

Cherwell

Oxford's oldest independent newspaper, est. 1920

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0TH WEEK, HILARY



Women's Blues carve out ski victory at Varsity

SPORT - PAGE 23



Oxford's changing smoking culture

FEATURES - PAGES 8-9

Pope Francis appoints Blackfriars fellow

By BRYN MOLLET

Timothy Radcliffe, a Fellow of Blackfriars Hall, was created a Cardinal by Pope Francis at a ceremony at the Vatican on 7th December, making him one of four current English Cardinals. The position of Cardinal is the second highest in the Catholic Church and the College of Cardinals plays an important role in advising the Pope and Church administration.

Radcliffe lived, taught, and lectured at Blackfriars Hall, a Permanent Private Hall for graduate students at the University of Oxford that specialises in theology and philosophy and is operated by the Dominican Order. He is also an Honorary Fellow and alumnus of St John's College.

Cardinal Radcliffe told *Cherwell*: "The Catholic Church is in a moment of profound transition" and that he hopes to help "make the Church more welcoming to everyone and... share the gospel with a world which is increasingly torn apart by war and violence."

On his time at Oxford, Radcliffe said that he was "blessed with wonderful tutors" who helped him learn "how to engage with people with whom [he] disagreed". Radcliffe added he hoped to continue to be based in Blackfriars as he found Oxford "a marvellously

Continued on pg. 4



'Look away': Animal experiments at Oxford

Home Office rejects the University's licence to use live animals in classes that left students "visibly disturbed and distraught"



Biomedical Sciences Building. Image Credit: Kenneth Wong

CW: Animal Testing

An anaesthetised rat was lying on its back, limbs splayed open. "Look away," a group of first-year medicine students were told as their demonstrator stuck a metal rod into the rat's head, cutting its brain stem so that it wouldn't feel pain. Its tail jerked.

Practical experiments that end in animals' deaths had been compulsory for Oxford University's medical students. At the start of this academic year, however, Oxford's application to continue teaching with animals was denied by the Home Office.

Universities in the UK are subject to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, which regulates how they house animals, run experiments, and conduct harm-benefit analysis. Licenced

By SELINA CHEN

accordingly, Oxford University's animal experiments have decreased over the years but remains the second-highest amongst UK universities, just after Cambridge.

In 2023, Oxford performed procedures on 194,913 animals, including ten macaques – the primates usually underwent skull implants and removal of brain tissue. The same year saw 2,049 deaths: Animals used for teaching constituted a small fraction of these 'non-recovery' procedures.

A contentious past

When Oxford's Biomedical Sciences Building began construction in 2003, the work was soon suspended due to

anti-vivisectionists' intimidation – until the University was able to obtain an injunction and establish an exclusion zone.

In light of the building's opening in 2008, an animal rights "fanatic" planned a series of terror attacks including homemade bombs: Two exploded in The Queen's College sports pavilion and two failed to detonate on Green Templeton College's property. They caused £14,000 of damage to Oxford, and the extremist was sentenced to a decade in prison.

Terrorist attacks – including parcels of HIV-infected needles – also targeted the late Sir Colin Blakemore and his family. Prior to becoming a professor at Oxford, he sewed shut newborn cats' eyelids and

Continued on pg. 5

38% of students report decline in mental health since joining Oxford

By ILA BANERJI

CW: Mental health, sexual assault, discrimination.

The Student Union's (SU) latest welfare report investigated the impact of academic workload on students' mental health, as well as other challenges including harassment and discrimination. Rosalie Chapman, author of the report and last year's Vice President for Welfare, described the findings as a "call for urgent action". It found that 76% of students had felt anxious and 44% had felt depressed during their time at Oxford University. Additionally, nearly one in five women (19%) reported unwanted sexual behaviour, whilst one in five BAME students reported bullying and harassment.

The findings showed that 38% of students reported that their mental health had worsened since coming to Oxford: 24% saying it worsened and 14% that it

Continued on pg. 3

£37 million council project to replace Odeon

By VLADA PALANCIUC

Odeon cinema on Gloucester Green is set to close in January and be replaced by a £37m council project. Oxford City Council will demolish the building, which has operated as a cinema since 1936, to replace it with a hotel and community space.

The 'aparthotel' will include 145 rooms, a bar, and a café, and will have windows on all sides, which Oxford City Council say will improve the atmosphere of Gloucester Green and meet modern building standards, reducing its environmental impact. A Council spokesperson told *Cherwell* the project will take around three years to complete.

According to a spokesperson, Odeon made it clear it did not want to renew its lease after 24 years at the location and when it became obvious that new tenants wanted to take over the cinema, the City Council launched a procurement exercise in September 2022 to determine the best future use for the site. Despite being invited to participate, a spokesperson told *Cherwell*, Odeon declined to submit a proposal for a new use for the building. The redevelopment plan was finally approved in October 2024.

The City Council says the

Continued on pg. 2

Former Oxfam CEO: 'In Oxford, our solidarity was stronger than the extreme right'

By SARA ROURKE

Mark Goldring is the outgoing CEO of Asylum Welcome, a local organisation in Oxford that assists asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants. He had been the CEO of Oxfam GB until 2018.

I turned Mark's mind back to the unsettling civil unrest of the summer, when, fuelled by misinformation and racism online, anti-immigration riots broke out across 27 towns and cities in the UK. Asylum Welcome, the Oxford-based charity that Mark directs, was one of the locations circulated as

a possible target.

"It certainly was quite a shock, coming to work on Monday morning to find out we were on a hit list for a Wednesday demonstration," Mark told *Cherwell*. "The staff were scared and the clients were scared. Not everyone we work with knew of the threats, but they could feel the change in temperature across the country."

Balancing the need to keep their vital services for the community running and the need to ensure employees' safety, Mark had made the decision that the offices would close

early that Wednesday. Just as they were preparing to leave, the reception was greeted by two unexpected visitors, Imam Monawar Hussain and Bishop Steven Croft, who walked in bearing lunch.

"They brought pizza! For the staff, the volunteers, and the clients. That solidarity is really what we felt very powerfully through the next twelve hours."

After lunch, the office was emptied. Mark told me of how he then went to a local hotel to spend the evening with some of the 250 asylum seekers

housed there. Inside the hotel the already tense atmosphere was brought to a climax by the sudden sound of chanting outside.

"We then realised it was the supporters of the refugees who were singing, not the demonstrators and we went out to join them. It was a threat that turned into a marked opportunity for people to express solidarity."

"Obviously, the atmosphere was very different in some other parts

Continued on pg. 12

Hotel and community space to replace Odeon after 24 years of business

Continued from Page 1

“much-needed” development will bolster the tourism industry by attracting overnight visitors. The council cited a 2015 report from Experience Oxfordshire to *Cherwell*, that found overnight visitors spend 1.5 times more than day-trippers while only 17% of Oxford’s 6.6 million annual visitors stay overnight.

Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Business, Culture and an Inclusive Economy told *Cherwell*: “More overnight visitors will increase the number of people using our restaurants, bars, and theatres, helping local businesses thrive. Gloucester Green is already a thriving, successful place because of the market, and the community centre will help expand on that success.”

Hollingsworth also highlighted Oxford has other cinemas such as the Curzon at Westgate Oxford, Ultimate Picture Palace in Cowley Road, Phoenix Picturehouse in Walton Street, and Vue at the Kassam Stadium – which in fact lies outside

of the Oxford ring-road. To compare, Cambridge has three cinemas and York has four.

Many residents, however, point out that these alternatives are prohibitively expensive and argue the proposal reflects a broader trend of prioritising tourism over local needs. A resident claims Odeon’s decision to not renew their lease stems from the council making Oxford “pretty much inaccessible.” Another resident adds: “The residents of Oxford are slowly being pushed out of the city, so tourists can invade it.”

An Oxford student told *Cherwell*: “I liked the Odeon because it was affordable and central and I never went to other cinemas because they were too far away or too expensive.”

The plan has received 97 formal objections from residents, who express concern in light of recent entertainment venue closures, including Kiss Bar and ATIK. Despite this, no members of the public spoke in objection at the planning meeting.

Odeon were approached for comment.

Image Credit: Kenneth Wong.



One-fifth of Gen Z embarrassed to consume non-alcoholic drinks

By BELLA GERBER-JOHNSTONE

Young people are still held back by fear of “social judgement” from drinking low or no-alcohol beer, according to research by Heineken and the University of Oxford’s Professor Charles Spence. In response, Heineken are kick-starting their new campaign this “Dry” January, naming it “0.0 reasons needed”.

Experimental psychologist Professor Charles Spence collaborated with Heineken to survey 11,842 adults across five developed non-alcohol beer markets. The study found that 21% of Gen Z said they have “concealed drinking low and no alcohol versions of alcoholic beverages because of social pressures”.

2024 saw the highest demand for non-alcoholic beer yet, with Heineken 0.0 sales increasing by 14% in the first half of 2024. Gen Z are the most likely generation to have drunk low or no-alcohol drinks, with 73% of Gen Z participants saying they had tried one. Baby Boomers (aged around 60-80 years old) were the second most likely, with only 58% saying they had. The *Financial Times* have speculated the link between this growth and the

1% drop in global beer sales, as drinks data provider IWSR noted in 2023.

Social pressure is an important factor in low or non-alcohol drink consumption. Thirty-eight per cent of Gen Z men said they would be willing to drink them but only if their friends did too. This was 35% for Gen Z women. Professor Spence told the *Financial Times* that “it is evident that people still do sometimes face social judgments from others concerning their choice of non-alcoholic drink”.

According to research, more people are opting for low or no-alcohol beer for health reasons. Professor Spence remarked in Heineken’s press release that “alcohol is no longer the default in social situations” and “more mindful consumption”.

Cherwell’s recent Intoxigation, surveying over 1,000 students, found that the drinking culture is still strong at Oxford, with 51.8% of surveyed students reportedly drinking the NHS recommended weekly limit of 14 units in one single night on a regular basis. A student told *Cherwell*: “I would consider drinking non-alcoholic drinks if I was just going to the pub casually or if I have an early morning the next day, but if I am going clubbing then that just wouldn’t do.”

Medieval kitchen and Saxon-era wall discovered during Oriel renovations

By CHARLIE BAILEY

Once-in-a-century excavation of Oriel College has led to the discovery of the remains of a medieval kitchen and part of the city’s Saxon-era walls. The discovery, made by Oxford Archaeology, has shed light on Oriel and Oxford’s historical development, of which little was previously documented.

The excavations were made possible by renovations to the college that took place in preparation for its 700-year anniversary, which included rebuilding the kitchen and refurbishing the bar. Oxford Archaeology discovered what they believe to have been part of the city’s south eastern corner, before Oxford extended eastwards. The walls

separated St Martin’s Hall, one of Oriel’s old medieval halls, and land Oriel owned to the north.

A roasting hearth and oven base were also discovered: Medieval structures like the kitchen had been replaced in the 1640s, when the present Front Quad was constructed.

Further excavations of Oriel could uncover even more about Oxford’s history and will contribute to the debate that started in the 1950s around whether the excavation site may contain the remains of a smaller defended town.

Oxford Archaeology’s senior project manager, Ben Ford, described Oriel’s location as “archaeologically rich”. Ford also commented that unearthing the

medieval kitchen allowed archaeologists to confirm assumptions about the size of Oriel’s original perimeter, which were made based on maps, views and surviving historical documents.

Previous renovations on the Oriel site in October 2024 unearthed a ditch that revealed late-Saxon Oxford’s eastern defensive line. It dates from when Oxford was one post in a wider defensive network on the boundary of the kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. Its position in relation to a section of wall believed to be the late-Saxon north-eastern corner of the town meant that archaeologists were able to verify a theory that the late-Saxon perimeter of the town was square, and thus based on the Roman model.

New Years Honours List names seven Oxford academics and researchers

By MAIR ANDREWS

Seven researchers and academics from the University of Oxford were recognised in the 2025 New Years Honours List, with one being awarded a DBE, another made a life peer in the House of Lords, and five others given OBEs. The awards recognise those who have made significant achievements in public life and committed themselves to serving the UK.

Professor Alison Etheridge

Professor Alison Etheridge (pictured) was awarded a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE), one of the highest honours in the British honours system, for her service to mathematical sciences. Etheridge is a Professor of Probability at Oxford’s Mathematical Institute and Department of Statistics.

Reflecting upon her career, Etheridge told *Cherwell*: “Unlike research or teaching, it can be quite hard to point to particular achievements in this kind of service [to mathematical sciences]. That can be frustrating, especially as it takes time away from teaching and research, both of which I enjoy. But over the last few days I have received a huge number of messages from colleagues, expressing their appreciation for the work that I have been doing for the discipline, and that makes it all feel much more worthwhile.”

Professor Nigel Biggar

Professor Nigel Biggar CBE, Regius Professor Emeritus of Moral Theology and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Oxford, has been nominated for a life peerage. He is to be styled the Lord Biggar, of Castle Douglas in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, and will be able to sit and vote in the House of Lords. In an interview with *The Telegraph*, Biggar affiliated himself with the Conservative Party.

Professor Biggar said that the grant of a peerage “marks the culmination of a forty-year journey through academia and the church into British public life. I am deeply grateful to have lived to see the day, and to have the opportunity to contribute my ethical expertise to Parliament’s deliberations and the Conservative Party’s intellectual renewal.”

Professor Nandini Das

Professor Nandini Das OBE, Professor of Early Modern English Literature and Culture in the Faculty of

English and Tutorial Fellow in English at Exeter College, was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to Interdisciplinary Research in the Humanities and Public Engagement.

Paul Chapman

Paul Chapman is a Senior Fellow in Operations Management at the Saïd Business School and was awarded his OBE for services to Project Delivery.

Chapman set up Oxford’s MSc in Major Programme Management, a two-year, part-time programme that attracts senior programme leaders from around the world who lead programmes across a range of sectors.

Chapman is a leading expert on the learning and development of executives. He is also an Academy Director for the UK Government’s Major Project Leadership Academy, (MPLA). He designed and directs the ‘Sponsoring Major Projects’ programme for UK Government Ministers in this role.

Professor Steve Strand

Professor Steve Strand OBE, Professor of Education in the Department of Education and Fellow of St Cross College, was awarded his OBE for services to Equality and to Human Rights.

Strand’s research interests are in ethnic, social class, and gender gaps in educational outcomes including achievement, progress, and to special education. He works with government departments, local authorities, and individual schools trying to improve school effectiveness.

Strand commented he was grateful to receive an award which “recognises the importance of equity in educational achievement as a key element in developing a fairer and more just society.”

Professor Ros Rickaby

Professor Ros Rickaby FRS, Professor of Biogeochemistry at the Department of Earth Sciences, Chair of Geology at Oxford Earth Sciences, and a Professorial Fellow at University College, Oxford, has been awarded an OBE for services to Biogeochemistry.

Professor Rickaby joined the University in 2002 and has been a Professor of Biogeochemistry since 2010. Her research focuses on interactions between the evolution of organisms, ocean chemistry, atmospheric composition, and the earth’s climate to inform predictions of future change. She has been awarded prestigious medals from the European Geosciences Union, American Geophysical Union, and the Geological Society of London, and was appointed a Fellow of the Royal Society in 2022.

Dr Paul Roberts

Dr Paul Roberts OBE, Archaeologist and Research Keeper of the Department of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum, was awarded his OBE for services to Archaeology and to Heritage. In 2019 he curated the museum’s most visited exhibition to date, Last Supper in Pompeii.

Image Credit: Alison Etheridge, Edmund Blok.

Mathematics professor, Alison Etheridge has been awarded a DBE



38% students report mental health decline in Oxford

Continued from Page 1

slightly worsened. Thirty-two per cent said it had stayed the same, and 30% that it had fluctuated. Seventy-four per cent of students said that their university course adversely affected their mental health, with a commonly cited reason being a “fear of being inferior to others on my course”, and one respondent writing that “the burnout from workload is chronic”.

“This report is a vital resource for pushing for long-overdue changes to welfare services, structural inequalities, and policy reform.”

Alongside academic pressure, financial strain and social isolation were other commonly cited factors impacting upon students’ mental health, according to responses to an open-ended question. Discrimination, the stress of student leadership, and drinking culture were also frequently named. Social connections and the college community were identified as having a positive effect on the wellbeing of students.

The report found 15% of students reported experiencing discrimination. There was a higher incidence of discrimination against BAME, disabled, and LGBTQ students, particularly transgender students. LGBTQ respondents

reported a larger rate of sexual violence (21.5%) than straight respondents (8.7%).

Responding to questions on bullying and harassment, 13% of students said they had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in the previous academic year and 11% said they had experienced bullying and harassment.

There was significant support for the introduction of a reading week. Sixty-five per cent of students believed it would help them with stress and workload. Despite the infamous “Fifth Week Blues”, it was week six that students found the most challenging.

The report also discovered that just 35% of students were satisfied with welfare support and that 40% had never used it. Further, while 94% of respondents were aware of college welfare support, only 74% were aware of the University Counselling Service.

The survey, carried out by Chapman and supervised by current SU President Dr Addi Haran Diman, surveyed 2,116 students, of which 66% were undergraduates, 17% Postgraduate DPhil, and 15% Postgraduate Masters.

Chapman told Cherwell: “This report is a vital resource for pushing for long-overdue changes to welfare services, structural inequalities, and policy reform. Ultimately I hope these findings will be the catalyst for a better, more supportive and more inclusive Oxford.”

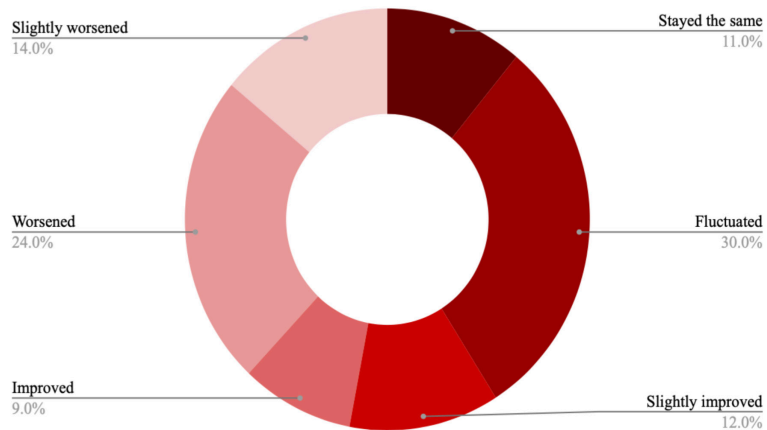
In response, a spokesperson for the University told Cherwell: “We take the wellbeing of our students very seriously and encourage those who are in need of support to access the extensive welfare provision available at both University and college level.

“A range of specialist support services for students is accessible

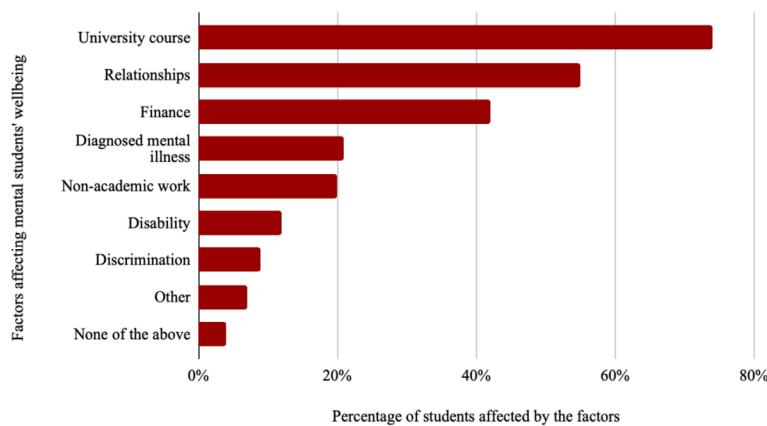
via the Student Counselling Service and the Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service as well as college Welfare Teams. Oxford’s Student Support and Welfare Services

are committed to delivering timely, high-quality, and effective support to all members of our student body who need information and support.”

