brioche buns.

When funds are running low, of course, and a big burger is out of the question, Popeyes’ Saver Meals provide, for £2.99, a light yet agreeable stomach-filler. There are four types of Saver Meals to choose from. I usually go for the spicy chicken strips with fries. (Their fries, by the way, are fresh, slender and as good as can be expected, but aren’t in the same league as the chicken).

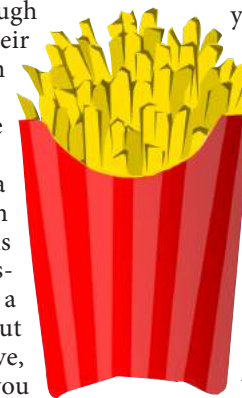
The other Saver items involve wings. Wings are usually the standard unit of measurement when discussing chicken shops – like pints for pubs – though the ones from Popeyes have, historically, made quite a poor showing. They all used to be stiff and tasteless, as the chicken pieces still are. But this problem was later solved by the introduction of the Ghost Pepper Wings (£5.25 for five). These are dusted with a zingy

seasoning which rubs off on your fingers like Pringle powder, but which is punchier than any of the other things and lingers for longer on the tongue. If your tolerance for spice is low, they come with your choice of Popeyes sauce (Ranch Sauce is the best, though they are all good in their way, and all come in attractive-looking pots) which cools the flavour quite well.

There are also a range of vegetarian options, and various sides, drinks, and desserts. And, if you’re a regular, it all works out as more cost effective, because, whenever you buy something, you get a barcode from which you’re guaranteed to win anything from a free ice-cream to a free year’s worth of

chicken sandwiches (or most often something in between, like a burger meal).

Now, I’ll finish with a warning that Popeyes may have unaccountable effects on your health and mind. You may well find yourself under the grip of violent cravings in the middle of the night – or, worse, in the middle of a tutorial – which send you marching suddenly off to 36-37 Queen Street. You might end up having to mortgage your bed and your laptop in exchange for more spicy chicken burger meals. Moderation is the word. I would try my best to restrain these fatal attractions... as much as humanly possible once that batter has passed the lips and that sauce has touched the tongue.



Ancient Recipes...

Sick of having pesto pasta everyday? Try our recipe for Chaucerian cream

Don your fayre chopping garb. For Fig and Raisin Cream:

125 g well-soaked dried figs
125 g stoned raisins
275 ml red wine

Good pinch of ground black pepper

1/3 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
Soft dark brown sugar to taste
3 teaspoons rice flour or corn-flour

A drop of red food colouring
Salt to taste

“Take half fyges and half raisouns; pike hem [remove the stalks] and waishe hem in water. Skalde hem in wyne, bray hem in a mortar, and draw hem through a straynour. Cast hem in a pot and therwith powdur of peper and oother good powdours [no, not that kind]; alay it up with flour of rice, and colour it. Salt it; seeth it & messe it forth.”

That should be clear enough. Why not tell a tale or two over candlelight when you eat?

Recipe from Maggie Black's *The Medieval Cookbook*; Image Credit: CC0 via RawPixel



Cherwell Food dines at Lula's Ethiopian and Eritrean Cuisine

Georgie Allan

I knew it would be good when we were sat opposite Lula's poetry library.

On a warm afternoon in early June, my friend and I resolved our fast-approaching-Prelims woes with dinner at Lula's Ethiopian & Eritrean Cuisine restaurant on Park End Street. Quiet, softly broken from the relentless thrum of exam season, this was a welcome idyll.

Other than the practice of feeding your dining partner as a gesture of friendship, I had no knowledge of Ethiopian cuisine. We opened the door through the heavenly glow of refracted summer sun, greeted with a rumble of nondescript jazz and the familiar face of a local barista (who was probably less pleased to have been followed by parasitic students). We would later discuss how much of a blessing Lula's is for Oxford's vegans and non-students. Indeed, I'd much rather keep it a secret. Still, this welcome stood us newbies in good stead.

The waiter happily guided our ignorance through the menu. By his recommendation and willingness to cooperate with our student budget, we ended up with:

Habesha Hamli - Kale and potatoes cooked in olive oil with onions, garlic, and chilli.

