



# Cherwell

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## It's not whether you rusticate, it's where: Suspension of studies at Oxford

Emily Henson reports.

Oxford has one of the lowest drop-out rates in the country, with around 0.9% of admissions not completing a degree, much lower than the UK average of 5.3%. Absent from the University's "facts and figures" section is the number of students each year who suspend their study – or "rusticate" as it's more commonly known.

The practice isn't new – Oxford students have been rustivating for hundreds of years. Historically, however, rustication was not taken as seriously as it is now; Oscar Wilde rusticated for one term merely for returning late from holiday in Greece.

Today, the rustication experience varies massively depending on your College. Despite the university's new "Common Approach" initiative to mental health, each college still has a unique combination of policies, JCR involvement, and collections standards for returning students. So with 50% of students considering rustication at some point, according to a *Cherwell* poll, what exactly does the experience entail?

How many actually rusticate?

Across the university, around 4% of undergraduate students choose to rusticate every year. However there is significant variation

between different colleges, with the rate ranging from 2% to 9%.

One standout is Regent's Park, which averages 15 rustications per year, despite only having 166 undergraduates. Proportionally,

Regent's Park has the highest levels of rustications at 9%, with more students rustivating per year than St Anne's, a college with nearly triple the undergraduate population.

While Regent's has greater assets

per student than four colleges, as a Permanent Private Hall and not a college, it was not included in the wealth redistribution scheme attempting to alleviate inter-collegiate financial disparity. With

mental health often cited as the cause for rustication, colleges that are already struggling with essential funding might not be able to sufficiently support students.

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Image credit: James Morrell

## A string of medical book thefts vexes New College

Selina Chen reports.

A recent string of book thefts from the New College Library has prompted warnings from the college's dean. According to emails seen by *Cherwell*, three books, all on the subject of medicine, were stolen last week.

New College Dean Michael Burden reminded junior members that it is a "serious offence" to remove books without properly checking them out, and he encouraged students to ensure that others do not tailgate when entering the Library. Further, students have been asked to report any suspicious activity to the Lodge and approach Burden or the Fellow Librarian in confidence with any information.

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## Oxford Council approves plan to expand cycle paths

Aarav Billmore reports.

In response to traffic and safety concerns, Oxford City and County Councils have passed a scheme to improve cycling infra-

structure in Oxford and the surrounding Oxfordshire countryside, allocating £106,000 to the project. The plan, inspired by Cambridge's network, comes in response to Oxford's high bicycle usage and the

current lack of other transportation alternatives.

Grade-separation – the approach that separates different modes of transport and ensures that they do not interact – is the key improve-

ment that the plan makes on the current usage pattern. Putting distance between cyclists and other vehicles makes the alternative to driving a more attractive option, which in turn decreases the num-

ber of drivers on the road. By fully grade-separating bicycles and cars, both parties can operate in more predictable environments, drastically reducing the number of collisions.

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## NEWS SHORTS



## Oxford commemorates Holocaust Memorial Day

This week, Oxford commemorates Holocaust Memorial Day (January 27th). TORCH oversaw a memorial reading group on Thursday 25th. A memorial service took place (January 26th) in the Town Hall Assembly room. The Lord Mayor made a statement espousing “Love for all, hatred for none.” Keble College hosted a Memorial Day Commemoration, collaborating with the Oxford Branch of the Council for Christians & Jews. The music was sung by Keble choir and OxfordShir, a local Jewish choir.

## New chairs have been installed in the Radcliffe Camera

Following survey responses indicating a desire for new chairs in the Radcliffe Camera, chairs with padded backrests were installed with the help of student volunteers overnight on 24th January. The chairs were funded by a generous philanthropic donation and chosen to keep with the neoclassical style of the library. Opinions on the chairs are divided, with some students expressing frustrations about the size of the chairs.

## Kazakh language programme launched following delegation visit to university

On 26th January, the University of Oxford signed an agreement with the Kazakh Ministry of Science and Higher Education with plans to launch a Kazakh language program at the University.

The delegation, including Minister Sayasat Nurbek, met with Professor Maia Chankseliani, who told Cherwell: “We explored potential collaborations aimed at supporting Kazakhstani higher education and research. Such interactions with policy-makers are essential to ensure that our research and teaching remains focused on policy impact.”

# SU Town Hall: meet the presidential candidates

**E**lections for Student Union president open Monday to Thursday of 4th Week. Candidates include SU veterans and outsiders with a radically different vision for the role of the organisation and president. *Cherwell* sat down with eight candidates to hear about who they are and what they hope to accomplish if they are elected president.