How students' mental health has changed since being at Oxford



Factors that affected students' mental wellbeing



Closure of Kiss Bar and All Bar One deal another blow to Oxford nightlife

By NOAH ROBSON

Kiss Bar, a late-night venue on Park End Street, has been permanently closed just months after ATIK Oxford was shut down in the same building. The owners made the announcement on social media, explaining that the decision was forced on them by landlords, who wish to repurpose the building. The recent string of closures, with All Bar One also closing,

has many students worried about the quality and future of Oxford’s nightlife.

Writing on Facebook, Kiss Bar said: “They [the landlords] have decided to take back all of the premises situated within their building, in a view to change the purpose of the building, therefore this obviously means we have to go.” The venue had been running for 23 years until its closure was announced on Sunday 22nd December.

Kiss described having experienced a “reduction with the foot fall” after ATIK shut down earlier in the year. The bar had previously been home to both “Intrusion”, a Goth and Industrial Night, as well as “Metaaall!!!”, a club night dedicated to heavy metal music, although Kiss has said this will not be the end of these events.

The closure marks another blow to Oxford nightlife, a sector which has been struggling nationwide, exacerbated by the impact of both the Cov-

id-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. The Night Time Industries Association recently warned that if closures continue at their current rate, there will be no clubs left in the UK by New Year’s Eve of 2029.

Students have expressed concern about the quality of Oxford’s nightlife. One student told Cherwell: “Oxford is already pretty infamous for poor nightlife and it is sad to see it take another big hit.”

Kiss Bar had been a popular venue with students at Oxford University. One student told Cherwell: “I’m devastated that Kiss is shutting down – especially following the closure of ATIK too.” Another added: “It just feels like nightlife in Oxford is dying, there’s a place closing down practically every week.”

All Bar One, which closed at the end of last year, has indicated that the venue will not reopen. They cited “increasing competition in depressed markets” as a reason for closure. The chain is operated by Mitchell & Butlers, and also owns Toby Carvery and Harvester and Browns. The closure of stores belonging to big chains, such as this, demonstrates that it is not just small businesses that are struggling in the current business climate.

Nights out in Oxford are also becoming more expensive. A study conducted by Casino.org found that the price of a night out in Oxford has increased by 127.6% since 2022 – more than any other city in the UK. The study looked at pint prices, late-evening food, and hotel prices.

Image Credit: Subin Saji



NEWS SHORTS

The Oxford Student named ‘fourth best’ newspaper in the world

The Oxford Student was named the ‘fourth best’ newspaper in the world according to BeeHive News, which boasts being the “world’s only AI-powered news rating platform.” 13 other newspapers were included in the sample size that delivered these results – Cherwell was not one. The Oxford Student ranked higher than Sky News, the Daily Mail, and The Guardian. The winner was Sixth Tone, a Chinese state-owned English-language online magazine.

Oxford takeaway nominated for Best Kebab Van of the Year

Ahmed’s B-Q, located on Oxford High Street, was nominated for Best Kebab Van of the Year at the British Kebab Awards. Judges include James O’Brien, Nadhim Zahawi MP, and actor Adil Ray.

‘NPC’ added to Oxford English Dictionary

Gaming terminology popularised through frequent use in social media has been added to the Oxford English Dictionary. As well as ‘non-playable character’, and its abbreviation, ‘cutscene’ and ‘cheatcode’ have also been included.

CROSS CAMPUS

MIT suspends opinion section of student paper

The editorial board of The Tech, Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s student newspaper, has decided to temporarily suspend their opinion section. The decision comes following a recent retraction of an opinion piece written by the MIT Coalition for Palestine which contained “major factual inaccuracies” and led to increasing “hostile rhetoric and action” against a professor.

Ape-like beast terrorises Cambridge students

Varsity, Cambridge University’s student newspaper, reported on several sightings of a “monkey human hybrid” around the city, terrifying students. One eye-witness described it as six foot tall and running on all fours.

Hydraulic compression videos kick-off Australian student conference

The University of Sydney’s student paper reported that the annual student National Conference began with a “new strain of brainrot: hydraulic compression videos”. For many, the event is a group of “student politicians tearing each other apart”. Sound familiar?



116 million year-old 'dinosaur highway' uncovered in north Oxfordshire

By EKAM HOTHI

Researchers from the University of Oxford and University of Birmingham have discovered a "dinosaur highway" in North Oxfordshire, one of the most significant paleontological discoveries in the UK. The area revealed hundreds of dinosaur footprints produced by five different species of dinosaurs. Approximately 166 million years old, they date back to the Middle Jurassic Period.

Footage from the excavation will feature in the Oxford University Museum of Natural History's (OUMNH) exhibition *Breaking Ground*, which will run from October to September later this year.

The footprints were initially discovered at Dewars Farm Quarry by employee Gary Johnson whilst using his vehicle to strip back layers of clay. Subsequently, a team of over 100 people, including staff from the Oxford Museum of Natural History and students from Oxford and Birmingham universities, carried out an excavation which uncovered around 200 footprints.

Four of the tracks are believed to have been made by the sauropod *Cetiosaurus*, a large herbivorous dinosaur with a long neck, related to the *Diplodocus*. Although these dinosaurs could reach up to 18m long, the

tracks suggest these sauropods were all different sizes, and therefore possibly a herd.

The fifth set of tracks was made by the carnivorous predator *Megalosaurus*, which was the first ever dinosaur to be scientifically described 200 years ago. The researchers uncovered the carnivore and herbivore tracks crossing, raising questions about possible interactions between the two groups.

The last discovery of this kind was approximately 30 years ago, when 40 sets of footprints were uncovered in a limestone quarry. Some of these trackways reached 180m, slightly further than the 2024 tracks, the longest of which reaches 150m. This site, however, is now mostly inaccessible.

More than 20,000 images were taken of the footprints during the dig, using photogrammetry, 3D models, and drone photography, to capture as much digital information as possible about the footprints for future research.

Doctor Duncan Murdock, Earth Scientist at OUMNH, told *Cherwell*: "Unlike fossil bones, finds like these tell us about the behaviour of extinct animals. The size, shape and position of the footprints can tell us how these dinosaurs moved, their size and speed."

Image Credit: Caroline Wood.

Blackfriar's fellow created a cardinal

Continued from Page 1

stimulating place to live" and that he will also be able to "continue to visit the difficult places of suffering and poverty".

Radcliffe was also the head of the Dominican Order from 1992-2001. It is a Catholic organisation that focuses on education and theological intellectual inquiry. He was awarded an honorary Doctor in Divinity in 2003, given in recognition of his contribution to theology and religious leadership.

Radcliffe will turn 80 years old next August, meaning that it is un-

likely he will be eligible to vote for the next Pope: the rules dictate that only those under 80 are allowed to form the conclave. Because of this, some commentators see his appointment as an honorific reward for his service to the Catholic Church.

Traditionally, most cardinals have been bishops or archbishops, though this has occasionally been waived, as in the case of Cardinal Radcliffe. This most recent intake of 21 new cardinals has also seen Pope Francis appoint many cardinals from Catholic minority countries, such as Ukraine, India, and Iran.

Oxford study calls for radical rethink of mental health support

By POPPY LITTLER-JENNINGS

A new study by researchers at the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge has found that only 55.5% of young people surveyed who used "formal" support provided by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) found it helpful. Along with recent surveys of students at Oxford and across the country, this study points to a widespread sense of unhappiness with current mental health services.

The research recommends reform to create a more nuanced approach to mental health services that would recognise how services can work in conjunction with other support networks accessed by people. According to Senior Post-doctoral Researcher Dr Emma Soneson: "More joined-up working between families, schools, and health professionals is essential, especially for more vulnerable young people."

Data from the OxWell Study Survey, in which nearly 24,000 people aged from 11 to 18 participated, shows that 27% of young people reported accessing some form of mental health support in the previous year. Amongst the respondents, between 87% and 91% of those who accessed "informal" support (reaching out to parents, carers, and friends) found it to be helpful.

These findings follow the Oxford Student Union's (SU) latest welfare re-

port, in which 38% of surveyed students disclosed that their mental health had declined since the start of their studies at Oxford and that 44% had experienced depression. Significantly, 46% of respondents also answered 'yes' when asked if they had experienced a mental health crisis whilst at Oxford.

These results, coupled with the findings of the OxWell survey, come in the wake of increasing concern about a mental health epidemic in the UK, and the ability of services to cope with the growing pressure. Such concerns were evident in the research carried out by the Policy Institute at King's College London and the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO), which revealed that between the academic years of 2016/17 and 2022/23, the proportion of undergraduate students at UK universities who reported experiencing mental health difficulties rose from 6% to 16%.

Data highlighted in Oxford's Counselling Service Annual Report traced a similar trajectory to the national picture, with the percentage of students reporting having anxiety increased from 16.7% in 2017/18 to 33.7% in 2021/22. This figure fell to 31.1% for the year 2022/23, but anxiety remained the largest presenting issue for Oxford students.

Cherwell's 2023 investigation into Oxford's own counselling services found that they were inadequate in dealing with the increasing mental health issues

of students. The SU's report also found that only 35% of students were satisfied with the welfare support available, mirroring the discontent with national services found in the OxWell study. Additionally, a survey conducted by the Tab and Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM), a suicide prevention charity, found that just 12% of respondents believe their university handles the issue of mental health well.

Whilst the SU's report notes a correlation between the high intensity of the Oxford workload and an exacerbation of student mental health, with 74% of students reporting that their university course adversely affected their mental health, the increasing rates in mental illness on a national level are undeniable. The results of the national OxWell survey point to the insufficient nature of mental health services as they currently function.

Further, the shortcomings of mental health services provided by CAMHS were evident in research conducted by BMC Psychiatry, in which just 29.39% of young people who had used CAMHS said that they were generally satisfied with the services. When asked the same question, 29.27% of their parents said they were satisfied. The research also supported the view that young people's user satisfaction is underrepresented in literature about mental health services despite a strong correlation between satisfaction and clinical outcomes.

St Hilda's to plant over 5,000 trees to restore historic woodland area

By BRYN MOLLET

St Hilda's College is set to plant 5,000 trees in Radley Large Wood over the next three years to help protect and diversify the woodland area and combat the impact of ash dieback – a fungal disease which kills ash trees. The College received £21,115 from the Rural Payments Agency to fund the project as part of the government's Countryside Stewardship Programme.

St Hilda's purchased Radley Large Wood, which lies just south of the Oxford ring-road, in 2022 and has worked closely with the Forestry Commission

to create a 10-year management plan for the area. Before St Hilda's became the custodians of the woodland area, there was scant active management, with many areas overgrown and, in some areas, ash dieback affecting up to 40% of trees in some areas.

The tree planting is part of St Hilda's broader goal of improving sustainability which involves achieving net zero emissions and improving biodiversity. The College also hopes that the project will enhance local wildlife habitats.

The College also wants to ensure that the wood remains accessible to the public. Falling branches as a result of ash die-

back can make woodland areas unsafe for visitors and nearby properties. St Hilda's bursar, Chris Wood, told *Cherwell* by combating the disease, "the College's intention is to ensure that Large Radley Wood becomes a truly living woodland for the benefit of all."

The College has warned that occasionally the active management of woodland areas can appear "stark" but emphasises that it is crucial for the long-term health of the area and limiting the impact of ash dieback disease.

Image Credit: Path in Large Radley Wood, Steve Daniels, via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0.



INVESTIGATIONS

'Look away': Animal experiments at Oxford

Continued from Page 1

later killed them to study their brains. His experiments significantly advanced the understanding of Lazy Eye – the most common form of childhood blindness – rendering it curable today. To Blakemore, animal research is a necessary evil he hated: He opposed animal testing for cosmetics and fox hunting, refrained from eating factory-farmed meat, and owned a pet cat.

Until this summer, a small group associated with this violent past had been protesting outside the University's Medical Sciences Teaching Centre on South Parks Road – visible to medical students as they headed into their practicals.

Emotional Toll

For the first-year Physiology and Pharmacology course, a compulsory practical class titled 'excitation and blockade of α and β adrenoceptors' involved rats that are anaesthetised, decerebrated, and injected with drugs, according to practical books viewed by *Cherwell*. In order to inject drugs into the rat, their jugular veins were cannulated with tubes, and in order to measure their heart rates as the response variable, electrodes were placed under their skins.

A second-year medicine student spoke

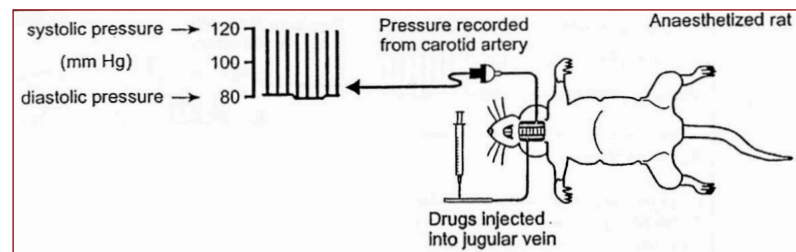


Diagram from medicine practical book. Image credit: With permission of Oxford University

to *Cherwell* about watching this experiment, which she did twice. Both times, the rat's brain stem was destroyed to prevent reflexes and pain.

"The demonstrator told us to look away, but most of us kept looking anyway. He took this metal rod and stuck it into the rat's head," she described the decerebration. "Its tail shot up and moved in a very jerky sort of way, even though it's completely under anaesthetic and not going to feel anything."

The rat was then injected with a sequence of six drugs – noradrenaline, adrenaline, isoprenaline, phentolamine, propranolol, and angiotensin II – to observe the effect of large dosages on its heart.

Although the experiment itself ended there, the rat was also dissected. The student said: "The demonstrator also cut the rat open, took its heart out, and showed us its heart beating in his hand."

She said her friends could see her acting "visibly disturbed and distraught" after practicals such as this.

The teaching varied between different groups: sometimes only the demonstrator injected the rat, while other times students were also able to do the injection and pass around the beating heart. One rat was used per every five to 15 students (with an average of 149 medicine students in each year, anywhere from ten to 30 rats were killed per year).

In another practical for Organisation of the Body course, pairs of students used forceps to "tear apart the beating heart" of chicken embryos in their eggs to observe under a microscope.

"I literally could not get myself to do it," the student said. "For me this is a living thing, and you want me to kill it – I can't."

Additionally, several practicals use animal tissues, such as chick muscles, guinea

pig hearts, guinea pig intestines, and rat uteruses. The turnover of these materials vary. Some can be re-used between different students, but others degrade over the course of the experiment. While each animal only has one heart, many pieces of smooth muscle can be extracted from each life lost.

Vivisection or Video

Oxford was one of only two institutions in the country that still used live animals in education until this academic year. Over summer, the Home Office declined its application to continue, in line with the government's shift toward limiting teaching licenses where suitable alternatives exist.

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "The Home Office took the view that the use of live animals for teaching purposes was no longer justified and that teaching objectives could be achieved using alternatives such as videos and computer simulations."

In response, the Medical Sciences Division replaced live animal practicals with video recordings of demonstrators doing the experiment. For one second-year student, this format is "perfectly fine" because she's still learning the same material.

During in-person practicals she sat aside and took notes, "not engaging very much" because she felt uncomfortable. In contrast, she was able to focus better when she watched the videos.

While she acknowledges that students can gain insights from looking at animal anatomy, she believes it's more helpful to

look at human cadavers in the demonstrating room.

"Firstly, to pursue a career in medicine it's a lot more helpful to understand the anatomy of a person," she told *Cherwell*. "Secondly, we have consent to do this from the people who donated their bodies... Animals of course cannot do that. It just feels dirty."

Another student against these practicals is Sheen Gahlaut, treasurer of Oxford Animal Ethics Society. Despite her personal belief that animal research is necessary for justified causes, she agrees with the Home Office's recent assessment that these practicals are not justified.

The replacement with video recordings elicited mixed reviews. Gahlaut acknowledged that some medicine students argued animal research is a worthwhile endeavour, and some demonstrators shared their belief that it was unfair to deprive students of a learning opportunity.

Gahlaut also pointed out that Oxford's "impersonal" way of rat vivisections wasn't the only possibility. Rather, she described a research lab she volunteered at this summer where animal research was conducted with more sensitivity:

The scientists there put rats in CO₂ chambers to study their intestines. In these moments, they would always ask everyone to be quiet and say: "We thank you for the sacrifice. We appreciate we're doing something that is harmful for this creature, but we're thankful that we can do this to advance research."

On her experience with Oxford's practicals, Gahlaut told *Cherwell*: "The worst part was the impersonal nature of it, how there was never really any thought or respect given [to the animal]."

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "The pharmacology teaching practicals used humane approaches (terminal anaesthesia), minimised animal numbers, and were used to demonstrate fundamental pharmacological and physiological principles of clinical significance."



Image credit: Kenneth Wong

Severities of Suffering

The discontinuation of Oxford's animal teaching licence does not affect its research licences.

While Oxford was conducting more animal experiments than any other UK university until 2022, its numbers have now dropped below Cambridge's. Over the years, the number of animals used at Oxford has gone down, from 226,739 in 2014 to 194,913 in 2023, classed into five categories according to severity of suffering.

According to Understanding Animal Research (UAR), an organisation that supports use of animals in biomedical research in a humane way, "sub-threshold" severity is defined as procedures which were originally expected to cause suffering but in retrospect did not. 64.1% of procedures in 2023 fell into this category. Meanwhile, 19.5% of the animals underwent "mild" procedures, 14.2% underwent "moderate" procedures.

"Severe" procedures were done to 2,139 of the animals in 2023. UAR defines this category as procedures where the animals are likely to experience severe pain, long-lasting moderate pain, or "severe impairment of the well-being." It lists examples such as:

- Any test where death is the end-point or fatalities are expected;
- Inescapable electric shocks
- Breeding animals with genetic disorders that are expected to experience severe and persistent impairment of general condition.

Lastly, 2,049 animals, including the rats used for medicine demonstrations, fall into the "non-recovery" category, meaning they never regained consciousness after being placed under general anaesthesia.

From Mice to Macaques

The vast majority (98.5%) of animals that underwent procedures in 2023 were mice. Other species included rats, ferrets, guinea pigs, pigs, birds, and fish. Only 10 non-human primates – they receive greater protection under the legislation – underwent procedures in 2023, with one classed as "mild" and the other nine as "moderates".

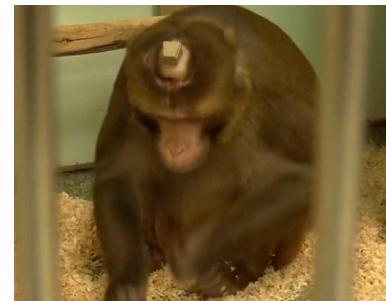
An official video titled "Animal research at Oxford University" shows shelf after shelf lined with plastic units, each with several mice inside. The footage details how the animals are housed in accordance with their natural environment. For example, mice have shredded papers to burrow into, while macaques live in social groups with stimuli, such as swings to play on and paper bags to forage from. The video doesn't mention how the animals are used in research.