Red lentils - Slow cooked in a rich sauce of caramelised onions, garlic, mixed spices and

Berbera (a particular spice mixture).

And an injera each.

The injera is a staple of Ethiopian cuisine. It is a pancake-like flatbread made with traditionally just teff

flour and water. Lula's explains that “Brown teff is an ancient East African cereal grass that originated in Ethiopia circa 4000 BC to 1000 BC.” Though the injera is not complex, it is delicious. Its wonderful simplicity laughs at restaurants that need liquid nitrogen to distract from the food.

It was a filling meal but definitely left me wanting to taste more. The garlic - and this is a true garlic lover's haven - made for rich fulfilment. The potatoes were perhaps aligned with the sag aloo dish with chest-kicking hotness. I could venture to compare the food to various dishes - lentils to dal, potatoes to sag aloo, injera to pancakes (celebrate pancake day with a trip to Lula's) - but, if truth be told, Lula's has its own, unparalleled jazzy cheekiness. It's spicy where you least expect it.

And, in the spirit of such cheek, we were coaxed into trying the traditional honey wine. Lula's offers sweet or dry; we went for sweet. Lula's menu writes: “The production of wine in Ethiopia can be traced to the early centuries of the first millennium A.D. In Ethiopia and Eritrea, Tej is often homemade and served at Tej houses and for special occasions. Served in a flask-like carafe or bottle, called a berele.” I think this wine would be my highlight. It tastes remarkably like honey and its delicate gloopiness is, well, ethereal against the slosh of Fruity Red.

We ate at Lula's in the week after Eritrean Independence Day. On the 24th of May, 1991, Eritrea reinstated independence after a 30-year war against the military regime of Ethiopia. I had thought about this while we ate and asked the head chef that day if it was something she had con-

sidered. But, as is embodied by the restaurant's ethos, she insisted that the food was instead a celebration of the cultural - not political - partnership of the two countries.

After all, the Habesha Hamli we ate is a combination of Eritrean and Ethiopian. Hamli is the sauteed onions, garlic, and chilli; it comes from Eritrea originally. And Habesha, from the Habesha People, is an ethnic identifier which spans both Ethiopia and Eritrea.

It is also a venue for frequent jazz, poetry readings, and, in December 2023, a wonderful amalgamation of the two in the form of an evening of Lemn Sissay (check him out). The restaurant embodies cultural inclusion. It is forgiving of Western ignorance with explanations and histories of the cuisine in its menu. It is entirely vegan unless you opt for one of the separate meat dishes. And, after a glass of honey wine, you can still do some revision.

To all the pubs we've loved before

Susanna Elliot and Reka Sztaray review another iconic Oxford pub...

We are Réka and Suzy, two law finalists on a mission to find the best pubs in Oxford. We will begin our journey by reviewing our clear favourite so far, our home away from home, the Lamb and Flag. It was the preferred pub of legends such as C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and has been selling pints since the 16th century with its profits historically funding DPhil scholarships at St. John's College. Ever the philanthropists eager to give to a good cause, we often come here to forget our latest medical negligence case by drinking our favourite pint, the Prospect. A delicious, sweet pint with a low ABV that only costs £4.50, it's the perfect drink to relax and wash away your essays without acquiring a hangover. We would encourage everyone to try it, even those who have not acquired the taste for beer. Even if the Prospect isn't your thing, the pints



pulled at L&F are constantly changing, so you will never be stuck for something new to try - like the chai cider from last term. This pub isn't the destination for a 4-course meal, but the bar snacks are perfectly satisfactory. Due to its fame and location the L&F fills up quickly after 8pm so best come early if you expect a large group! Overall, you can't beat the lively atmosphere of the place, and there's no better place to celebrate meeting a deadline or numb the pain of many more to come. Until next week!

Artwork by Taya Neilson

Pints: 5/5 Food: 3/5 Price: 4/5 Ambiance: 5/5
Overall: 4.5/5

The Hundred: revolutionising the women's game

Daniel Mackay

Lunch, cherries, and tea. Three words perfectly befitting of a quaint high-street café, yet curiously suited too, for English cricket. Nothing evokes the game's charming essence more than its peculiar language, or its endearing reliance on food breaks. When we hear the word 'cricket', we so immediately turn to images of Lord's with its manicured lawns and picture-perfect stands, or to village squares adorned with two sets of eleven in loose-fitting whites, that it is clear just how strong the sport's image of tradition is.

What we don't immediately think of when we hear the words 'English cricket' is modernity, forward-thinking, or a willingness to change. But maybe we need to. Underneath this seemingly picturesque image of English cricket lies its sobering synonymy with widespread and deep-rooted discrimination. Following the Yorkshire County Cricket Club racism scandal that erupted in 2021, this June saw the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) publish their investigations into racial equality, gender equality, and social equality in English cricket. The findings were damning, identifying "widespread

and deep-rooted" issues of racial discrimination, elitism, and structural problems faced by those attempting to get into cricket. Cindy Butts, the ICEC's chair, stated that "discrimination is both overt and baked into the structures and processes within cricket, the stark reality is cricket is not a game for everyone".

Nearly a decade since the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) launched their *This Girl Can ... play cricket* campaign, the ICEC's findings put a stark emphasis on the deep-rooted sexism that still underlies English cricket. It stated that women were "not even nearly on an equal footing with men within the sport today ... evident both from the lived experience of professional and recreational women cricketers and from the structural barriers that women continue to face". The report identified "significant investment disparities" between genders, a prevailing "culture of misogyny", and a lack of "proper representation amongst the highest level of decision-makers", no doubt exacerbated by the societal context within which the sport exists.

The report was damning. But, in issuing an unreserved apology for its failings, and in pledging to respond to the ICEC recommendations for change, the investigations have been

a "seminal moment" for the ECB.

There is one glimmer of hope in this bleak shadow though: The Hundred.

The implementation of The Hundred had a startlingly transformative effect on women's cricket. Initially seeming like a corporate afterthought, with the women's matches rather siloed away from the 'main' men's event, The Hundred was not without its faults. Yet the unlikeliest of catalysts - the Covid-19 pandemic - blew these plans out of the water, forcing male and female teams of the same franchise clubs into the 'Bubble'.

It had an instant effect on cricket equity. The one-club two-team set-up of The Hundred gave rise to double-header fixtures, with games played at the same major stadiums, featuring the same half-time entertainment, and the same commentary crews. Suddenly, the Michael Vaughan's and

the Kevin Pietersen's of the cricketing world began to commentate on women's matches too, driving up viewership through their large on-line followings and offering a 'credibility' to the women's game that it previously lacked. Becoming a fan of the London Spirit meant becoming a fan of both their teams, a coupling reinforced by the gender equal promotional material: if Jos Buttler was featured in a social media advert, so too was Sophie Ecclestone.

The Hundred has helped tackle financial discrepancies across genders too. The ICEC reported that for every £5 spent on the men's teams, the women's teams received just £1, and in overall remuneration England men received 13 times the amount paid to England women. The competition has committed to equal prize money and has led to increased opportunities for female sponsorship and funding, although the tournament's salary cap still remains disparate between genders, and is not yet financially capable of sustaining itself. The ECB's £25 million annual investment pledge has furthered this positive change, reducing first-class

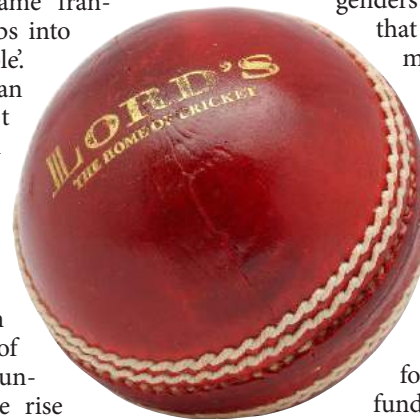
county pathway costs by 36% for girls and 28% for boys.

As such, the face and the audience of the game is changing. More women on free-to-air TV has increased female participation, with 30% of tickets for the 2023 Hundred being sold to women, and 23% to children. The year prior, women made up 31% of a 14.1 million TV audience, 42% of which hadn't watched any other ECB cricket before The Hundred. This was a dramatic uptake in numbers - 5.9 million new viewers to be precise.