Experiments on primates are described on the University's webpage. The macaques spend most of the time in group housing, with several hours a day dedicated to behavioural work, such as playing

games on a computer screen for food rewards. They then undergo "surgery to remove a very small amount of brain tissue under anaesthetic". After a few hours, they are up and about again.

Additionally, these macaques "often will undergo surgery to have an implant attached to the top of their heads. An implant may consist of a post to hold this animal still (e.g. during an MRI scan)," according to a virtual tour of the Biomedical Sciences Building's primate research facility.

In a video, the animal welfare officer said: "It's really important that we have



A macaque in the primate research facility with an implant. Image credit: With permission of Oxford University.

ongoing assessments of their welfare, obviously for their own welfare...but also... that they remain that way for the science – we want to have normal animal models that will produce good quality data."

Scientific consensus, ethical debate

There is a scientific consensus worldwide that animal research remains necessary to some extent. Nevertheless, animal research only forms a small part of the University biomedical research, with the vast majority using in-vitro techniques or humans.

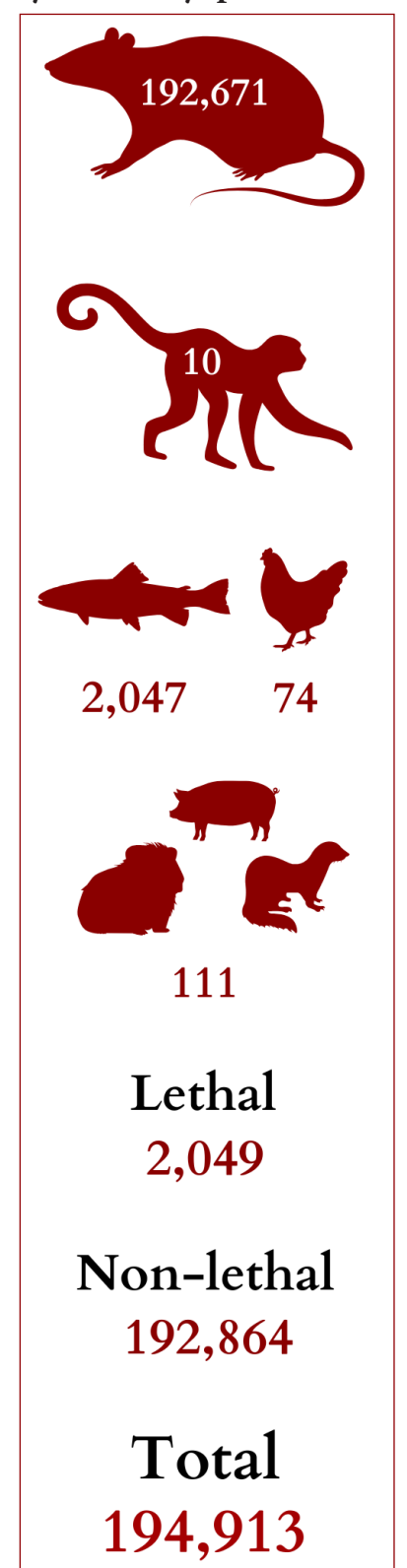
The University's website features several scientists discussing how their animal research advanced medicine. For example, Dr John Parrington used sea urchins, mice, and hamsters to find treatment for men's infertility, while Professor David Gaffan uses primates to identify the processes behind memory disorders in the human brain.

"Just by being very complex living, moving organisms [animals] share a huge amount of similarities with humans," the website reads.

"There has to be an understanding that without animals we can only make very limited progress against diseases like cancer, heart attack, stroke, diabetes, and HIV."

Other members of the University's faculty disagree. Theology professor Revd Andrew Linzey, who founded the independent Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, told *Cherwell*: "I fear the University has not yet caught up with the moral paradigm change that sentient beings, human or animal, should be treated with respect."

Procedures performed on animals at Oxford University in 2023, by species:



192,039 mice, 611 rats, 21 other rodents; 10 non-human primates; 29 domestic fowl, 45 other birds; 1919 zebrafish, 128 other fish; 21 ferrets, 48 guinea pigs, 42 pigs.

OPINION

Not everyone needs - or ought - to go to university

ZAGHAM FARHAN

University is not cheap. For most of us, it will be one of the largest set of debts we ever take out.

It remains to the Treasury, however, a debt largely left unpaid. By March 2024, outstanding student loan debt to the government stood at an eye-watering £236 billion, and that figure is predicted to double in the next 25 years. This is symptomatic of very active choices from governments, both Tory and Labour, over the last few decades; Blair made a pledge to send over half of young people to university, a pledge which has had untold negative consequences on the country as a whole. His 50% target was finally reached in 2017-18, and what has it gotten us?

The results are disappointing: A nation full of shortages in key industries (plumbing, electricals, etc.) and an incredibly oversaturated graduate market. As with anything, when you increase the supply the item itself

becomes significantly less valuable – and so being ‘a graduate’ is no longer the golden ticket it once was. Combined with the domestic fees cap, we now also see a university sector subsidised heavily by international students and the British taxpayer, with many universities struggling to be financially viable.

Encouraging people to go to university seems now to be a compulsion, as opposed to being considered one of the most significant financial decisions of one’s life. My own decision was thought through long and hard – after the Navy rejected me for medical reasons – and to this day I often feel that I may have been better placed diving straight into the

“Encouraging people to go to university seems now to be a compulsion”

real world. Indeed, I often feel that my year of employment before I started at Oxford taught me significantly more about life than this degree ever will.

And there are, of course, plenty of excellent

non-university options out there. Someone I know recently took up a Ministry of Defence apprenticeship instead of going to university, and I’m beyond convinced that this was a fantastic decision. He earns an excellent salary, and is learning skills that are actually incredibly valuable to both himself and the nation – and crucially he won’t be saddled with £50,000 of debt. We can, and should, do more to open up new opportunities to people – to show them that in today’s world a piece of paper with the word ‘Bachelor’ written on it doesn’t have to define your ability, skill, or indeed earning potential.

So what’s the solution? In my ideal world, the government would do everything in its power to expand and celebrate non-university options. They would encourage the establishment of more degree and non-degree apprenticeships, and careers that start at 18, not 21. At the same time, they should raise tuition fees and end the repayment threshold, acknowledging finally that higher education is a privilege, not a right, and currently an outsized burden on the taxpayer.

Student Finance is a truly wonderful thing: it has enabled millions of young people to access the world’s best educational institutions. But it comes at a massive cost. Not everyone needs to go to university, and that’s not at all a bad thing.

Importantly though, we must recognise that someone pays for these degrees – either that is the person who chooses willingly to go to university, or it’s the taxpayer. I know which one of those options I prefer.

Letters to the Editor:

Readers of *Cherwell* respond to articles from Michaelmas term

The myth of woke universities

MADAM - Having been Editor of *Cherwell* during the pro-Palestine encampments in Oxford, I like to think I have a pretty good idea of how ‘woke’ Oxford is.

When we talk of ‘woke’ student bodies and circles, I must say I believe it is a loud minority who shape the picture. Many people are afraid to speak up for what their peers might respond with. And this is wrong. As long as what you say is not inherently bigoted or hurtful, then you should say it. A ‘woke’ university culture is counter-productive and stops meaningful discourse.

That is often because the ‘woke’ people have insightful and oftentimes ‘correct’ opinions; but if you don’t even feel able to speak up out of fear that you will be shot down and laughed at, or even worse, cancelled, you will never learn and perhaps keep your bigoted opinions to yourself. The feeling of ‘anti-woke’ in certain groups, especially young men, is rife, and this is what can ultimately lead to dangerous beliefs being propagated.

I genuinely think the foundational problem is intolerance from both sides. There is little empathy or time taken to sit down and talk about beliefs and ideas without emotion. That is why Adam and I ultimately agreed to only publish fact and news pieces about the war in the Gaza strip, because anything else would have led to chaos.

Oliver Sandall

German and Czech, Somerville

Intoxigation 2024

MADAM - I must start by mentioning that many of the article’s key findings seem accurate: the Lamb and Flag is comfortably the best pub in Oxford and the HisPol students I know would drink eight days per week if they could. However, I cannot believe that only 37 people claim to spend more than £70 per week on alcohol. £70 is less than the price of three bottles of M&S pink gin, or merely sixteen pints of Renegade in the Lamb and Flag.

This oversight must be the result of the investigation’s methodological flaws or because most students use the bank of mummy and daddy. Why would people even know they were spending £70 on alcohol per week, when it’s all charged to mummy’s credit card? Yet, for those of us who don’t have the luxury of daddy paying for our Cognac supplies, it is almost impossible to keep the alcohol expenditure below £70. To make matters worse, beerflation in the Lamb and Flag only worsens the financial burden.

It is a great failure of the Labour government that Rachel Reeves’s decision to cut draught duty by 1.7% has not managed to prevent the price of a Renegade increasing by 30p since last Trinity.

Job Estill

History, St John’s

Divestment will take more than a review board

MADAM - This piece from last term argues that the University’s review of its investments needs to preclude “a drastic change of policy”. Amongst other arguments, the author claims that “ethical arguments for divestment from arms are very easy to lay out” and that “it is the responsibility of every member of the University community to keep up the pressure”.

However, the simplicity with which all arms manufacturing and sales are deemed immoral motivated me to advance my main argument which I set out in a blog for the Uehiro Institute last year. Though armed conflict is something we all should despise, it is sometimes justified - though I’m not saying that the examples the author used in the article are examples of justified conflicts.

Yet there are several principles in Just War Theory that can make the case for conditional arms sales, rather than a complete divestment from arms. Even in cases where the government being armed is repressive, one can argue that their people face aggression from even worse regimes - regimes that are worth defending against. Even more than that, they can be lobbied to reform their governance structures and become more humanitarian through such conditional arms sales.

Mahdi Ghuloom

MSt Practical Ethics, St Cross

Got an opinion on this print’s Opinion?
Submit a Letter to the Editor via:
comment@cherwell.org



In defence of the History Admissions Test

Despite the recent crises in this challenging entry exam, removing it may only exacerbate access inequalities

STANLEY SMITH

A little more than two years ago, I would have never imagined myself writing this article. Applying to Oxford on top of a busy work week, and cramming History Admissions Test (HAT) past papers whenever I could, I’d have welcomed the recent news that the Faculty of History is considering scrapping its entrance exams. If you had told me, in the future, I would be advocating for prospective students to go through the same gnarly experience, I would assume I’d gone a little mad.

But here we are. After the fiasco this November, in which applicants for History and joint honours degrees had their exams delayed or cancelled due to issues with the new online provider, the Faculty of History has announced it is exploring new options for the future of the exam. One of these is for the department to follow in the footsteps of others, notably the English Faculty last year, and remove it altogether.

At first this might make sense. The entrance exams are a massive commitment for prospective students, one that distracts from their school work, all for a university place they may not get. You would think

that a personal statement, written work submission and the interview are more than enough to determine the candidates with the most potential. However, to remove the HAT would be a mistake, one that makes the Oxford admissions process less meritocratic.

Some context for those who have not had the pleasure. The HAT is an hour-long exam, in which applicants are given a primary source from an unfamiliar period of history and asked to write an essay in response to a question. As a result, it does not test a student’s historical knowledge, but instead their skill in comprehension, analysis, and presentation. This provides students from diverse backgrounds an opportunity to showcase their raw talent, compared to the knowledge-focussed personal statement and interview which favour those who have had a more guided education.

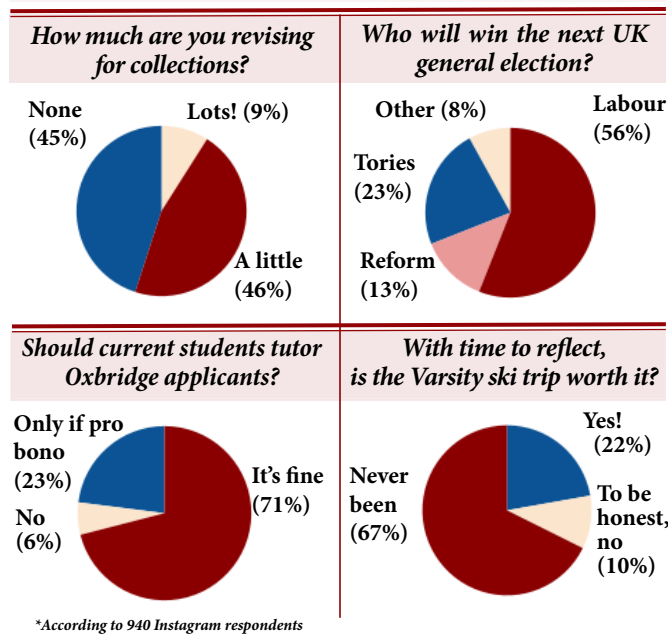
In terms of resources, the HAT is the most level playing field that students will experience during their application process. All applicants have access to the same number of past papers and mark schemes explaining what makes an exemplary answer. In contrast, the criteria for a good interview performance, as much as one might try to watch every Matt Williams access video on YouTube, is more

nebulous. This stands to the benefit of schools that regularly send large chunks of their cohort to Oxford. Their larger pool of Oxford alumni and closer ties to the institution provide greater access to unofficial tips and strategies for succeeding in interviews.

Of course, the advantages of better resourced schools pervade the HAT as well. Private schools often run Oxbridge programs with exam preparation classes and marking for practice tests. But the HAT and similar tests at least provide a crucial opportunity for students’ work to speak for itself, without the polish teachers can add to a mediocre personal statement or the overconfidence in the interview installed by expensive schooling. Removing the HAT, then, would not only reduce the number of chances a student has to demonstrate their potential, but would make them do so in a format that favours the privileged even more than it previously did.

It’s a long way to go before Oxford offers reflect pure merit – that is why initiatives such as Oxbridge Launchpad and Oxford’s Astrophoria Foundation Year are so important and should be expanded. Whilst the History Faculty is right to reconsider how it implements the HAT, simply scrapping it won’t do any good.

THE VERDICT



Admissions tutoring proves that money beats merit

While most students support tutoring applicants, this just highlights the role of luck in getting us to Oxford

RIZINA

The growing private tutoring industry for Oxbridge admissions is one of British education's most visible fault lines. The practice of paying for specialised admissions coaching has become increasingly common – and increasingly controversial. Private tutoring for Oxbridge admissions exemplifies everything wrong with educational inequality. Wealthy families can spend thousands of pounds on specialised coaching, mock interviews, and application guidance, while equally talented students from less privileged backgrounds navigate the process alone. This contradicts universities' stated commitment to selecting students on academic merit and potential, not background.

However, for some students from non-traditional backgrounds, targeted tutoring can be a crucial equalising force. Many comprehensive school students, despite their academic capabilities, lack the cultural and social capital implicitly expected. They may have never encountered the discourse common in Oxbridge interviews or been exposed to the specific ways of thinking and expressing ideas that these universities value. A bright student from a working-class background might use tutoring to gain the same interview techniques and application strategies that come naturally to those who have grown up in academic households or attended schools with generations of Oxbridge success.

While compelling, this doesn't address fundamental ethical questions. Should access to elite education depend on ability to pay for extra coaching? If tutoring does provide significant advantages, shouldn't these skills and strategies be taught openly and systematically within schools rather than through an expensive private market? Moreover, the focus on tutoring obscures structural inequalities in British education. Before students reach Oxbridge applications, their paths have been shaped by countless advantages or disadvantages consequent of their socioeconomic background. Private school networks, family connections to academia, exposure to intellectual discussions at home, and access to cultural experiences determine who even considers applying. The tutoring industry is a symptom not a cause of educational inequality. It has emerged in response to a system where the stakes of elite university admission have become increasingly high (or at least are perceived to be), while the preparation for success in that system remains unevenly distributed. As competition for places intensifies, families with means will seek advantages for their children – and the market, unregulated, will provide it.

The commercialisation of Oxbridge admissions is part of a shift from universities being purely intellectual institutions to gatekeepers of social and economic opportunity. Universities are not places of learning and intellectual growth as much as their prosaic mission statements would have you believe but investments to access a certain job, an economic

stratum, a circle of influence. Banning or restricting private tutoring would likely drive it underground while doing nothing to address underlying educational inequalities. Rather, structural reform and social policy is necessary as existing equity initiatives have had mixed effectiveness. Since 2020, the gap between private school and state school access to Oxford "has only grown bigger". Programmes like Opportunity Oxford and Foundation Oxford, while positive, nonetheless intervene too late, when disparities are already entrenched.

Early intervention is needed: invest in high-quality early childhood education, reform education funding to better support disadvantaged schools, and address intergenerational poverty through job training and community development initiatives. Fundamentally, though, the debate over Oxbridge admissions concerns meritocracy. Are our accolades, such as an Oxford admission, even deserved?

People believe so; we tend to think that success stems from individual effort and luck has little role. A 2023 Ipsos study found that three quarters (77%) of Britons view hard work as essential or very important for getting ahead in life. Just a quarter cite parental education or family wealth as significant factors. Just one in five attribute success to luck, making it the least important factor among those considered. It makes sense why we believe this. The just-world hypothesis shows people desire to believe the world is fair, and meritocracy fits this illusion. It offers something seductive: Self-congratulation and absolution from guilt. Meritocracy frames success as individual excellence, failure as personal deficiency. It makes prosperity guilt-free and justifies why some go without even basic necessities. It excuses many of us who walk past, unflinching. After all, everything is earned or deserved.

However, this view ignores how a life actually takes shape. The qualities we label as "merit" – ability, persistence, determination, ambition – arise largely from chance. Our capacity for effort and achievement, including grit and resilience, depends on inherited traits and childhood environment, factors beyond our control; "early attachments to parents play a crucial, lifelong role in human adaptation."

Circumstance informs even the most vaunted success stories, such as those of billionaires. In fact, in 2024 for the first time since 2009, every billionaire under 30 has inherited their fortune, casting doubt on supposedly "self-made" stories. Perhaps the resolution to the Oxbridge admissions debate is to disavow any notions of meritocracy; upon this backdrop, buying admissions tutoring is one small factor in a world that is irrefutably stacked in favour of some and against others, and where the cultural desire to reckon with how deep this unfairness goes is scant. More immediately, the veneration of Oxbridge graduates needs to stop. The system is slanted from the start, and yet, we idolise those who navigate it. Success should be viewed in context – not merely luck masquerading as 'merit'.

It's time for a new view on college disparities

Historical, cultural, and financial differences within the University can benefit everything from fundraising to teaching

ALEXANDRE GUILLOTEAU

Much noise has been made about college wealth disparities since the report last April – mostly negative. The very word 'disparity', or 'inequality', triggers some of our most visceral feelings – how can people at the same university end up having such a different experience of student life? Yet at the same time, we celebrate the diversity and eccentricity that the collegiate system fosters. Are these two feelings not in tension with each other? Perhaps approaching the issue mindfully of this tension will allow a more balanced reflection on the matter.

The collegiate system is surely one of the great strengths of Oxford University. Few are those who do not enjoy comparing and competing over the relative merits of colleges – of their architecture, of their food, of their location. Even fewer, in my experience, are those who dislike their own college. Were we to live on the sterilised campus of one great identikit 'Oxford University', we should all imagine ourselves to be less fortunate.