The progress doesn't stop there; alongside this audience diversification, female participation at grassroots level is also improving. According to ECB figures, over one million girls in more than 7,000 schools have now played the game since the *This Girl Can ... play cricket* campaign launched, and the number of cricket clubs involved in developing women's and girls' cricket has increased from 93 to more than 615 in over a decade.

Clearly, there is still work to be done, but the face of the game is rapidly changing, and the oft besieged Hundred is right at the core of it.

Image Credit: Marie-Lan Nguyen/CC BY 2.5 DEED via Wikimedia commons



The sporting landscape of 2054

Krishna Gowda

Today's sporting scene is largely unrecognisable from thirty years ago, having undergone radical changes in efforts to amplify interest, increase profits, and deliver entertainment to a globalised audience. In another thirty years' time, the future of sport will again present an alien scene to us, though given sport's inseparable relationship with politics, it would be prudent to consider what the repercussions will be.

Newfound Saudi interest is one of the most contentious issues in the current sporting world, with an estimated £5 billion being spent over the past three years across football, golf, F1, and various other sports. Following Cristiano Ronaldo's pioneering transfer to Al Nassr, The Saudi Pro League has experienced an influx of elite stars swapping esteemed European football for higher paying careers at distinctly lower levels.

Footballing interest has also operated outside of its own domain; in 2021 Newcastle United was taken over by a consortium of the Saudi Public Investment Firm (PIF), the sovereign wealth fund of the country. Effectively controlling its investments and assets, the PIF is one of the globe's richest clubs. Saudi Arabia have also created the LIV Tour, a controversial rival to the PGA establishment that has lured away many players via lucrative contracts. They are also set to

host the 2034 Football World Cup, the 2029 Winter Olympics, and the 2034 Asian Games - testaments to their embracement of global sporting culture, and the forging of their own sporting legacy.

The gulf state has, however, been met with accusations of 'sportswashing', strategically staging sports events in order to deflect criticism away from their poor human rights records, and environmental impact from fossil fuel exportation. Saudi Arabia has dismissed such criticism, with crown prince Mohammed bin Salman stating that: "if sportswashing is going to increase my GDP by 1%, then we'll continue doing sportswashing". Prince Abdulaziz, the Saudi sports minister, branded such claims as: "very shallow", indicating his antipathy and suggesting that investment will continue to accelerate. Whether Saudi bear the fruits of their labours or whether their ambitions will fizzle out will be interesting: it is clear their political motivations interlace with their sporting ambitions and thus such decisions will have potentially damaging global repercussions.

Women's sports are also likely to continue upwards trends of interest and investment. Although figures like Billie Jean King have advocated for policies of equal pay for men and women since the 1970s, it has only been after the turn of the century that equal pay in sports is becoming more prevalent, occurring at different rates across various

sports. In 2007, Wimbledon and the French Open began offering equal pay, ensuring that all four slams had pledged parity and setting a precedent for other sports to follow. Motorsport has developed racing series for women to create opportunities for women to progress through the sport, such as the W Series and F1 Academy. Women's football has seen a significant uptick in investment, viewing figures, and public interest, helped by their recent successes in both the European Championships and the World Cup. Signalling intent for the upcoming decades, the government recognised such international success with a £30 million injection to develop million to develop opportunities for the next generation of Lionesses.

Despite these success stories, there is still much progress to be made across various sports. F1 President Stefano Domenicali suggested that it would be highly unlikely for women to enter the sport this decade, extending the wait for the next female driver since Giovanna Amati in 1992. Whilst the FA have instilled equal pay for national representation, club salaries massively differ for men and women, with the top players in the WSL sitting at roughly £200,000 annually - a stark difference from the £20 million earned by top male players in the Premier League.

There are systematic issues too that signal an underlying misogyny pervading women's sport.

Read the full article at [Cherwell.org](https://cherwell.org)

Editors' Corner

This week, in anticipation of this coming term of coppers, the Sports editors talk about what college sports means to them - no matter the level.

Krishna, Dan, and Oli answer some of the key questions on college sports. All three are heavily involved in college sports, with the former two actually making it past the trials for uni sports. Deputy Editor at Cherwell is clearly more exciting. What do you think about college sports? Is the team spirit real? Or are we all just still trying to justify our (questionable) college choice?