Perhaps, therefore, we ought to approach the issue from this angle: Seeing ourselves less as Oxonians and more as members of colleges each with their storied histories, together making up a greater whole. In this light, disparities seem less unacceptable: Why, as members of separate, distinct institutions, ought we all to have the same experience as each other?

If we are not so concerned that UCL, say, has a greater endowment than St Andrews, why the concern that Christ Church has more than another college? If we are reluctant to accept this pluralist principle, shouldn't we be more concerned about redistributing money from wealthy Oxford as a whole towards other universities altogether?

Eccentric differences between colleges don't just form, they contribute to their individual character. They may also be a safeguard of

Oxford's future. Many alumni identify more strongly with their college than the University, and donate to their college accordingly. Would they be so generous if they donated to a central university fund, for example, rather than their old institutions? Keeping income streams separate helps maintain this individuality: a donor to Oriel may expect very different use of their gift from a donor to Wadham.

Is this just the rationalisation of a Mertonian who is quite happy with his college's fortunate endowment? Perhaps. Many of the issues caused by college disparities should certainly concern us all. For all I wax lyrical about the advantages of pluralism, we are all united by taking the same exams and getting the same degrees.

Can this really be right when a student at one college has benefited much more from the grants and other non-material perks (better facilities and the like) when his peer at a poorer college has not? For many this will be immaterial, but we should not ignore that for some it can make a significant difference.

Likewise, while we may all be proud of our colleges now, how much did we know about colleges' wealth as applicants? Certainly visiting Magdalen for the first time one cannot but be struck by its grandeur and surmise it to be a wealthy institution, but what of the fine-grained differences in between? And this doesn't even touch upon pooling, or the intricacies of the allocation system, which remain veiled in mystery.

Perhaps, however, a more pressing concern ought to be the significant disparity in teaching from college to college – rather than wealth. It is of course a great benefit that so many different approaches can be trialled in one university – as Louis Brandeis called the individual states in the American federal system 'laboratories of democracy'; so colleges can be laboratories of education. In my own subject, Classics, I have seen how the lonely efforts of Jesus College in promoting the 'active method' of language



teaching has encouraged its adoption by other colleges.

Yet on the other hand, it can be deeply frustrating, if not unfair, when one college is seen to take the tuition of its students so much more seriously than another, and even if the difference is merely of teaching style, it is not exactly easy to migrate to a more suitable college. Surely differences in the style and attentiveness of teaching, often separate from wealth, have a greater impact on academic success.

The discussion about college disparities, then, raises a much broader question about the merits of the Oxford collegiate system. It seems to me unavoidable that a system which preserves the distinctiveness of its individual parts will necessarily involve some inequality, and that these disparities may result in injustices. Which we value more – uniformity or individuality – informs our politics and indeed our life much beyond the balance sheets of Oxford colleges.

Image credit: Laurence Cooke

FEATURES

Smoke and Mirrors: Oxford's changing smoking culture



By JACK LEADER

Smoking in Oxford appears increasingly under threat, as rates decline and restrictions increase. Once universal, it is now largely limited to Oxford's nightlife. But while fading in the University at large, smoking survives among its distinct subcultures.

Behind a constant veil of thick tobacco smoke, students relax and chat in a night of music and dancing far from Oxford's usually formal settings. This might sound like a club smoking area, but it actually describes Oxford's 'smoking concerts'. An integral part of entertainment at the University in the early twentieth century, they speak to a time where smoking was an inevitable backdrop to everyday life. Smoking was more a constant part of its scenery than a University-wide 'culture'.

This ghost of smoking past left me wondering: Is there a smoking 'culture' at Oxford today? And how much has it changed?

Changing times

Those days of carefree smoking have vanished. The 1950s saw a definitive link established between smoking and lung cancer, and smoking rates have been declining ever since. When the Health Act of 2006 made some premises smoke-free, the University seized the opportunity to introduce a no-smoking policy inside its buildings. Philosophy students could no longer indulge in endless nights in their

rooms spent staring at an unwritten essay question, a cigarette between their fingers.

Cast out of doors, even smoking outside has faced heightened restrictions. Most colleges have restricted smoking to a few fringe areas. The areas in question are generally dingy, such as a small hole outside Lincoln College's bar. When that's the space on offer, little wonder barely any of Oxford's smokers picked it up at the University.

Some colleges have banned it entirely from their main sites: Brasenose, Mansfield, and Queen's to name just a few. Unhappily for smokers, but a victory for those concerned with the significant health threats of second-hand smoke. These policies have seen occasional reversals – St Peter's College rowed back on a ban on smoking on-site in 2019 after a JCR majority opposed it – but the trend of increasing restrictions continues at pace.

Declining rates

Health concerns and the steady encroachment on smokers' terrain has won results. Whereas in the 1950s we might have expected 80% of students to smoke, a survey of over 80 Oxford students showed

only 23.8% now do so. The decline is unmistakable. Smoking has been limited and de-normalised as a habit for students. Ever fewer smoke, and ever fewer spaces allow them to.

Smoking survives outside bars, pubs, and clubs. Tobacco and alcohol go hand-in-hand as some of the substances available to students looking to cool off from the University's "stress machine" (as described by one interviewee). Oxford's nightlife helps students socialise and de-stress, and smoking provides both. Even within clubs cigarettes facilitate these roles – who hasn't taken a breather from Bridge in its smoking area?

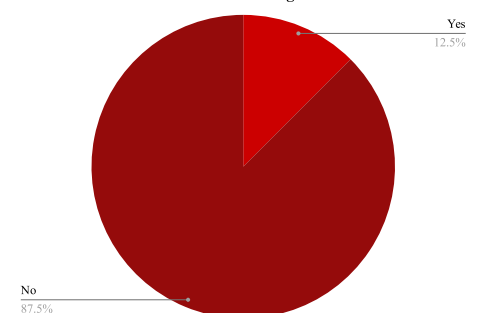
Even with this appeal, smoking wins few converts at Oxford. A few respondents discussed picking up smoking to deal with stress. One told *Cherwell*: "Oxford is stressful so there's peace in smoking." But 87.5% of respondents who smoked started before coming to the University (Figure 1). The alluring thought of a quick cigarette to calm the nerves before a collection only occurs to those already used to it.

Smoking cultures

Carried over by incoming students as opposed to being home-grown at the University, smoking is more a passive practice at Oxford than a 'culture'. It is in the background of other parts of life. This is exactly the same place it held when smoking was much more common, but now confined to some dank smoking areas and the cold streets of the city (Figure 3).

Figure 1

Whether students have started smoking in Oxford



A narrow majority of the students surveyed disagree. 54% believe there is a smoking 'culture' at Oxford. Yet even here it was seen as largely passive.

Non-smokers rarely felt pressured to smoke (Figure 2). If one person went for a smoke, others wouldn't necessarily follow.

But if non-smokers are naturally more likely to come from environments where smoking was rare, the culture shock of seeing students their age smoking semi-

“The connotations of smoking here become more attractive: A social currency; a tool for hacking; something more glamorous or worldly. Smoking becomes adopted as a part of the subculture’s aesthetic.”

regularly might lead them to think there is a smoking culture. One non-smoker interviewed described exactly that, though they conceded this may be because they were “sheltered”.

This chimes with how sceptical the smokers interviewed were of the idea of a university-wide Oxford smoking culture. A wider consensus emerged among respondents that the case was more one of smoking cultures than a single one for the whole university. Here, different subcultures develop their own smoking ‘cultures’ as part of the images they wish to cultivate: the Union and Oxford University Conservative Association, “posh kids”, student journalism. PPE and English had by far the highest proportion of smokers by subject

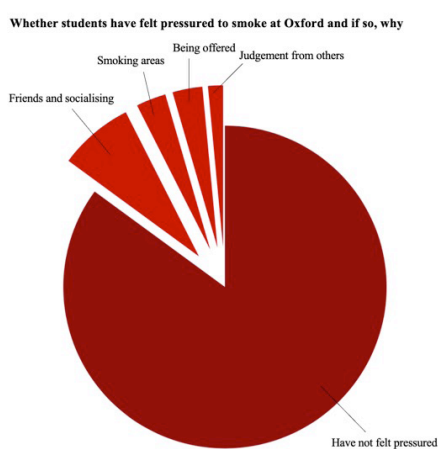


Figure 2

– the same groups most likely to be active in these subcultures. The connotations of smoking here become more attractive: A social currency; a tool for hacking; something more glamorous or worldly.

Smoking becomes adopted as a part of the subculture’s aesthetic. The result is a feedback loop encouraging new participants to partake as well. Smoking becomes a social glue within these contexts, helping to cohere the groups by the opportunity it provides for socialising within them. Its position as a natural part of the subgroup’s culture and image is then consolidated. However, if you weren’t a part of these specific groups you wouldn’t necessarily draw the same associations. One interviewee



told *Cherwell*: “I used to walk past the smokers outside Port and Policy without thinking about it. It was only when I picked up smoking and started attending that I saw it was a culture there.” This explains why drinks and stress were much more commonly associated with smoking as being more widely applicable.

Oxford’s cigar-smokers exemplify this. I was unaware such a subculture even existed, but a few respondents described it. Limited to a tiny group who can afford them and are “almost always dressed formally”, cigars are used by them as symbols of wealth and ‘refinement’. Freshers assimilate into the groups and adopt the practice, but otherwise the subculture is so compartmentalised as to be largely invisible. The symbols are only for each other to see – in these contexts smoking is as much a social signal as an outlet.

Generational changes

Yet the future of smoking at Oxford appears to be a bleak one. With a declining proportion of smokers between years, it is increasingly endangered. This may be part of the wider trend in recent years of Gen Z proving increasingly abstinent. One in three is teetotal, as a shift occurs away from a ‘going-out’ culture and the substances like alcohol and tobacco that accompany this.

As ever fewer students participate in the ‘going-out’ culture and ever more pubs and clubs are forced to close, this has a knock-on effect on smoking. Those spaces are the very ones most closely associated with the practice. Its ground is yet more limited, leaving it with too little space to even become a University-wide culture. The subcultures are its last bastion.

At a more direct level, the proposed Tobacco and Vapes Bill of 2024-25 – set to be passed into law early this year – will ban the sale of tobacco products to people born on or after 1st January 2009. This raises the prospect of Oxford’s Freshers of 2027/28 being nearly entirely smoke-free. A black market will almost certainly develop, with products even more expensive and difficult to attain. Students still smoking will be far less willing to freely give them out, and Oxford’s casual smoking culture will face extinction. It will be too much effort for

something banned in so many places to be worth it.

The future for Oxford

I can only speculate about what smoking cultures in Oxford will exist then, but I can think of two alternative paths. First, existing smoking cultures may slowly die out due to the expense and legal difficulties of the purchase. Second, smoking may become further limited to even fewer subcultures, but become more important in and culturally distinct to those contexts. If I had to place a bet, I would count on the second one, since it’s hard to believe smoking will lose all of

“The decline is unmistakable. Smoking has been limited and de-normalised as a habit for students. Ever fewer smoke, and ever fewer spaces allow them to. ... Carried over by incoming students as opposed to being home-grown at the University, smoking is more a passive practice at Oxford.”

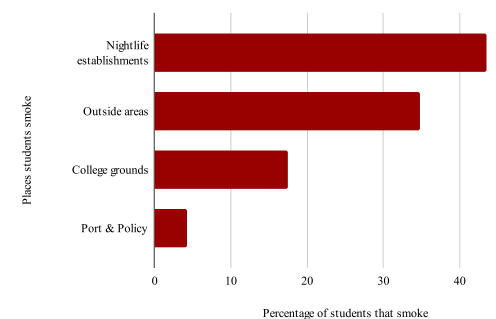


Figure 3

its appeal by becoming illegal (you need only look at the UK’s drug culture to see supportive evidence – a subject for another article!).

Smoking retains its allure: Many identified it as a “cool” aesthetic for Oxford. In a context where it is limited and threatened, smoking gains its own attraction as something almost counter-cultural in breaking with those norms. It hardly possessed this trait when it was a constant presence around Oxford. It is precisely the restrictions designed to limit it that make smoking more attractive to specific groups.

The proven health dangers of smoking may mean that it is not a practice whose passing should be lamented. But it has evolved into a symbolic prop for many of Oxford’s vibrant subcultures, complementing their chosen aesthetics and images. Smoking has also maintained its older role as a passive practice occurring in the backdrop of Oxford’s nightlife and entertainment.

Nicotine is hardly the most attractive social glue. Still, the fact that it retains a social role despite its dangers and increasing restrictions is testament to its staying power. Any judgements on smoking’s demise may be premature. And while there has never been a University-wide smoking ‘culture’ as such at Oxford, different smoking cultures have developed and look set to continue, for now.

Image Credits: David Hays [Left] and Susanne Nilsson/CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons [Right]

What Gisèle Pelicot teaches us about consent workshops

The trial of Gisèle Pelicot exposes the disturbing reality of consent ignorance. We need more effective, comprehensive consent education to address widespread misconceptions.

By VICTORIA MCKINLEY-SMITH

CW: Sexual Assault

No means no.” We’ve all heard the phrase, repeated in a variety of settings; ranging from public campaigns to Freshers’ Week consent workshops. Yet, despite this clear-cut message, consent continues to be misunderstood, misrepresented, and in some tragic cases, ignored. The recent trial of Gisèle Pelicot in France has brought these issues to the fore, forcing us to confront uncomfortable truths about the state of sexual consent laws, education, and attitudes – not just in France, but across the globe.

A case study in consent

Consent workshops have been a mandatory part of Freshers’ Week at Oxford University since 2016, in a bid to create a safer environment for students and initiate a more open conversation about the issue. While some colleges opt to carry out their own JCR welfare-led sessions, others opt for Oxford’s internal training system, CoSy, offering a comprehensive course dispelling myths on consent and its associated laws. Every one of us has sat through the excruciating awkwardness of these sessions, placed into groups of five or six people, whose names we might not even know yet. We’re presented with scenarios, then asked to decide whether or not consent was given. A typical example might read something like this:

“A 59-year-old woman lives in Avignon with her husband of 38 years. Between 2011 and 2020, he used an online chatroom to invite over 70 different men, aged from 21-68, to violate her. One of the perpetrators arrives, a 53-year-old baker and father of three. The woman is splayed on the bed, motionless and snoring; she is unconscious. Rape, or not rape?”

This was no imaginary scenario, but the horrifying reality for Gisèle Pelicot.

Over nine years, Dominique Pelicot, Gisèle’s husband, contacted men from all walks of life, including trusted professionals from nurses to journalists, to violate his wife whilst he filmed them. To most people, there is no question that this is rape – and indeed, the court in Avignon reached this verdict for 51 of the men guilty of these abominable crimes.

But this clear-cut case did not stop almost a quarter of the convicted claiming that they had not realised Gisèle had not given her consent, or even that she was unconscious. One video played during the trial shows Gisèle, eyes closed, tongue lolling from her mouth, rendering consent totally impossible. This defence raises major questions

about the state of consent education in France: it seems inconceivable to us as students who have been through the consent workshops offered at school and university, despite their flaws.

The lack of knowledge

What was perhaps more concerning during the Pelicot trial was the argument that Gisèle’s husband gave consent for her. Many of the men during the trial argued that they were convinced they were taking part in a sex game with a consensual couple. Needless to say, there are no consensual couples, only individuals.

For the vast majority of us, consent is not a difficult thing to understand. Should we not know what consent is by the time we reach the age of 18? However, the reality is more complex. Research shows that many young people, particularly men, may not fully grasp the nuances of consent due to the widespread consumption of pornography, which often portrays explicitly non-consensual scenarios as normal or even desirable.

This can lead to a distorted understanding of consent, with some individuals internalising harmful ideas about coercion, manipulation, and entitlement in sexual relationships. In fact, one YouGov survey indicated that 36% of British men, compared to 4% of women, consume pornography at least once a week. This has prompted growing concerns that these influences shape perceptions of what is acceptable behaviour.

In order to keep such problems from worsening, it is therefore vital that secondary education provides adequate teaching on the subject. In many cases, comprehensive sex education is still lacking or inconsistent, often focusing on the biological aspects of sex rather than emotional, psychological, and ethical dimensions like consent.

This leaves many young people ill-prepared for navigating complex situations around consent once they reach adulthood. Given these realities, it seems more necessary than ever that consent workshops at university are conducted – workshops that aim to challenge common misconceptions and provide clear, comprehensive education on the importance of mutual respect, communication, and boundaries in sexual relationships.

University consent workshops

The sessions conducted during Freshers’ Week are instrumental in explaining the nuances in body language, continuation, and withdrawal of consent. Many workshops attempt to address these nuances by exploring both real-life and hypothetical scenarios, to help participants understand that consent is an active process that can evolve throughout a situation. They emphasise that consent can be communicated not



just verbally, but through physical cues and body language as well.

However, the effectiveness of these sessions can vary. While some students report a deeper understanding of how consent works in practice, others feel that the workshops oversimplify complex issues or fail to address the subtleties involved, especially when it comes to non-verbal signals or ambiguous situations.

Moreover, as rape can take many different forms, the issue of consent is not black and white either. This raises issues with the application of a blanket law, leaving no room for nuance in situations which can turn out to be far more complicated than they first appear. French criminal law makes no clear mention of the need for a partner’s consent and prosecutors must prove the intention to rape to secure a guilty verdict. What the men in the Pelicot trial failed to understand was that the absence of a ‘no’ is not a ‘yes’.

While this renders these educational workshops more necessary than ever, it is important to acknowledge that they are far from perfect. One College Welfare Rep told *Cherwell*: “The resources we are given by the SU are fairly fundamental and there is no guidance from college or the welfare professionals in it towards more effective resources.”

It is also important to remember that a team of welfare reps and second-year volunteers now trying to educate had sat through the workshops themselves only a year ago, and received no formal training or guidance. In order for these workshops to succeed, they need to feel less like another obligation in the overwhelming Freshers’ Week timetable, and more like an essential step in educating the next generation of students. In order for this to be the case, the responsibility needs to be placed on trained professionals rather than welfare reps and well-meaning volunteers.

Colleges or the central university must therefore increase funding to ensure resources are comprehensive and well-designed, and establish standardised, high-quality sessions that are regularly updated and tailored to students’ needs. Professional facilitators, with expertise in consent and sexual violence prevention, should lead these sessions, guaranteeing a more informed and impactful delivery.

Assault happens everywhere

The domestic setting of Gisèle’s ordeal reminds us that assault does not just take place in busy bars and clubs at the hands of a stranger. Dominique was seen as a loving father and caring grandfather to his three grandchildren. According to the university-wide *Our Space* study from 2021,

more than half of Oxford students reported being sexually harassed within a single year, and over one in five said they were victims of sexual touching or rape, demonstrating that universities can be a breeding ground for sexual harassment in the forms of both physical and verbal targeting.

Despite all students having access to the free online consent platform ‘Consent for Students’, roughly two-thirds don’t complete the training. Freshers are simply unlikely to engage with oversimplified, seemingly obvious scenarios where they come away from sessions feeling bored and patronised.

Yet, even with such workshops in place, the defence used by the perpetrators in the Pelicot case – that they didn’t understand what consent truly meant – suggests a larger societal failure. If adults, particularly those of legal age, are still unclear about the concept of consent, what does this say about our educational systems and cultural attitudes towards sex?

This misunderstanding of consent often manifests in dangerous ways, such as the defence

1/2 Oxford students reported being sexually harassed within a single year

used in the Pelicot case from one of the men that: “My body raped her, but my brain didn’t,” as if a lack of intention could erase the harm caused. This line of defence, which hinges on the claim that the accused didn’t understand the situation fully, is not only legally weak but morally reprehensible.

More needs to be done

The Gisèle Pelicot trial forces us to confront the harsh reality that, despite the good intentions behind consent workshops, much work remains to be done. Beatrice Zavarro, Dominique Pelicot’s lawyer, has said that she believes “change will not come from the Ministry of Justice but from the Ministry of Education.”

This only highlights the need for systemic change. The Gisèle Pelicot trial teaches us that student consent workshops, whilst often simplistic and even a little condescending, are vital in ensuring that the excuse: “I didn’t know what consent was,” can never be used again.

It’s about recognising that consent is not just a rule dictated in an isolated workshop, but a responsibility that we must actively enforce.

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John Evelyn

Editors' Note: It amuses us how hacks attempted to influence our choice of Jevelyn. The president, through his faithful spokesman, helpfully sent Cherwell a shortlist to choose from, while ex-Jevelyn of the ancien régime made his own recommendation. We disregarded them. Instead, one of us messaged several hopefuls for writing samples, and the other judged them anonymously. With transparency and meritocracy, we welcome Jevelyn HT25.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, welcome back to what will surely be another action-packed term of compelling Union drama. With the Sun having set on Michaelmas Term and Ra back home after failing to pass his darling rules changes, Jevelyn has been assured that we have seen the last of the filibustering and constitutional arguing, though only time shall tell. Jevelyn will miss the drama, paying attention for 8-10 minutes of a debate is ever so exhausting...

Following everyone but his own electoral success, the Keble Klutz has sprung into action as the new meritocratically chosen Chief of

Staff, failing to update the Vac Day spreadsheet at any point. No doubt we'll see some auto-resignations flying through soon (something the Klutz should be familiar with). Meanwhile, Regents Ruler may be doing his best Lord Sugar impression, with word spreading he is not best pleased with some of his Senior Appointed team.

Austerity appears to have set in for our lovely hacks following an exorbitant Michaelmas term.

Despite Dudley Dursley's vigorous attempts, including crying to mummy, he has still not been paid back for the order of Stash. Jevelyn sends him our thoughts and prayers at this time, but certainly not the £37 for our fleece x.

Having entered his Influencer Era, The Lieutenant has been seen roaming the halls of Frewin Court, considering his victory already pre-ordained, with the backing of the current officers, The Barista (no doubt taking notes for her own Trinity plans), and potentially the ISI if rumours are to be believed. Following her false-start last term, we can only wonder

whether Lady Macbeth will break into full stride this term to snatch the gold, or whether she will be left in the dust. Caution to her relay team however, as it sounds as though her only priority is crossing the line herself; that's if she even has a team to run with...

With Harvey Specter and The Barista's Baby locked in with The Lieutenant, the main goal will be holding the team together before the close of nominations. The Corpus Pope, following his retirement and resurrection 3 days later, marks our final confirmed officer candidate, potentially ruining the GirlBoss Trinity term currently being planned.

Elsewhere rumours fly of Grandpa Joe, preparing for his finals and fresh off two trips to the hospital, hopping out of bed and throwing his flat cap into the ring. Much like the elderly grandparent at Christmas, be prepared to listen to stories of how he "won the war back in his day", followed by exchanged nervous looks as he says something slightly out of touch.

With the term card set, balancing a healthy number of rappers with slightly authoritarian politicians (most of them on the "meet the committee page"), it is shaping up to be an interesting term if nothing else.

See you soon,
John Evelyn x



Cherwell Archives

2005:

The humble beginnings of college stash.



While college puffers may plague Hilary, with even the most well-dressed students embracing the hungover college rower aesthetic, they were not always the fine institution they are today.

In fact, when reporting on the introduction of college stash, Helen McMahon breezed past the "crested sweatshirts, polo shirt, tshirts, and jackets" to discuss the business end – seemingly unaware of the shockwave jackets with a college crest would send throughout Oxford. The revolution was not televised, nor was it covered by 2005 *Cherwell* team.

So today, as you wonder if GC from Queens is single, thank Oxford Limited and their enterprising spirit that you can send in a simple Oxfess and be on your way.

by Emily Henson

A note from the Editors-in-Chief



Georgia Campbell
The Queen's College

Happy New Year everyone, and welcome back to Oxford for what is shaping up to be a very frosty start to Hilary Term 2025. Welcome, also, to another term of *Cherwell*.

With Editors on opposite sides of the Atlantic, and a Senior Editorial Team working from Australia to Italy to Dubai, this print has been a truly international effort. Calls have been taken in cars, on trains, at the Stanford College campus and the Manchester Christmas Markets. We have all tested the limits of our phones' service providers, and Facebook Messenger – I am ashamed to admit – has become part and parcel of daily communication.

That is to say: this paper is a product of the digital age – the very thing we're told is killing print journalism today. It has never been easier to organise, format, and print a newspaper (I recently spoke to an ex-Editor of Durham's student paper who remembers the dark days before copy and paste). And yet, everywhere you

look print media seems to be losing its cultural currency. Circulation of national papers is steadily dropping, and the UK currently faces an epidemic of local newspaper closures.

This is where student papers come in. With funding systems that differ from professional papers, we have a duty – I think – to help keep print alive. We're faced with a unique opportunity to experiment with the ways print can interact with an increasingly digital world. For this term's print, we've brought back *The Verdict* (formerly 'The View from Oxford', TT24) which reflects responses to questions posed on our Instagram. Some new print-exclusive features have been added too: Opinion's cartoon and Letters to the Editors, as well as Profile's Student Spotlight, to name a few.

If nothing else, this paper is a tangible testament to the hard work of over 100 Oxford students – authors, editors, illustrators, photographers, archivists – contributing from whatever part of the world they found themselves during the vacation. It's a collaborative feat that would have been impossible just a few decades ago. So I think we can afford to be at least a little optimistic about print in the digital age: here in Oxford, at least, it's still going strong.

Selina Yu Chen
Corpus Christi College



Sometimes when I'm faced with a particularly tedious bit of *Cherwell* work, I'm baffled by how a team of 80 students choose to dedicate hours, even days, to each story you read. I'm ceaselessly amazed, but every so often I do question: Are our efforts trivial, or why do student journalists write?

I find my answer whenever I come across a story that makes me lose my breath. The exposé that reveals the dark underbellies of our institution and holds it to account. The fresh perspective that elicits an hour of heated debate in my JCR. The fascinating history that makes me see this city in another light. The heartfelt narrative of a peer.

We're not a Fleet Street paper, but we personally live the Oxford life that we report on. That means an offhand complaint we hear could spiral into a hard-hitting investigation. A student production we review could record the beginning of a future Academy-winner's stardom. An outlandish story (iPad explodes in lecture?) could give you a good laugh.

Last year when OA4P first set up its encampment, national outlets flocked to Oxford for polished press statements and called it a day. But I was a student, so I grabbed

a sleeping bag and asked to stay inside for 24 hours, documenting midnight meetings and 4am conversations – things professional journalists miss. In the same vein, I read *Cherwell* because it's written by Oxford insiders.

Because we are here listening to the very heartbeat of Oxford, we're capable of getting the scoop, penning razor-sharp analyses, and illuminating unheard perspectives. We tackle heavy topics and uphold impartiality, develop daring visions and make difficult decisions. And, we prank you every April Fool's Day :p

But in order to get there, we must first fuss over whether 'University' is capitalised or whether an en-dash (–) is of the correct length. We must first write routine stories like the parroting of yet another "Oxford researchers found X" press release. We start out with seemingly trivial exercises, and soon enough we write something worthwhile.

PROFILES

“Oxfordshire would collapse without immigration.”

Cherwell spoke to Mark Goldring, CEO of Asylum Welcome and ex-CEO of Oxfam

By SARA ROURKE

Continued from Page 1

of the country. But in Oxford there was the sense that our solidarity was stronger than the extreme right wing.”

In light of these threats, I asked if he believed that anti-immigration sentiment in the UK had worsened in recent years. Something that Mark was keen to address was that the narrative of scapegoating migrants, perpetuated by some of the media and politicians, needed to change: “People were equating a sense of exclusion, that local services, jobs, opportunities weren’t good enough, with a sense that other people are taking it from us.

“No, I don’t think we can’t get healthcare because we’ve actually got too many migrants. Those very migrants are providing the healthcare. We would have a fraction of the students and professors that we’ve got. We’d have a fraction of the businesses. We’d have a fraction of the doctors and nurses and so on. Oxfordshire would collapse without migration.”

At Asylum Welcome the focus has been on assisting asylum-seekers and the most vulnerable migrants in the Oxford community. Mark described it as “a deliberate philosophy of responding to a broad range of needs.”

This certainly rings true: Even a cursory glance at their website revealed the seemingly endless list of services they provide. These range from opposing government plans for the re-opening of the Campsfield detention centre, to providing translators to help individuals express traumatic experiences for Home Office cases, to supplying free bus passes.

A large obstacle for the charity was the unequal support available for asylum seekers depending on which country they come from. Mark told *Cherwell*: “Some refugees arrive welcomed by the government like the Ukrainians and the Afghans were, and there’s public funds

to help them. Others arrive as asylum seekers where the government provides the minimum legal requirements and nothing more.

“As a local organisation we can’t pretend to have a national influence, so we join coalitions, or we help on an individual level. Wherever we can, we’ll do it by giving voice to our clients so that they can actually speak for themselves. We’ve taken up successful cases to stop deportations to Rwanda or to keep them off that awful barge which was rented last year.”

On the issue of advocacy, we discussed student campaigns for change and reform which were often met with opposition from their universities.

“Well,” He chuckled. “History shows students being opposed by their institutions. Many of which are run by people who used to be students themselves and fully understand both sides of that picture. I think the real challenge for student campaigning is longevity and consistency.

“Something like the Campsfield detention centre is not in the power of the University but our attempts to get the University to take a position on it have not made any progress. The science park development site has actually got land right next to it. They don’t even answer our letters.”

“As a local organisation we can’t pretend to have a national influence, so we join coalitions, or we help on an individual level.”

The work that Oxford University has done to become an accredited ‘University of Sanctuary’ was where Mark viewed the University as making the most progress. “There are some very committed people working on it at senior levels and student levels... A few tutors even came together to set up a maths club for displaced academics from around the world.

“I’m interested in what [Oxford] does to help



refugees and asylum seekers who might not be students because, you know it’s only ever going to be a tiny privileged few who get into the University.”

Despite having had a long and varied career in the charities sector, Mark did not have a clear idea of what he wanted to do when he graduated from Oxford.

“I studied law. The only thing I knew when I graduated was that I didn’t want to be a lawyer. I had a much more ‘live now, get paid later’ mindset. And that was what took me to volunteer in Borneo.

“I’ve now run four different organisations, completely different. My last job was leading

Oxfam, and Oxfam spent more money in a morning than Asylum Welcome spends in a whole year. It’s a difference of scale, but that’s what I wanted.”

We reflected on his resignation as CEO of Oxfam in 2018, following news of Oxfam employees using aid funds to hire sex-workers while responding to the 2010 Haiti earthquake. Mark told me: “I think it was the right thing to do. I wasn’t CEO of Oxfam when the Oxfam staff behaved in the way that they did, but I was in the front line of the public storm about it and it was clear to me that Oxfam wasn’t going to rebuild without a sense of starting afresh.

“What would I have done differently at the



Student spotlight: Alec Tiffou on monasteries, Lou Reed's *Berlin*, and the process of play-writing

A student playwright for Matchbox Productions, Tiffou speaks to Faye Chang about his past two plays.

Cherwell: *Where do you generally get inspiration for your plays?*

Alec: I think it's difficult to say it comes from one place. So far, it's come from people that I shouldn't like, but I do – meeting a person who's a bit strange, and then imagining a life around them.

I'm not Christian, but for the first play, *Daddy Longlegs*, I lived in a monastery for a while. Every day I would go to confession, and one of the monks I would confess to would always want to know a little bit too much about my personal life. I think he'd always lived in the monastery and saw me as a peephole into the outside world. It made me feel really uncomfortable, and at the same time, I completely understood him.

In my parent's car, we have one disc, and that's Lou Reed's *Berlin*. Everything about that album is how I wish I wrote – he says really demented things in such a composed, casual way. There's a song called 'The Kids', and it's basically about the police taking away a woman's children, only he sings it like it's a bed-time lullaby. It's a complete severance between the tone of the song and the content, and I love it when plays do that.

Cherwell: *I know that with a lot of Matchbox's productions, there's been a lot of technical innovation. What informed the decision to strip back those elements for Moth, and have it as something that's 'just a play'?*

Alec: It was scary, but there's something about just seeing raw events happening that I really like. I think it allows for a more direct interaction between audience and story.

I remember being in Arkansas, and for some reason, I decided to go into a Pentecostal service. Again, I'm not Christian, but there was a pastor just screaming and yelling, and the audience was just going wild – speaking in tongues, falling on the floor, dancing, foaming at the mouth. I think if a play can have even a fraction of the effect on the audience as a Pentecostal service, then I think it's worth it. There's this amazing thing when you see a really good play, and

you know that it's good just because of the action – it's bodily and unintellectual, and I love when I see a play and it's like that.

Cherwell: *A lot of the articles on Daddy Longlegs and Moth have pointed out that both are your first forays into playwriting. How do you hone that skill in play-writing?*

Alec: When I was a kid, I was a really good liar. I lied all the time to my friends. I would tell them that I had this amazing life where my dad was a gun-slinging cowboy who travelled around the world robbing banks. The lies would get more and more complex, and you'd have to expand your narrative out, so that when a friend came over to your house and saw that your dad was a normal guy, you'd have to be like "Oh, that's because my actual dad has hired a stand-in while he's on the run from the police who are searching for him".

I think that meant that actually starting playwriting felt quite natural. My parents definitely sat me down and the whole pathological liar thing was drawn out of me, but there's still that tendency in a play where it feels like a complexifying web of lies that you have to detail more and more and more.

A lot of the pacing comes from just seeing how the actors interacted with the work. But in terms of trying to get it right when it's on the page, I attribute it to people like Lou Reed. His music is this monologue, but it has this rhythm to it. I think my pacing probably comes from wanting to recreate those musical influences that I have.

Cherwell: *Theology, or religion, seems to have a big through-line in your life. Do you think there's something in particular that draws you to those ideas?*

Alec: I always think about this, and I feel like it's a lot of coincidences. Like I always go to Quaker meetings, because I love Quaker meetings, and they have the best tea and biscuits at the end of it. And there's also something just really dramatic about a Quaker meeting, that it's 95% silence, but then in one moment someone can say something which has such weight, that it has all the emotional intensity of a two-hour play. I think there's just an inherent drama to it. I don't like the words 'religious experience', but in a really good play, you can have an experience which is somewhat similar to that. And maybe I'm a little bit jealous that I'm maybe too atheistic in my views – maybe that's what draws me.

*Read the full article at cherwell.org
Image Credit: Alec Tiffou*

time? It was a whole host of small [mistakes] rather than one big decision where we chose that we weren't going to do something. That never happened – no one ever thought 'we're aware of this, but we're just not going to respond to it'. We just weren't forceful enough consistently enough."

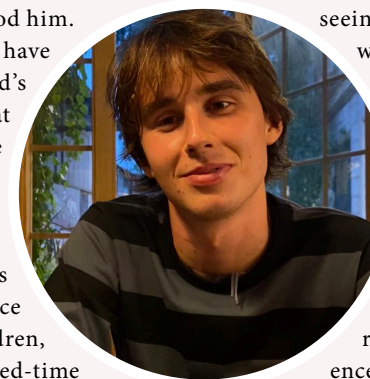
Much of Mark's career has centred around Oxford and even now, as he retires as director of Asylum Welcome, he plans to work in a part-time role for South Oxfordshire Housing Association.

"I think that there is something that's very special about [Oxford], you know. The name Oxfam comes from Oxford famine relief,

and it's quite interesting because there were a number of other local organisations set up at the same time as Oxfam [which] didn't survive. So, Oxfam became the national organisation. I think in Oxford you have a liberal society, a comparatively wealthy society, and you have lots of forward-looking people. So, it doesn't always feel like that on a day to day, but overall, it's a positive place to be in at all levels, you can work in practical ways."

Oxford University Development has declined to comment.

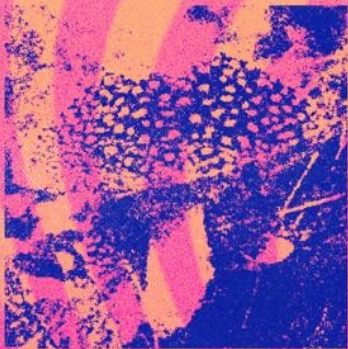
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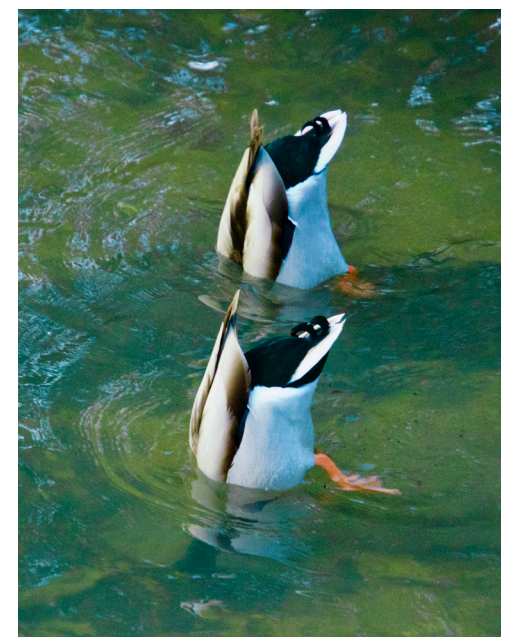
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Oxford through the lens

By Cherwell Photography: David Hays, Kenneth Wong, Subin Saji



Exploring *Into the Woods*

STAGE

Elliott Armstrong-Reed speaks to the team behind a new production of *Into the Woods*, coming to Oxford

29 January until 1 February

Last week, I sat down with Luke Nixon, Lydia Free, and Isobel Connolly, the directorial force of a new 'vivid and visionary' production of Sondheim's timeless classic *Into the Woods* being held at the Oxford Playhouse from 29th January to 1st February. Together we unravelled what it takes to build the woods from scratch and guide a cast through the shadowy forest floor, how we can explore the humanity of some of our most beloved fairy tale characters, and how to simply embrace the chaos of Sondheim's ridiculously complex score. Luke, Lydia, and Isobel share their inspirations, challenges, and a few behind-the-scenes secrets that make their rendition of this musical masterpiece one-of-a-kind.

*Why did you decide to stage *Into the Woods* in the first place?*

Luke: It's felt like forever since me and Lyds [Lydia] first spoke about taking *Into the Woods* to the Playhouse in our final year.

Lydia: We started to talk about it around two years ago and the seed of our friendship was that we both loved this musical so much. We decided to take the plunge and get staging it when we were on our years abroad, at which point Izzy joined the project. Since then, the three of us (all Aries... crazy) have been whittling away for almost a year trying to bring it to life! In all honesty, I just wanted to put mine and Luke's friendship to the test. Co-staging a mega Sondheim musical in a 600-seat theatre when I have never been involved in a musical and Luke has never directed.