Are college sports worth it? Surely the teams are never fair?

I think that in a similar vein to competitions like the FA Cup, which pit the lower teams against ones of a much higher calibre, college teams often embrace the unbalanced nature of sports fixtures. College patriotism counts for a lot and even if the matchups don't seem fair on paper; team spirit and a gritty performance can result in the underdog winning and Blues players being left stunned as LM-HFC have demonstrated many times in the past. There's no better feeling than causing a huge upset through a scrappy performance knowing that everyone's fighting tooth and nail for their college, justifying their tribalism. College

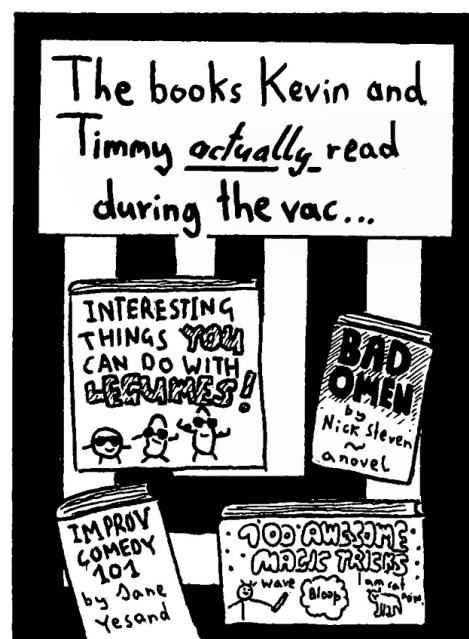
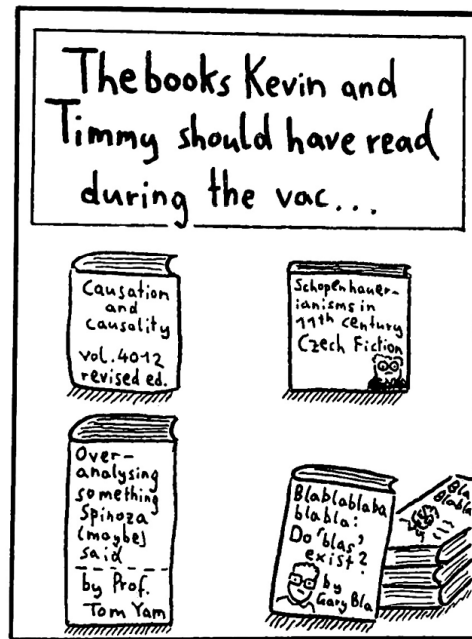
sports have a bit of everything - the drama, the history, deeply entrenched rivalries, creatively insulting chants, the heritage.

Is college sports just a laugh, or is it actually a space for players to develop into uni players?

Great question, and the answer is definitely both. Over at Somerville we definitely prioritise the laughs over the winning, but that's not to say we don't take the sports seriously. Playing college sports is one of the best aspects of the Oxford experience, allowing you a space to run around and distract yourself from tuts with close friends that you've known since Freshers week. Having said that, college Hockey was the catalyst for me - and many other Somervillians - to start playing uni Hockey, which I've thoroughly enjoyed during my time here. All in all, college sport is what you make of it. If you want to take it seriously, it's a great opportunity to sharpen skills and prepare for the step up to uni-level sport. On the flip side, if you want a laugh and fancy a work break with college friends on a Sunday morning, it's the perfect place to be too.