Luke: The musical just gives us it all, really. A phenomenal score, some beautiful ballads, some amazing opportunities for an ensemble to shine as well as a tight network of intricate relationships that are a pleasure to watch. It's also hilarious.

How do you balance the familiar fairy-tales in the play with fresh creative interpretations?

Lydia: We have set the play in a very bare-bones way to draw maximum attention to the theatre 'space'. We are laying out the fictionality of the fairy tales as much as possible in that way. With a really strong, fantastical backbone, we want the nuanced, clashing parts of humanity and morality that the musical explores to shine out against it.

Luke: We're using what we know of these fairy tales – their characters, their stories, their relationships – and exploring why we love them so much, why are they



still so relatable nowadays? It's because they're wholly truthful; amongst the farce and the ridiculousness are characters genuinely experiencing the madness, and this has been so enjoyable to play with. The company is formed of 16 characters who are fully-fledged, fully-feeling people, and this is something that we have taken real pride in moulding.

If you could bring any real piece of magic into the production, what would it be?

Isobel: This cast, band, and crew are already pretty magical, but I'd go for characters being able to fly. Would probably add some extra pizzazz.

Lydia: I would choose for Eleanor Bogie [The

Witch] to actually be able to perform sorcery, so that when she waves her hands, gusts of wind and flying disco balls and floating audience members actually occur. The magic she already possesses is in the way she will make you sob in 'Stay With Me'.

Luke: Shape shifting. So we can nail those speedy quick changes without having to faff with clasps and laces and buttons. Sorry Grace [Costume Designer], love you.

*Why should people come and see your production of *Into the Woods*?*

Lydia: So many people have poured so much passion and time into this show and you can really

feel that when it's being performed. The amount of effort and care from cast to designers to flies operators to marketers – it's a joy to feel that thrumming, and the audience very much will when watching.

Luke: It is a truly fantastic production that hopes to be a super enjoyable night at the theatre in the dark depths of Hilary. It's a heart-warming comedy about love, loss, and the murky grounds of morality, and has been a pleasure to stage. Sondheim's score is gorgeous.

Peach Productions' *Into the Woods* will be performed from 29th January – 1st February 2025 at the Oxford Playhouse.

Image credit: Peach Productions Oxford

Review: *Endgame* – “The play seems to have been written for a space like the Pilch”



By THEO WOOD

Devilish Whimsy's production of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* at the Michael Pilch Studio succeeds in balancing deep tragedy with a very natural, spontaneous style of comedy

As last year's November nights grew longer and colder, Oxford's theatrical offerings seemed to follow suit, bringing us an outstanding piece of tragic drama: Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (6th-9th November, Michael Pilch).

The play has an aesthetic preoccupation with culminations and ending points, which is undoubtedly intensified by the audience's own fixations on an ever-approaching end of term and the year. The play also possesses an ambiguous relationship with genre, presenting tragedy with flickering moments of comedy.

Endgame seems almost to have been written for a space like the Michael Pilch Studio, a claustrophobic black box theatre which confines the audience

within the boundaries of Beckett's dramatic world. Two small windows on the back wall offer a glimpse into an apocalyptic outside world, necessarily inaccessible to the characters and the audience, as repeated by Hamm: "Outside of here it's death."

Nate Wintraub's outstanding portrayal of Hamm presents an overriding sense of deterioration, as we witness his repeatedly vain attempts to recite his "chronicle" to any willing audience. In a way, Hamm's attempts represent the flickering strains of narrative in Beckett's play, which deteriorate and unravel into absurdity. Clov, brilliantly played by Lyndsey Mugford, serves as Hamm's assistant and forms a symbolic antithesis with him: Hamm is permanently seating, Clov permanently

standing. Whilst Beckett grants Clov the most agency in the play as the only freely-moving character, Hamm holds power over him through verbal orders. Perhaps the most unmistakably tragic symbol in *Endgame* is the constant presence of Nagg (Lam Guan Xiong) and Nell (Rowan Brown) in two newspaper-covered dustbins at the back of the stage.

The deeply tragic content of *Endgame* is subtly undercut by Beckett's absurd writing. During Nagg's furious ranting, Hamm's cursing against the world, and Clov's muffled protests, audience members broke into involuntary laughter.

Here, then, is the conclusion I reached: The audience's laughter serves as form of agency and has a distancing effect from the centre of the tragedy.

FILM AND TV

Editors' Picks

IN THEATRES



NOSFERATU

This remake of the 1922 "Symphony of Horror" is sharp, murky, and thick with atmosphere, and has already acquired a cult following.

TO STREAM



FROM ROGER MOORE WITH LOVE

Co-stars and family reflect on the legacy of Bond actor Sir Roger Moore in a warm BBC documentary

Image Credits:

[Nosferatu] – FICG.mx/CC BY 2.0 via Flickr

[From Roger Moore with Love] – Allan warren/ CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

By DAN PALING, LARA MACHADO, HASSAN AKRAM

CHERWELL'S BEST FILMS OF 2024

Cherwell's Film and Culture editors came together to review their favourite releases of 2024. Ranging from animation to drama, these are the Editors' Picks for the must-see pictures of the past year.

Dan Paling: *Robot Dreams*

Pablo Berger's heartfelt animation, *Robot Dreams*, based on Sarah Varon's 2007 graphic novel, reached UK screens in March 2024. The protagonist, a lonely dog-stroke-human (he walks upright and watches cable television) orders a life-size robot online. The machine companion – conveniently named 'Robot' – arrives at Dog's door. Dog assembles him; AI-canine friendship blossoms.

Gallivanting around '80s Manhattan, the unlikely pair are captured charmingly by Berger's warm colours and soft curves. The animation is melancholic, yet endearing. There's something of vintage Hanna-Barbera.

Robot Dreams is the kind of universal cinema that enchants all ages. Dog represents none of us (he's a dog!). But he's also everyone: Longing for connection, joyful in friendship. These tropes are never diminished as childish, nor rendered 'too adult' for youngsters to understand. This is a platonic love story of the most serious character.

Disaster strikes when Dog organises a trip to the seaside and Robot is incapacitated by rust after a swim (he's made of metal, of course). The two lose sight of each other, the beach closes for the season and our protagonists embark on separate lives, flooded by mourning. The film

changes gear. Now it's about isolation, powerlessness, moving on.

Robot Dreams shows that animation can take on the biggest themes. Therein lies its brilliance. It's that rare combination of humble and grandiose. All that, and its unforgettable title track (Earth, Wind & Fire's classic anthem 'September'), make it difficult to remain unmoved by Berger's portrait of love and loss.

Lara Machado: *Grand Tour*

In September 2024, Portuguese auteur Miguel Gomes returned to the big screen with his seventh feature film *Grand Tour*. As a long-term fan of his work, I may be biased but can assure you that it did not disappoint.

The film follows Edward, a British Diplomat working in 1917 Burma, now Myanmar. Overcome by fear when faced with the prospect of being reunited with his long-term, long-distance fiancée Molly, Edward decides to run away from her. Molly, however, is determined to marry Edward and it soon turns into a chase across the Asian continent.

Genre-bending as usual, Gomes mixes modern day documentary footage – captured by three different directors of photography – with the film's narrative, drawing attention to the artificial nature of what we are watching, all while reminding us of the magic that is cinema. To add to the irreality of it all, modern day items and pieces of the set are sometimes introduced into Edward and Molly's story and, despite the characters being British, all the actors are Portuguese and speak in their native language. None of the

dialogue in the many languages belonging to the countries included in the tour is translated. The characters don't understand so neither do we. Gomes once said that all his films were bizarre, Portuguese remakes of *The Wizard of Oz*. So, if you are looking for something to make you believe in the magic of cinema again, I cannot recommend *Grand Tour* more.

Hassan Akram: *The Warren Case*

I find myself in the awkward position of having signed up to write about my favourite film of 2024, without, as it happens, having a favourite film of 2024. This sticky situation arose because the cinema has suffered a precipitous decline, and – unlike in the 1930s, 40s, 50s, 60s, and even 70s – there was nothing in there in 2024 which even tempted my eye (though that's probably a me problem.)

A very obscure 1934 film which I (re)-watched over the Christmas vac, *The Warren Case* is one of the 'quota quickies' churned out after the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act compelled the British film industry to increase its film production. It is a psychological thriller about a manic journalist struggling for copy, who, spurned by the boss's daughter, arranges to frame her boyfriend for the murder of his own girlfriend, and thus exact his revenge while also getting a story out of it. Disturbing? There is no real violence but the plot is pacy and there are some absorbing glimpses into the newsrooms, night-clubs, and bachelor-flats of 1930s London.

Have movie musicals lost their magic?

By CIARA BEALE

Whatever your opinion on *Wicked*, it undeniably defined the tail-end of 2024.

As a fan of the original stage musical, the film made me wonder if something is inevitably lost when we attempt to recreate the magic of live musical theatre on screen. Subverting the conventions of stage musicals in screen adaptations is a comparatively recent phenomenon.

Thinking back to Old Hollywood movie musicals, they tend to be more simplistic, recreating the principles of stage musicals rather than moving away from them. Jon M. Chu's *Wicked* was visually exciting, but was it trying to do too much at once?

Stage musicals are all about illusion; moving furniture in the shadows between scenes and coming up with creative solutions to problems that only occur when directors can't simply yell 'Cut!'.

Examining the recent history of musicals adapted from stage to screen, productions haven't always been as solid as *Wicked*. *Dear Evan Hansen* (2021), for example, has been a favourite musical of mine for some time. Although the film was enjoyable, the now-nearing-30 Ben Platt was probably more convincing as a troubled teen when he first appeared as Evan on Broadway.

An audience's distance from the stage masks things that are harder to miss on the big screen.

Another infamous example of a movie musical that, in attempting to avoid audience scrutiny, did the exact opposite, was *Cats* (2019). Poor Dame Judi. Maybe it's for the best that stage musicals are forced to use animal costumes, rather than trying to make things look 'real'. CGI can only do so much, but movie musicals seem to increasingly rely on it.

Don't get me wrong, musicals on stage can also look ridiculous – Billy Elliot prancing around stage singing in a slightly affected northern accent springs to mind – but, arguably, this is part of their charm.

Certain reviewers of *Wicked* were relentlessly critical of the switches between Erivo's singing and speaking voice. Others found the fixation on perfect CGI overwhelmed the bare bones of the story, which musical fans know and love. The 'Defying Gravity' scene took my breath away, but was a far cry from the intimacy and raw emotion that the musical commanded when I first saw it on stage. Grande and Erivo, perhaps in homage to their musical theatre origins, insisted on singing live during filming (including during the wild broomstick stunts during the film's closing number). The difference is that we demand perfection from what we consume on-screen, while in live theatre we forgive a little messiness, and find the experience all the better for it.

However, this is a problem that Old Hollywood musicals seem (mostly) exempt from. As a general rule, they don't compete with the stage in the same way. It's not a case of the

screen fixing the problems or difficulties of a live stage, but a mixing of both mediums which creates something better than the sum of its parts. I know that I am not the only person who re-watches *The Sound of Music* (1965) every Christmas. This season it was playing on BBC One, and despite having seen it dozens of times before, it is still just as endearing. Though the infamously living hills of *The Sound of Music* look decidedly fake, and the synchronisation of voice and mouth wasn't quite up to scratch by 1965, it is always a wonderful watch.

Other films like *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), with its meta film sets, and *Mary Poppins* (1964), inexplicably featuring animated penguins, have the same captivating quality because they refuse to be seamless. Maybe future film musicals can learn a thing or two by looking back instead of lurching forward. They should embrace the magical imperfection that characterises the musical.

Image credit: *Our Movie Guide* / CC BY 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons



From the Chrysler to the Weston: 100 years of Art Deco

Florence Wolter explores the impact left by Art Deco on Oxford and European culture. A century on, should we be looking forward, not back?

ART

Picture the scene: The 1920s, jazz and sequins are stealing onto the dance floor. On the gallery wall, new techno-infused modernist forms are weaving their way into post-war aesthetics. In France, Paris breathes a sigh of relief in the aftermath of German occupation. In this atmosphere of Parisian liberty, Gertrude Stein penned: “it is not what Paris gives you, it is what she does not take away.” Yet behind this, anxieties were bubbling about what France had to give modern global culture. “Even the Americans themselves reacted, and sought to create for themselves – for better or worse – an original art” wrote Minister of Commerce Lucien Dior: “During this what did we do...? Nothing, except copy our own old-fashioned styles.” Out of this insecurity, not without an air of competition, the 1925 International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts was unveiled in Paris. This was the birth of Art Deco, a gift that would redesign the world.

The exposition’s fundamental stipulation was that everything be exclusively modern. It was expected, though, that this modernity should embrace the extravagant optimism of the period. Beyond the thirteen opulently designed entrances, the exposition was organised by pavilions, each competitively garnished to display the artistic creations of different French products, regions, and territories, as well as each of the international pavilions. These were accompanied by merry go rounds, fireworks, 300 ballerinas, and – to illuminate the Eiffel Tower – two hundred thousand light bulbs in six colours. So when Le Corbusier revealed his Pavillon de



l’Esprit Nouveau (ascetic, grey, and furnished only by mass-produced furniture and his designs for Plan Voisin), organisers of the exposition, horrified, attempted to conceal the shameful offering behind fences.

Both a development of and opposition to the Art Nouveau style, Art Deco is distinct for its incorporation of cubist elements which instill an angular, geometric quality. Art Deco is found in the visual arts, architecture, and commercial product design from furniture to fashion – Parker pens and streamlined locomotives. Its influence looming large in cities across the globe: Construction for the Chrysler Building, an iconic feature of New York’s skyline, began in 1929. Three years later, Christ the Redeem-

er was completed in Brazil, and has gazed down at Rio de Janeiro ever since. When thinking of Art Deco, Oxford is far from the first city that springs to mind. However, at the heart of the University, the Weston Library offers a local example of Art Deco architecture, designed in 1934 by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott—and that’s without mentioning the books within Oxford’s libraries. Iconic covers including the *Celestial Eyes* dust jacket of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* or (love it or loathe it) the cover art of multiple editions of Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* exemplify Art Deco from Oxford’s bookshelves.

Return to war in 1939 would bring a sharp end to the lavish tastes and garish embellishments of Art Deco, but even before this, modernism was creeping

in. Despite Art Deco interior designer Paul Follet’s claims that “the superfluous is always needed”, architectural decadence could not be justified in the face of the Great Depression of the 1930s and material wartime need of the following decade. Against this backdrop, Le Corbusier’s modernist counterclaim that the house was merely “a machine to live in” aligned more concretely with the modern world, while Art Deco’s geometric extravagances left the style more fragmented from reality than ever. “Decorative art,” Le Corbusier wrote, “as opposed to the machine phenomenon, is the final twitch of the old manual mode, and is a dying thing.”

This year, 100 years after the revolutionary advent of Art Deco, Paris’ Musée des Arts Décoratifs will launch an exhibition reflecting on the 1925 International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts. One cannot help but wonder whether such a return to the past is the best way to mark the spirit of modernity that precipitated the Art Deco style. Will 2025 begin an era of retrospection, and not growth? In answer to this, it is important to consider the cycle of progress, and how vital the past is in the influence of the future. As Frantz Jourdain, member of the Society of Decorative Artists, said of his 1925 inspiration: “We consequently resolved to return Decorative Art, inconsiderately treated as a Cinderella or poor relation allowed to eat with the servants, to the important... place it occupied in the past.” This month, the first of 2025, marks both a centenary of the past and the beginning of a new year; perhaps modernity allows for both.

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ARTS CALENDAR

What’s On.

MUSIC

Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra: Verdi Requiem with Crouch End Festival Chorus

(Sheldonian Theatre, 25 January)

“World-class soloists and the massed voices of the Crouch End Festival Chorus gather at the Sheldonian Theatre for this performance of Verdi’s soul-stirring work of awe and redemption, often referred to as ‘an opera in disguise’, with the full force of the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra and its Music Director, Marios Papadopoulos.”

ART

Anslem Kieffer: Early Works
(Ashmolean Museum, 14 February - 15 June)

This landmark survey will publicly display 45 works by Anslem Kieffer, produced between 1969 and 1981, including paintings, photos, prints, artist books, and mixed-media work.

STAGE

Into the Woods
(Oxford Playhouse, 30 January - 1 February)

This new production of Stephen Sondheim’s *Into the Woods* from Peach Productions is features some of the biggest names in Oxford’s drama scene. A must-watch.

The Children
(Oxford Playhouse, 4-8 February)

This tenderly emotional play is set against a nuclear accident which irradiates its characters’ lives and forces them to consider their relationship with, and responsibility towards, the world.



Review: Jonathan Coe’s *The Proof of My Innocence*

By HASSAN AKRAM

There are some writers whose line of literary descent is so clear as to resemble a kind of genealogical chart. The lineage of the English comic novel, for instance, runs smoothly from Fielding to Dickens, Dickens to Wodehouse, Wodehouse to Waugh, Waugh to Amis, and from Amis through to Coe, whose *The Proof of My Innocence* is one of the funniest novels published in Britain in recent years. It is a fusion of murder mystery, dark academia, and autofiction, whose assortment of genres and narrators only adds to the energy of the burlesque. It charts the development of a pro-NHS-privatisation think tank from its roots in Cambridge in the 1980s to its short-lived triumph with the rise of Liz Truss in 2022.

The plot, though deft and excellent, is difficult to summarise, and plays second fiddle to a more striking unity of theme: Nostalgia; or, more specifically, *anemoia*, defined by Coe as “nostalgia for a time before you were born”. The three best segments of the novel, the introductory chapters and the later ones set at TrueCon and at Cambridge, are the ones in which the nostalgia theme is most fleshed out.

Henry James once wrote of Anthony Trollope that “his great, his inestimable merit was a complete appreciation of the usual”, and in a sense the same is true of Coe. His opening chapters tracking the daily life of Phyl, a Newcastle University dropout who lives with her parents, are a case in point. Lounging at home, walking to the high street, riding the bus to work, bickering with strangers in lifts, and chopping sushi for customers – it is difficult to write well about these things without importing their monotony, but Coe manages it. Phyl remains a likeable character even though she never quite exceeds the sum of her parts. She is a very real type, the ennui-riven, naive zoomer disillusioned at her lack of socioeconomic prospects. Her main pleasure in life is to escape into the past, into the 1990s, by watching *Friends*, although perhaps the symbolism of *Friends* is laboured a bit too heavily.

The next segment of the story picks up at the 2022 TrueCon conference. Here is the dark side of nostalgia: represented in its crude form by the murder of a blogger at TrueCon; represented more subtly by the implication that the Conservative MPs, *Telegraph* columnists, and free-marketeers gathered at the conference are the very people who, in their quest for a nineteenth-century free-market Utopia, have created the decaying, prospectless Britain inhabited by Phyl. The never-changing slogans of these people are recorded with a deadly accurate pen: There is one farcical scene, too long to reproduce here, in which everything from the Church of England to the consumption of vegetables is denounced as “woke”. These passages are depressing precisely because, allowing for the exaggerations of satire, they could have appeared in earnest in yesterday’s *Telegraph*.

The very best part of *The Proof of My Innocence* is the flashback section set in Cambridge in the 1980s and narrated by Brian Collier. Brian is Coe’s most endearing character, a sort of updated Arthur Kipps:

He struggles to reconcile his council-estate roots with his rise to a new social sphere at university. His social awkwardness, his love life, his disgust for the pretension and vulgarity of the Cambridge Union, are all rendered more sincerely and believably than anything else in the book. Here, then, is the third form of nostalgia: if the first is escape and the second is delusion, the third is memory.

It is, however, when he is making jokes that Coe is at his best. Even the simplest of his passages are funny. Consider this one: “And so, for the second time during this unfortunate week, the proceedings of the TrueCon conference were interrupted. An absorbing discussion entitled ‘Why Free Markets and Nationhood Go Hand in Hand’ had to be curtailed.” It is these kinds of wry observations which make him better worth reading than almost any English novelist currently active.

Read the full review online at cherwell.org

FASHION

VINTAGE STYLE, MODERN LIFE

By MARTHA GATHERCOLE

With a punchy short bob and a swooping wide sleeved jumper, Anna arrived at the trendy French cafe in Tallinn which she had chosen for our interview. Anna is from Ukraine and since the war has moved to Tallinn, where I met her on my year abroad. There, she carries on working for the Ukrainian luxury fashion brand Anna October (named after the founder, a different Anna). This is a brand with a classic yet unique style, most famously embodied in its collection of impeccably cut, sensual satin dresses.

How would you characterise the style of Anna October?

Anna: Anna October is vintage style adapted to modern life. Our garments are summery, elegant and simple. It's very *Great Gatsby* inspired and luxurious, but also very wearable.

Yes, I noticed that when I checked out the website, I felt like, unlike most luxury brands, I really wanted to wear all the clothes!

Anna: Yes, it's supposed to be ready-to-wear. I remember I went to a fashion show of an Estonian designer once, and the pieces were sort of scary, like Halloween costumes! Anna October is much more minimalist. We also don't do fashion shows. They're very expensive and are more about prestige than anything else. Instead, we have showrooms where people can come and look at our designs.

What does the process of designing a collection consist of?

Choose clothes like you'd choose a man: Carefully

Anna: Well, the designers often go away and rest to have a think about the next collection, which has to consist of 60 pieces. They then turn the designs into wearable garments, so that they look good on a person. After the design stage, 'constructors' (I wasn't sure how to translate this from Russian) come in to do try-ons with models, and then go away and make changes to cut, measurements or fabric. This is then done many times on models of different sizes to get the clothes absolutely right.

Can you tell me about the fabrics used in the clothes?

Anna: The majority of the fabrics used are dead-stock, and many of the jumpers are hand-knitted with alpaca wool.

What are some ways you recommend the readers of Cherwell shop for quality garments second-hand?

Anna: Lots of luxury brands have sample sales in London, where they sell samples of garments for reduced prices, as well as past collections archives. I also use Vestiaire Collective, an app selling second-hand clothing from luxury brands; there are some Anna October pieces on there!

Thanks Anna, I've enjoyed your take on fashion and choosing clothing well.

Anna: Yes, we should choose clothes carefully, just like choosing a man!

What Oxford can learn from Icelandic music

By SARAH BEARD

Most Oxford students associate Iceland with plane-grounding volcanic eruptions and sweeping landscapes. It is, however, equally home to a surprising number of recognisable artists for just a small island of not even 400,000 inhabitants. Björk, Sigur Rós, Of Monsters and Men and KALEO are just a handful of the biggest names hailing from the land of fire and ice. But why is this small Nordic island such a hotspot for musical innovation?

Storytelling, as evidenced by the prolific Viking sagas, has always been an important aspect of Icelandic culture, with tales of adventure having been transmitted orally from generation to generation. Alongside this prose tradition, epic verse poems known as rimur, which date back to the 14th century, similarly reflected the awe and danger of the environment, mythological legends featuring trolls and elves as well as more human stories of love and loss, usually in an a cappella singing style known as að kveða. As the culture of the Icelanders developed from the first Viking settlers, it was largely unspoiled by external influences, allowing it to flourish organically in all its eccentricity and uniqueness.

There is an emphasis on naturalness that appears to characterise Icelandic music, as if it is something directly inspired by the beauty of the Earth. In turn, Icelanders, perhaps more subject to the elements than people of less geographically shifting lands, are seen as more unpredictable, less restrained by artificial stability and therefore tending towards artistic expression. Whether or not this romanticised image is justified is debatable, but as a result, the creativity of all Icelandic musicians is inextricably linked with their nationality as Sigurðardóttir writes here. It is very difficult to identify a common thread between

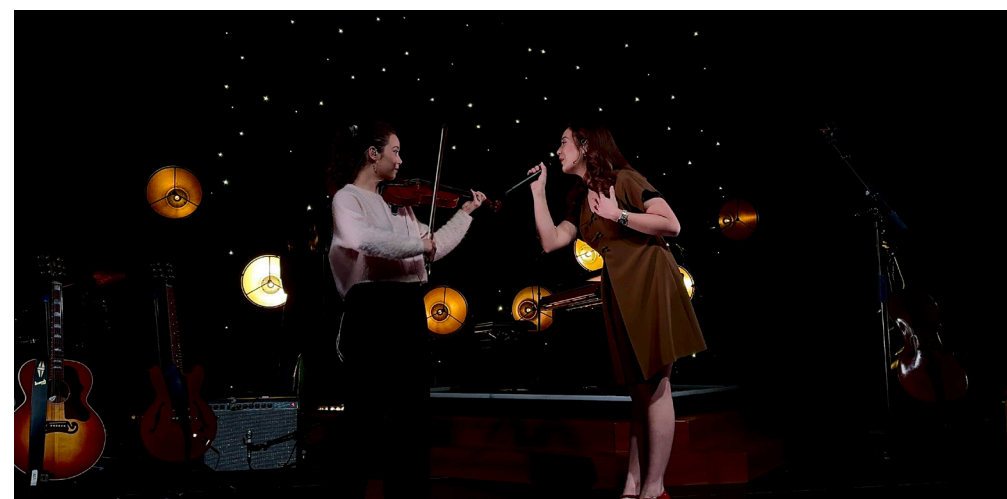
the warm jazz tones of Laufey and the electronic stylings of GusGus. In fact there has been extraordinary genre diversity and success over such a wide variety of styles.

During my own travels in Iceland, I found that most people I met always had a creative passion that, even if it didn't pay the bills, formed a key aspect of their identity. For some reason, it didn't feel uncommon to encounter a fisherman who played bass in an experimental punk band at the weekends. Moreover, being a professional musician doesn't appear to carry the same stigma it can elsewhere – including, for some, Oxford! The 'don't quit your day job' mentality isn't as prevalent, and artists aren't seen as 'wasting their time' but rather actively encouraged to thrive in creative environments. Music schools are ubiquitous and supported financially by the city, instilling a value on musicality from an early age. Influential festivals such as Iceland Airwaves spotlight new talent annually, often the stage of both local and international hidden gems.

Reykjavík is a capital filled with young creatives that traditionally has many live music venues from intimate stages like Húrra and Gaukurinn to Harpa Concert Hall – an architectural marvel of glass shaped like basalt columns found in Iceland's landscape. Yet, as one *Guardian* article has recently illuminated, some of these iconic venues have started to be "swallowed by tourism". 2024 also saw the end of LungA due to lack of funding, an art festival held in the tiny village of Seydisfjörður in the Eastern fjords that gave a stage to a wide range of the most popular to the most avant-garde artists. The country's unique creative hotpot, historically fostered by geographical isolation and lack of external input, could now be in a Björkian "state of emergency" due to an overwhelming influx of international influence.

Image credit: Tomzorz/ CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

MUSIC



The Source

By ISOBEL ESTIBEIRO

Mitosis

A letter
A single cell

Stuttering,
Reoccurring,
Scrap on
The page

Fragmented
Born from pain

A zygote
Dividing...
Turning inwards...

Malformed;
Abortorted;
Misbirthed;

I would choose-

An embryo that will not close,
The incomplete attempt,
Unfertilized emotion
Half dead thing

I would choose-

A single breathing word-
Stuck in the back of your throat

Struggling itself to life
Something from nothing

I would choose
above

The metallic baby
Slides clean and bloodless
Out of an artificial womb

Its cries are only the recordings of
cries

Trimmed of all the anomalies of
humanity

Its first words are only pretty
repetitions.

The perfected utterance of a dead
universe.

The sedation of skin that never
bleeds

The ease of the baby that never cries.
What does it know of poetry?

What does it know of life?

(Not quite) Halfway Hall

Victoria Mckinley-Smith discusses the experience of Halfway Hall as someone leaving Oxford for a year abroad.

Halfway Hall is bittersweet to say the least. It marks a milestone of achievement – a year and a half of essay crises managed, unfinished reading lists Wikipedia-ed, and solo tutorials blagged. We’ve made it this far – after this point the road ahead is shorter than the one we’ve already travelled. But for those of us on four-year degrees, particularly those with a year abroad, that’s not entirely the case. Halfway Hall is a reminder that our time with those graduating next year is limited, and our year group will look very different upon returning in a year and a half’s time.

Now, before I send you spiralling into a full-blown existential crisis, there are some positives. For example, all I have to do to convince my friends on three-year-degrees to do anything is to put on my saddest face and remind them that “some of us won’t be here next year.” I can safely say it worked the first ten times, but since then they’ve just started counting down the days until they’re free of my melodramatic pleading. My backup advice? Start regularly sending them articles warning that they won’t get a job without a Master’s degree. And if all else fails, there’s always rustication.

But after exposing the perpetrators of ‘Worst Chat,’ then hearing them prove the point by boasting about it for the next six months, you’re left with the nagging feeling that everything is about to change. Whilst I enjoy gloating that my Finals are not next year, it’s sad to think that my academic timeline won’t be the same as my friends graduating in 2026. They will emerge from Exam Schools in June next year, and I’ll be there to spray them in prosecco, party poppers and pink chalk. But from that moment of celebration, our paths will stray.

After a year of drinking wine and eating cheese in Paris, as any good French student does, I’ll return to a sea of faces which I no longer recognise. Somehow, I

will have to survive without the friendly grins and familiar laughs of some of the people who have been my support system over the last two years. Halfway Hall is a timely reminder that this is the last time we will fully be together. Like many, I am lucky to have incredible friendships which will last much longer than my degree, but this only makes the halfway point all the more bittersweet.

As we approach this turning point, it’s impossible to ignore how much we’ve grown, both individually and through the relationships we have developed. Second year can feel like the time we really come into our own. Gone are the days of “what’s your college?,” and our essays are (for the most part) much improved. Friends become like family, and it becomes impossible to imagine a life without them. It’s therefore no wonder that the thought of being half-way done with our degree can spark fear as well as excitement. The fact is, life is full of uncertainty. Leaving university will bring just as many trials and tribulations as coming to Oxford did. But in the midst of this uncertainty, there’s something comforting about how far we’ve come. So, here’s to Halfway Hall – both a celebration of what we’ve achieved and the anticipation of the unknown that still lies ahead.

Image Credit: A street in a city, SP Chaurasiya, via Pexels, CCO



New Year’s Resolutions: In or Out?

Emma Jeffries discusses whether January should be this stressful

As another year rolls around, I am (still) not doing enough exercise. And so, yet again, I will resolve to exercise more. But why am I not able to complete this New Year’s Resolution? Is it because there is something wrong with the concept of changing your life around the arbitrary date of 1st January? Or is it simply that my resolve just isn’t quite strong enough?

This year, I have decided that New Year’s Resolutions are out. Why am I not currently doing enough exercise? Because it is winter. It’s freezing cold, and dark outside at 4.00pm. If January 1st was to fall in the summer, it might be a different story. In the summer, I (shockingly) do more exercise, the weather is better and I have far more time. So, I won’t consider it a failure when I don’t go running at 7.00am, three times a week. At the end of the day, it doesn’t matter if I exercise for most of the year and take a hiatus during the coldest months. This doesn’t mean I’m doing away with my New Year’s Resolution completely, only allowing myself at chance of sustainable success.

I should say that that I’m not just blaming the weather for my rather shaky commitment to doing more exercise. Last year, I decided to read more books than I

did in 2022, and successfully completed this, according to my 2024 Goodreads challenge. I have also previously given up chocolate for Lent, and not caved in. So I don’t think it’s about me – I really do think that the arbitrary date of January 1st is what’s stopping me.

Structuring self-improvement around arbitrary dates rarely works. What if you want to improve your life in June? It is important to remember that, as students, our lives are structured not around the calendar year, but the academic one. It’s much easier to make good habits in our own calendars – calendars that begin in October, not January. Why not resolve to spend more time in the library in third year, instead of in the New Year? Or commit to changing your exercise habits in the summer, when you have more time.

So New Year’s Resolutions, at least when considered in a strict way, are out. This year, I certainly want to improve myself. But my graduation this summer is a much bigger turning point than January 1st, and I’m sure I’ll see far more changes this summer and next autumn than I can force upon myself right now

Image Credit: Winter Wonderland Scenic River View, Raul Koženevski, via Pexels, CCO

A Love Letter to Pasta

By Olivia Allen

From classic spaghetti to extravagant farfalle, humble penne to spiralling fusilli, Italy’s go-to carbohydrate has long held hearts worldwide. Diverse in type and inoffensive in flavour, pasta can be thought of as a blank canvas: The perfect backdrop for all of your dinnertime desires.

Picture the scene: you’re two years old, fresh out the bath and plopped in your high chair throne. Mum’s in the kitchen; she’s got your bowl in her hand, that blue one with the puppies on it that’s your favourite. Just then, a kiss is planted on

your forehead and the blue bowl is placed in front of you, filled to the brim with your favourite – mac and cheese. Today is going to be a good day.

Ten years later, it’s the evening before the biggest day of your life – Year 8 sports day. The nerves are making you twitch at the table, the dog is barking, and all you can think about is the start line of that 100m race. You shout into the kitchen, asking what’s for dinner. “Spaghetti,” you are told, “got to carbo-load for the big day”.

You won that race the next day, crossing the finish line first right ahead of your biggest rival. Five years later, they’re sitting across the table from you at the

local Italian. It took all the courage you had to ask them out. Your first date. You don’t know what to say, or where to look. Then, the waiter brings you the menu, and you spot the word linguine. “Italian is my favourite,” they say. “I love linguine.” You smile back, it’s all going to be okay.

Next thing you know, you’re in the cold, damp kitchen of your uni house. The tap is leaking, the neighbours’ cat is screaming, and you don’t even want to know what the noise coming from your mate’s bedroom is. You’ve had enough. You open the cupboard and grab the fusilli. Five minutes later, it’s still slightly crunchy, mixed with some pesto, and still the best thing you’ve ever tasted. Pesto

pasta to the rescue.

Now you realise that the drip is not so bad, the cat is probably cute, and your housemate is just having some fun.

Many pesto pasta-saved nights later, you’re on a terrace by the beach. Once again, your ex-sports day rival sits across from you; you reckon you could still beat them in a race. But time has moved on. If it made them happy, you would probably let them win. The pasta dish sits empty in front of you, a seafood pappardelle. Heart and belly full, you are content. Then, across the table from you, they slide back their chair, reach in their pocket, and get down on one knee.

Read the full article at Cherwell.org

HOROSCOPES



Aries

Don’t let your partner stop you from meeting the love of your life.



Taurus

Party’s over – lock in.



Gemini

Your next tutorial could change your life. Be prepared.



Cancer

It really was that damn phone... try a day without it.



Leo

Vitamin D will be crucial this term. Fix your sleep schedule.



Virgo

The Glink is your oyster – seize its sterile corridors!

HOROSCOPES



Libra

They're right. You're crazy. Gaslighting isn't real.



Scorpio

This will be your best or worst year ever. Proceed with caution.



Sagittarius

New year, same you – and that's okay. Embrace your true self.



Capricorn

Happy birthday! Now get back to work.



Aquarius

Them? Really???



Pisces

Exams are sooner than you think. Plan before it's too late.

My Parents, Oxford, and Me

By Angharad Thorp

My parents studied at Oxford, which meant I knew Oxford before I knew myself. The university found a way to fill each nook and cranny of my life before it even felt like my own. A hand-drawn map of Jesus College was hung in our downstairs bathroom; my eyes were level with the front quad any time I washed my hands. My interest in philosophy was fueled by my dad's old tutorial essays and reading lists, sparking debates about Kant which quickly dominated our after-school chats. He seemed unphased that I was thirteen; he was glad someone listened to his thoughts on obscure ethics with the same eagerness with which he spoke.

Crucially, this bright, richly academic childhood kept Oxford close to me. Small paintings scattered throughout the house and quiet quips about college life meant it felt like a viable destination for study rather than a distant, dream-like city of spires and snoots. I am entirely aware of the privilege of this perspective. The reason I am at Oxford is due in no small part to my parents' encouragement of my academics, and I am indebted to their continual support.

I am also slowly realising how Oxford connects me to my parents. With no close extended family, it was difficult to picture my parents as anything other than my mom and dad. Despite my best efforts to bring them into focus, they remained blurry. What Oxford crucially offers is a point of contact, where our lives exist in parallel. My mom talks of fond nights at "The KA", and I smile because I too am partial to an overpriced pint there. Now, every pub trip there makes me think of her. In this small world, I find parts of them which exist beyond their parental outline.

And yet, this city also is a reminder of our distance. Though I walk the same path, my footsteps do not fit perfectly in prints first left by them. In unassuming conversations, I find

reminders that my days do not look like theirs. My dad, with a mix of humour and sadness, explains that he was too anxious to ever step foot inside of the Rad Cam. I respond that it is one of my favourite places to study, acknowledging the gap between us.

It is on my quiet days, when I am too depressed to get out of bed, that I feel most distant. I wish I knew what they did when they were sad. How did they fill the silence, which streets did they walk? Ghosts linger around Oxford and I can neither outrun and ignore them, nor embrace them, pulling them into a hug. It is hard to know what to do. Sometimes too hard. Late one night, I walked to Jesus College, sat down on the pavement steps outside and cried, confused by the strange weight this city has come to hold, as well as its emptiness.

What I do know is that a man reading PPE and a woman reading Music met at Jesus College, Oxford, in the 90s and quietly fell in love. Eighteen years later, they dropped their daughter off at Balliol College for her first term of university. It was a sunny day in October, and the sun shone kindly on their faces. I know

"What I do know is that a man reading PPE and a woman reading Music met at Jesus College, Oxford, in the 90s and quietly fell in love."

that when I received my Oxford offer, my dad rushed upstairs, grabbed his mortarboard and placed it on my head; he was beaming, slightly teary-eyed. In amongst these memories lies disconnect and confusion, but also gentle warmth and understanding. These contradictions are testament to the city's ability to hold it all, each moment, feeling and everything in between. That certainly feels like a good reason to smile and give my parents a call.

CHERWELL-FED

Ramen Kulture: A cozy, warm, noodle retreat on St Giles.



By AMANDA LI

As soup season continues in 2025, we've evolved to another staple of uni culture: Ramen. Not instant, that is, but Kulture. Ramen Kulture has turned hearts and minds, and combined with its central location on St. Giles past Pusey Street, the line to enter the place is almost always to the corner. I popped by on a cold day to warm myself up with some spicy ramen.