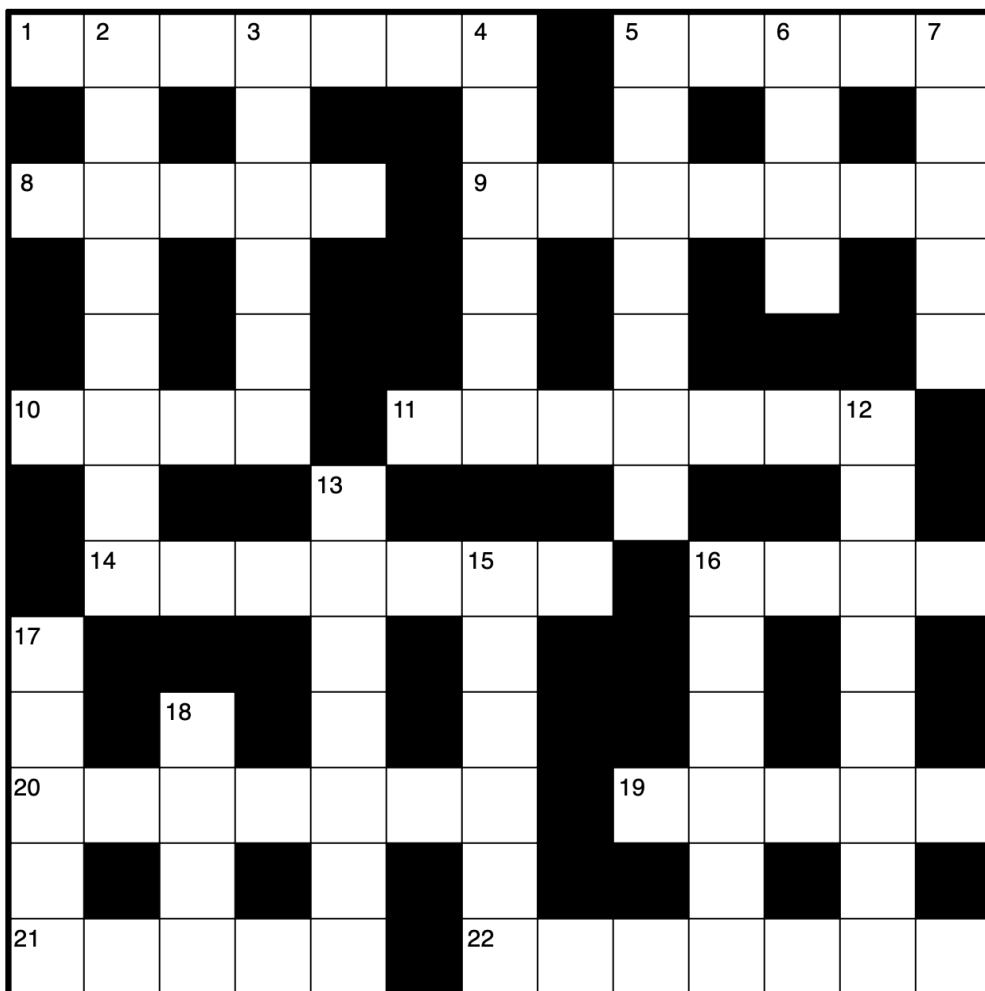
Kevin and Timmy fail collections



by Sean Hartnett



Cryptic Crossword by Sarah Beard



ACROSS

- 1. Mouldy wing rule introduced to make football less boring (7)
- 5. Normally unstressed syllable silenced at the beginning (5)
- 8. Sphinx's home is filled with air (5)
- 9. Ending of all, no other bikini attracts spotlight - makes decorative displays (7)
- 10. Connection between bleak notoriety (4)
- 11. A messy lace BOP will fool you into making you feel better! (7)