The one issue with the place is the line. Despite being one person and it being out of term, I still had to endure twenty minutes of the freezing cold before getting a seat at the side bar. At times, you'll have to wait up to an hour if your group is big, and they don't take reservations. I've sat at many a seat in this place, and had to share the tables with many other groups just to get my fill, but it's always worth it. The background music tends to be a mix of currently-popular Japanese tunes and 80s city pop – one time they even played anime themes. It's a warm, cozy ambience perfect for friend meetups and third dates.

I only ordered the spicy pork ramen, but my memory of appetizers are always fond here. The edamame here is served hot and boiled, making the texture of the pods a bit squishy but the beans themselves

warm. The chicken gyoza, though not a too large serving, has an umami kick and an extra crunch. My friends and I tend to share the chicken kaarage and the mayo is a classic dip, though I like it a bit spicier.

Ramen wise, you can never go wrong. The classic tonkotsu has a savory broth, though the chashu pork is less marinated in comparison. At £12.50, the large bowl is more than enough. Tonkotsu (spicy or not) comes with a jammy egg, bean sprouts, corn, shallots, and benishoga (pickled ginger.) The toppings add texture and crunch to a dish that is otherwise mostly noodle. I am less of a fan of the tan tan beef ramen – as the beef is minced, it cooks a lot faster and I hate the feeling of the lumps. My vegetarian friends love the miso tofu ramen, though it's the only vegetarian option – the miso broth is savory and warming on a cold day.

That day, the food arrived after about ten minutes. Thankfully, you never have to wait too long, and the unlimited green tea refills makes the time pass faster.

I didn't stick for dessert – one tends to be more than full when you go to this place. Still, I was able to leave Ramen Kulture with a smile and some good ramen for a decent price. If you ever come by St Giles and see there's no line, drop in!

Image credit: Angharad Thorp

Agony Aunt:

I've applied to 30 internships and have only got rejections back. I'm too embarrassed to tell anyone because I've been a consistent high-achiever my whole life. I hate lying but I don't want to look like a failure!



Dearest Struggling Second Year,

Most students can sympathise with your problem. The fight to secure a summer internship feels like an endless and brutal quest. Unfortunately rejection is unavoidable. Maybe you will only get one offer this year, perhaps not a single one. I'm not trying to rub salt into the wound, but this is the reality.

Difficulty handling rejection is something all too familiar for a lot of Oxford students. It can feel like we're at a university full of overachievers: Straight A students, who were also captains of the football team and lead characters in the school play. Admitting you've been turned down can feel a little scary, but it is normal. Most of us are just stumbling through the eight weeks anyway!

What is really difficult is not judging yourself. Your 'failure' to get an internship is not going to curse the rest of your career. My advice is to relax and enjoy second year. The last 'Trini-free' summer lies ahead, along with the only halfway hall you'll ever have. This is what you'll remember from uni, not twelve weeks spent in an air conditioned office, poring over boring documents and drinking too much coffee.

Lots of love,
Your Agony Aunt

BOOZY BULLETIN

Funniest College Drinks

1. Sheep Bite

Jesus College is playing on their Welsh heritage here. The drink is also called Bleed Green, quite appropriate as it literally glows green in their famous UV room.

2. Ed Millibubbles

Corpus's classic cocktail is a mysterious concoction. All we really know is that, just like Ed himself, it's a 'fantastic mild red'.

3. Ginston Churchill

A St John's classic, absolutely lethal after a few pints.

4. Pango

This Hertford speciality was at one time the Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster. Shame they changed the name.

5. Balliol Blue

A classic. Although the drink itself is not that funny, the hoards of freshers proudly displaying their blue tongues certainly is.

SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT

Varsity Ski Trip



Varsity 2025 was certainly the highlight of the Christmas vacation. All of the usual criteria was hit: Great snow (of all kinds), even better après, and lots of drama. Although, our editors do wish the Park End DJ would give Oxford a break.

Kissing my husband? Groundbreaking.

Chloe Smith discusses how committing college-family-cest was one of the best decisions she's ever made.

My boyfriend and I are married!! For over two years now, wow – what a journey. At 20, some could say it's a bit premature.

But when it's a college marriage, it's a bit less serious. It is a situation only possible at Oxbridge, where my boyfriend is both my boyfriend and my husband. We got married on the 8th October 2022 at a college drinks event, five days after we'd arrived in Oxford.

We got married before we'd even kissed, which is an unusual path for a couple to take, though not too unusual for a college marriage. I even turned down someone else to marry him. Picky, I know. I seem to have taken the college marriage system as seriously as an actual relationship, which, luckily, is an attitude that fate has justified.

If my relationship had gone wrong, my college marriage would be in shambles. That wouldn't matter if a college marriage wasn't an actual relationship. If you're at Brasenose, like we are, you have to cook dinner with your spouse in Freshers' Week for your children. If you hate each other, it's hard to chat, let alone cook a meal together in a kitchen you've never used for people you've never met. For a year at least, you can't escape your college spouse. That pressure-cooker, the famous Oxford 'bubble', is the only reason '-cest' in all its forms (not incest, come on) exists as an Oxford concept. Otherwise, what would be the problem? You marry a rando, maybe you kiss or more, and a year later, you cook dinner with them and talk about how much reading you have to do for Tort Law. Then you never see them again. To be honest, that is an option, if an awkward one. As long as you never see them in Quad. At a BOP. In Hall. Unlikely.

Firstly, can we have a suffix other than '-cest' please? It makes it sound way worse than it is. Colleges are not *families*. People doing the same subject as you are not your family. Even 'college families' aren't proper families, not blood families, not even *chosen* families. This is people who have things in common, in close proximity getting together, which is surely how most people... get together?



"Where to find love in Oxford?" people ask. Surely it's close to home, in the groups you've already formed, the friendships, the... college families?

Yes, stuff gets messy. But the reason 'oxcest' exists seems, to me, to be driven by the fear of a relationship falling apart. Granted, the aforementioned 'bubble' makes things harder. If you're looking for someone to have casual sex with, your tute partner is probably an unwise choice. So, maybe 'oxcest' is a good rule if you have a history of casually getting with friends and subsequently losing friendships.

But if you're looking for something more serious, consider loving thy neighbour. You'll be taking a chance, yes, but isn't all love a risk? I think you'll be less likely to find love if you're riddled with the fear of a relationship failing. Approaching love with the anticipation of regret cannot set you up for success.

The worry of later extrication is fair enough, but that painful undoing is part and parcel of living in a community, the beautiful benefits of which I think highly outweigh the disadvantages. You would always have to undo the lives you've built, even if

your partner wasn't originally in your community. Any kind of 'uni-cest' is an intensification of the gamble you take in all relationships.

Love is a losing game, they say, but not if you WIN!

Of course, I would say that. I took a gamble that paid off. My in-college, in-friendship-group boyfriend has been my boyfriend for over two years since the fateful MT22 Halloween BOP. It's just a cute fact about us, that we're married. If our relationship had gone otherwise, maybe it would have been perilous. But I'd like to hope that even if our relationship had gone wrong, if we'd broken up right in the middle of our degrees, that the pain wouldn't be so great that I regret it ever happened. A life anticipating regret cannot be one lived in joy.

So proceed with excitement. The world is wide but our circles are small. By all means, bring new people into your orbit, but do not disregard – through fear, arbitrary rules, and unnecessarily serious college small talk – those already living in your own world.

Image Credit: Silhouetted Couple in Dramatic Lighting, Lii Chun, via Pexels, CCO

Cherpse.

Oxford blind dating.

[A rainy Sunday morning in University Parks leads this couple to retreat to a coffee shop. Will love be found there, or left out in the rain?]

Mr Parks:

First impression?

I was glad she approached me to save the awkward introductions. Very smiley and approachable person so off to a good start.

Highlight?

Exchanging chaotic stories of our time at uni. Got in a good laugh, albeit at the expense of someone else's misfortunes but good to see they had character.

Most embarrassing moment?

The initial preliminaries and small talk but quickly got that out the way. Luckily not too embarrassing, felt quite at ease.

Did it meet your expectations?

Hard to say because I didn't have expectations as I've never been on a date before. We sat and had coffee for a couple of hours and didn't seem to run out of conversation. Glad she was sociable and amiable.

Will there be a second date?

To be decided

Miss Tinder:

First impression?

My first impression was a good one. It was raining so it was easy to spot him. I was glad I didn't know him.

Highlight?

The highlight was hearing his stories about his own college. It was nice to hear about the student experience outside of my own college.

Most embarrassing moment?

The guy who served us in the cafe was someone I'd spoken to on Tinder, and we immediately recognised each other.

Did it meet your expectations?

I'd say it was better than I thought. It wasn't as awkward as I initially imagined. I think we both got on really well. I thought I would be more anxious, but it was a nice few hours.

Will there be a second date?

Potentially



SPORT

Women's Blues carve out victory at Varsity

Oxford see three team wins, whilst Cambridge claim fastest individual times

By SEBASTIAN PAGE

Recent years have seen Cambridge dominate the Varsity Skiing competition that dates back over a hundred years, as Oxford have seen only seven victories since 2010 across all twenty-four Blues races that happened prior to the 2024 set (although no information is seemingly available for the 2023 outcome). So, with a chip on their shoulder and catsuits (think full-body Lycra) that left you wondering whether they were even capable of movement, our valiant skiers braved the -10°C to hit the slopes and get practicing.

For those unaware of how competitive skiing is judged at the Varsity match: Both universities enters a team of six racers, with each racer completing two runs in two separate categories. For each category, the times are combined, and the four fastest totals are used to calculate the team's score. The same process is repeated for the other category, and the times for both categories are added together to determine the teams' final scores. This system emphasises the necessity of squad depth and consistency, as teams require four racers to deliver reliably strong performances to achieve an overall good final score.

The two categories are Slalom, and Grand Slalom. The former is more technical and demands faster and sharper turns as racers will need to go slower to weave their way around the poles that are spaced very narrowly. Grand Slalom is more about overall control, as skiers pass gates that are more spaced apart, requiring them to remain in control while going at higher speeds.

Both universities were well-matched. Oxford took home the victory in the Men's 2nd and 3rd team races, as well as the Women's Blues overall. Cambridge picked up the remaining contests, but established their case for breaking the deadlock by having both the fastest man and woman overall. Despite this, there were still many results to be celebrated. Oxford's individual fastest times were David Schram



Charlotte Wagniez, winning Blues captain and Oxford's fastest woman.

and Charlotte Wagniez, both of whom captained the sides.

The Oxford Men's 3rd team also deserves significant recognition, as the course dramatically deteriorated over the course of the day, leaving them the daunting task of putting up a good score on what had become a steep wall of rutted ice that had claimed many victims already that day. They walked away with a score that not only won their own contest, but would have narrowly lost to Cambridge Men's 2nd team as well.

The setting of Tignes added another dimension to the race this year. With a large area for spectators, and a chairlift going directly overhead, there were plenty of witnesses for some of the good, bad, and ugly moments of the day, including multiple falls and the odd lost ski. Lest the crowd be enough, all competitors were asked for one song each to play in

the background during their last run. Some saw this as an opportunity to become the main character and picked famous titles like AC-DC's 'Thunderstruck' or their other classic 'Highway to Hell'. In my opinion, that was taken too far when one person chose KSI's latest addition to the world of music, his infamous track, 'Thick Of It'. Other selections were a tad more bizarre, as quirkier racers chose the 'Wii Sports Theme Tune' and even 'Clash Royale Drill Remix'. There were even racers who became momentarily self-aware, with one choosing 'Stayin' Alive' by the Bee Gees, while simultaneously hurtling down the hill with the sole cushion of a block of ice.

The major drawback to the songs (that were otherwise a great opportunity for some fun in what could have become too serious of a day) is that racers who had fallen over would have to ski down the side solemnly while the song they had chosen played in the background. This might not have been so bad if the chosen song had been a bit more hardcore, but when one skier chose to have their name sung in noughties Europop-style by an artist called Die Zipfelbuben, they might have started to wonder why they didn't pick a different song...

But as we well know, the day is about a lot more than skiing. Wednesdays are about socials, not sport, and skiing is about après. Cambridge celebrated their great win outside the neighbouring venue Cocorico's, before dancing the night away at the Blues Bop. All in all, the Varsity Ski race is generally a very good-natured affair, and Oxford brought their most appropriate flag to pose with after the races, with a message that perfectly matched the tone of good-sportsmanship: 'F*ck Cambridge'. Glad to see that good old-fashioned rivalry is still 'in', and I very much look forward to a term's worth of trash talk and competitive spirit in the Varsity matches to come.

Image Credits: Varsity Trip and Floom Creative



MATCH OF THE WEEK

St. Catz/Somerville claim college hockey title

St. Catz/Somerville claim the Division I title, despite falling 2-0 to Brasenose/Anne's.

The latter were struggling for results in previous weeks, but managed to spoil St. Catz/Somerville's victory lap with an impressive result, bolstered by newer talent.

In the end, St. Catz/Somerville retain their first-place position solely on goal difference.

The league will reset after these Christmas vacs and St. Catz/Somerville will look to retain their title from the stiff opposition provided by Hertford all-season long.

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Ben Cooke's brace put New College to the sword

Two goals from Ben Cooke was enough to get St. Anne's across the line in a 3-2 nailbiter against New College in Division I of the JCR Reserves' League.

New College responded well to an early goal from Matt Farnfield, before Ben Cooke finally ended the game with a composed penalty after a New College defender handled the ball inside the box.

Ben's goals helped seal the first three points of the season for St. Anne's, after struggling to find opposition to play against all term.

HALL OF SHAME

Freshers' Athletics Varsity not so successful...

Cambridge swept Fresher's Athletics Varsity in November, winning the Men's side 82 - 61 and the Women's side more narrowly at 80 - 73.

The last Freshers' Varsity that took place at home resulted in a sweep for Oxford, and the women managed to retain their title despite travelling away to Wilberforce Road in Cambridge last year.

I'm confident that this will only prove to be motivation for the freshers as they look to break into the Blues team, and strengthen the team that beat Cambridge 4-1 last year.

SHOE THE TABS

Cambridge lose overall Varsity tally

With 2024 coming to an end, we can tally up the wins and losses across every single Varsity match that took place over the calendar and academic year. Oxford won 86 matches to Cambridge's 80, with only 3 left as a draw.

While Cambridge may have claimed some more prestigious wins such as the Boat Race and a sweep across both rugby matches, we can still hold our head high.

UPCOMING Squash

Saturday, 15th February
@Royal Automobile Club

Captains: Shiloh Wu and Grace Belgan

Badminton

Sunday, 2nd February
@Cambridge

Captains: Varad Puntambekar
and Zheqing Zhang

Taekwondo

Saturday, 15th February
@Cambridge

Captains: Matthew Morgan and Laura Wharton

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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

Coffee break with Cherwell



CLASSIC SUDOKU

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

by Joe Dunn

Cryptic Crossword by Alessandra Edwards

1		2		3		4		5		6		7
8						9				10		
11												
												12
13	14			15			16					
						17						
18								19		20		21
								22				
23		24								25		
26										27		
28								29				

Across:

- Yap as a form of vengeance? (7)
- Crazy! Loco! Bring back English city (7)
- Covered dessert with last of custard (5)
- Surpasses golfer's pa by mistake (9)
- Loses senses in surgery experience this? (13)
- Position of hospital moved along peak (6)
- Sword holder is scoundrel when with Will (8)
- Deliberate cheat? Communist is revolutionary (8)
- Contrary love thanks

- runner for sweet treat (6)
- Capacity to cause issues in casual venue for a change (8,5)
- Toxic club scored 99! (9)
- Hold note and get complaint (5)
- Otherwise, pinching cheek, causes egg shape (7)
- Execute half of lectures on drug before return to office (2-5)

Down:

- Secretly hook-up, I can tell it's spicy (7)
- Leader of beasts is rabbiting (7)

- Daze caused by drink, overshadowing two days (5)
- So good you'll die? (6)
- Top performer (clown) in Clacton, get rid of last two (5,3)
- Girl loves hollow dudes and possessions (5)
- Accepting son is, yes, a horrible piece of work (5)
- Debriefed endlessly about something on the house (7)
- Pace run, out wearing two shirts (4)
- Symbol change I brought to the top (4)
- Corrupt institution isn't

- removing lessons (7)
- Troop through river a political initiative (8)
- Announce end of century, left unsurpassed (3-4)
- Plain to see around each, get stuffed (7)
- Rascal adjusted temperature, say (6)
- Flyer illustrates what to do when first four methods fail? (5)
- Amongst men, as always, with certain kind of voice (5)
- Evacuate VRBO half of guests are in (5)

Guillotines by Zoë McGuire

These poor things have been beheaded, but their heads are still making noise! Can you work out what each group is trying to say?

Bodies:

- Cooking Pan Originating in China (3)
- What one might do to God (5)
- Anne or Antoinette (5)
- Part in a play (4)
- The Southern or Atlantic are 2 (6)
- Baseball glove or Barack's opponent (4)
- Funeral fire fuel (4)
- "pieces ___"; Parrot's catchphrase (2,5)
- Gender represented by Mars (4)

Victims:

- Computer correspondence (1-4)
- Cross the street illegally (7)
- Disperse, as light or radiation (4)
- Feelings; sentiments (8)
- In some other place (9)
- Lift to a higher level (7)
- Room to store weapons (7)
- Sign up; register (5)
- The _____ state building (6)

Heads:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Vowelless Crossword by Julian Xiao

When entering your answers into the grid, omit all occurrences of A, E, I, O and U; do not omit Y. The numbers in the clues will indicate the lengths of the true answers as well as any hyphens or spaces.

		1	2	3	4	5	
	6						
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							

Across:

- Easy choice (2,7)
- Most of Cherwell's readership, I think (8)
- Prodigal (11)
- Something that's hard to resist from friends (4,8)
- Amazon concern (13)
- What a movie may be based on (4,5)
- Pessimistic person (8)

Down

- Businesses (11)
- 9-Across is a threat to it (12)
- Drummer who replaced Pete Best (5,5)
- Strength (9)
- Hold back (8)
- Cooking technique used in many Asian cuisines (4-3)
- Trip to the South Pole, for instance (10)

WEEK 7 ANSWERS

Cryptic Crossword
 Across: 1) Corrals, 5) Mending, 9) Pentagon, 10) Pulse, 11) Oxygen, 12) Colleges, 14) Stretch out, 16) Aced, 18) Sets, 19) Bamboozled, 22) Iron fist, 23) Nimbus, 26) Alibi, 27) Americano, 28) Hygiene, 29)

Doggone
 Down: 1) Copious, 2) Horny man, 3) Amaretto, 4) Sort, 5) Mumbo jumbo, 6) Nipple, 7) Illogical, 8) Greased, 13) Cheapskate, 15) Rationing, 17) Noticing, 18) Spinach, 20) Dispose, 21) Office, 24) Bravo, 25) Feud

Ins and Outs
 KILLJOY, MARIJUANA, EXTRAORDINARY, CALZONE, CIRCUMVENT, GAZPACHO, AWKWARD, HALFWAY, CHEVRON, OXFORD, SUBPEONA, EARTHQUAKE

For Starters
 DIORAMA, UNCURLS, HEATMAP, PALETTE, FRESHER, TIN EAR, LOCALE, BRUTES, WARMTH, I'M LATE, CASPER

Weekly mini crosswords coming to cherwell.org
 Follow us on Instagram @cherwelloxford