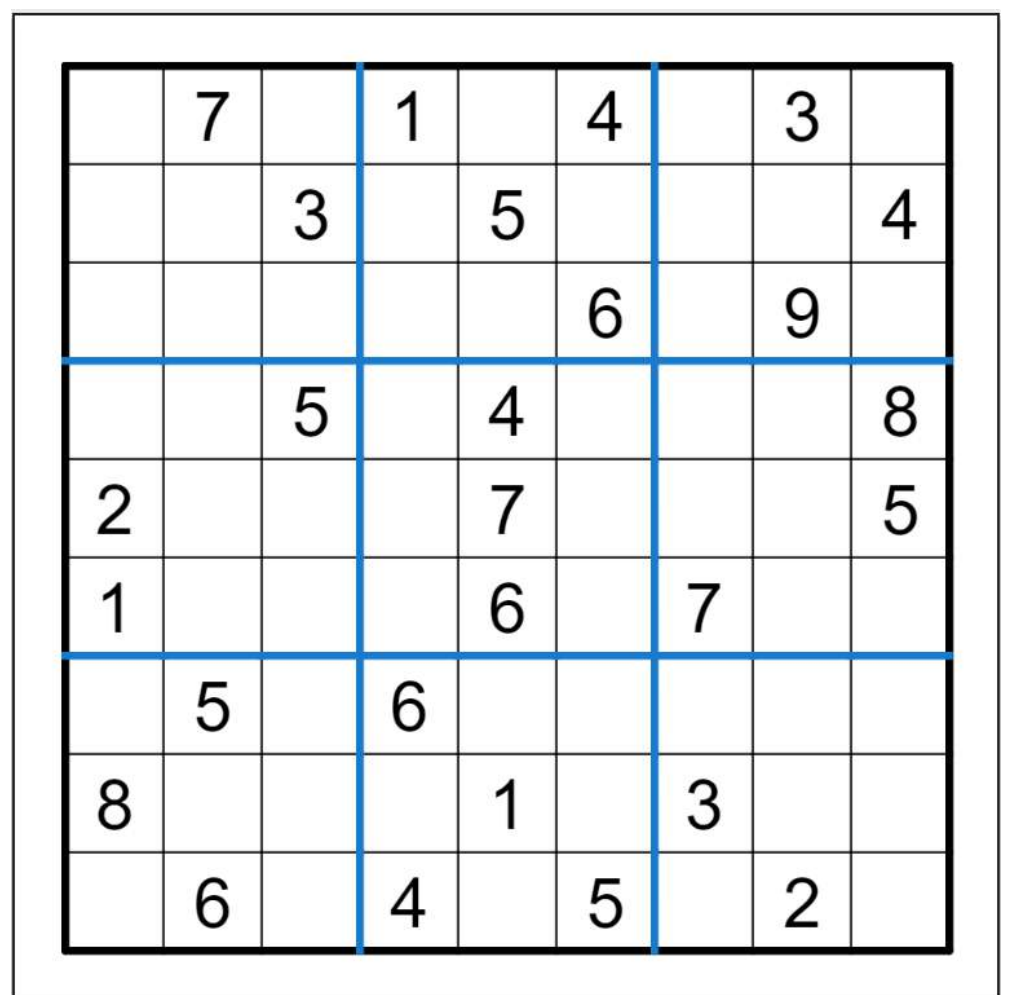
- 14. Onion hiding constant belief (7)
- 16. The Spanish need thirty-one days to make a sauce (4)
- 19. Hairy pirate's shout in bed (5)
- 20. Draw out in favour of length (7)
- 21. Domination makes me wet? (5)
- 22. Resting ends with first half of a table tennis game (7)

DOWN

- 2. Burning letter devises colourful bird (8)
- 3. A ball in place is a sweet

- thing (6)
- 4. Sounds like I tumbled from a tower (6)
- 5. Digester found amongst manifesto machinery (7)
- 6. Successor hanging by a thread? (4)
- 7. Parasite causing Lyme disease reportedly found in Park End (5)
- 12. An Oxfordy idiot? That's a contradiction in terms! (8)
- 13. One ear is mythical (7)
- 15. Start genuine, without aluminium (6)
- 16. Invent mascara, e.g. (6)
- 17. Start punting anywhere preferable, except river - e.g.

Samurai puzzles by Lewis Callister



Quiz by Misha Pemberthy

- 1 Who won the PDC World Darts Championship on 3rd January this year?
- 2 What is the only London tube station to contain 6 consecutive consonants in its name?
- 3 Which Magdalen graduate wrote the words "There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about"?
- 4 Barbie leading the charts, what was the second worldwide grossing film of 2023?
- 5 In November, David Cameron was made foreign secretary- how many people have held this post since the 2010 General Election?
- 6 According to the British Phonographic Industry what was the top-selling song of 2023 in the UK?
- 7 Which of Durham College, Chester College and Canterbury College was not a former college of Oxford?
- 8 What number scores itself in Scrabble?
- 9 What symbol is the octothorpe more commonly known as?
- 10 Columbian footballer Jason González's full first name is actually Efmamj Jason. What is he surprisingly named after?

Looking for the second sudoku? Check page 11!