### 1. Addi Haran Diman

**Who are you?** Addi Haran Diman, third year in a DPhil in Politics at Lincoln College.

**On previous experience in the SU:** I’m pretty much an outsider to that babble and I think that’s good because what’s really needed right now is someone who can shake up the system and is not part of the problem.

**On other relevant experience:** I have been political for over a decade now. I have mainly been focusing on LGBTQ+ work as the President of OULGBTQ Society, founder of Oxford Trans+ Pride, and a community officer at Oxford Pride. I have an experience that not many students in Oxford have of negotiating with the University and advocating to achieve actual things.

**Describe your platform in one sentence:** Competence, seriousness, inclusion, powerful representation, advocacy.

### 2. Shermar Pryce

**Who are you?** I’m Shermar Pryce, a third year PPEist at Univ.

**On experience and motivations to run:** I’ve always had a passion for student representation. I’m not really from a background which was traditionally represented in Oxford. I’ve interacted with the SU quite a lot in various capacities, including working directly for them this year, and before that as [University College] JCR president.

**On what the SU have done well:** I think this year they’ve done well on EDI issues. They’ve worked hard to maintain the fine line between representation of people’s views and grievances while at the same time not necessarily becoming overly political as we’ve seen in previous years.

**On top priorities as president:** Empowering [College] Common Rooms – making sure they’re equipped to fight for the rights of students. I hope to collect data from colleges – anything from sustainability to rent and food prices – and make that available for everyone to see. It’s an invaluable tool for common rooms negotiating with colleges by leveling the asymmetric information that reps usually have to go off. It also embarrasses colleges.

**Describe your platform in one sentence:** An SU that’s actually useful.

### 3. Reuben Constantine

**Who are you?** My name is Reuben Constantine, 2nd year at St. Peter’s studying Modern languages – specifically French and Modern Greek.

**On experience and motivations to run:** I’m the treasurer of the 93% Club and access and outreach ambas-

sador for my college, my faculty, and for the university as a whole. I’m also heavily involved in Class Act, which is an initiative run by the SU to address class disparities. I would ultimately love to be involved in allowing the university to become more diverse in that way [and] to profit from the same life changing opportunities that I’ve had.

**What’s one thing you would have handled differently?** Honestly, nothing. I think in all the situations the SU have been, they’ve dealt with it the best they could.

**Describe your platform in one sentence.** My campaign slogan is Make Oxford Smile; I want to contribute to building an environment where everyone can truly be happy.



### 4. Elliot (Riz) Possnett

**Who are you?** Elliot (Riz) Possnett, 2nd year, PPE, Wadham

**On motivation to run:** I love so much about this university, but there are so many things that infuriate me and that create massive barriers for certain groups of people. I want to make sure that everyone can get the best out of Oxford, and Oxford can be a better place for the wider world.

**On experience:** [I’ve been involved in] strategy coordination for UK Student Climate Network and youth delegate to COP C40 Cities “Women 4 Climate” conference, as well as Oxford Trans Pride activism, including leading direct action protest inside the [Union] debating chamber. I’m also Chair of the Economics Undergraduate Joint Consultative Committee.

**On doing things differently:** I would replace the role of SU President with an “internal coordinator” role, taking the pressure and attention off of one person so the team can work in a more equal and efficient way.

**Describe your platform in a sentence:** I’m an experienced youth advocate and campaigner, and I want to use that experience to leverage collective power in the university with the support of targeted data-driven

projects to put greater pressure on the university to make essential changes.

### 5. Tim Green

**Who are you?** My name is Tim Green. My course is PPE. And I’m in my third year at Regent’s Park College.

**On experience with the SU:** Most students have had very little interaction with the SU, and that’s despite the fact that the SU has over a million pounds in budget and 17 members of staff. I think that’s not good enough.

**On background:** I was diagnosed with a disability in Oxford and I’m a bursary holder. I’ve led an access committee of about 15 people, we’d have meetings every week devoted to representing different groups.

need to convince people I’m not running as a facade. I’d be the mechanism through which I bring the views of the students to the university that the SU might not be something that A) the students want and B) is needed. I’ll see whether the rules and regulations with the SU could be re-written, and put that to a referendum to see what the student population think at a wider scale.

**In a sentence:** The SU will run perfectly fun with no SU president for the year 2024-25.

### 7. Isaac Chase-Rahman

**Who are you?** Isaac Chase-Rahman. 4th year, Physics, Corpus Christi College.

**On motivations for running:** The SU is broken. It functions similarly to SUs in other universities but Oxford is not other universities, and so the things that would normally be done by an SU are done by other groups.

**On experience:** [Within the SU] I’ve been the Chair of Student Council for two terms; previously I was on the Steering Committee and Elections Committee. I was JCR president of Corpus Christi college before that, as well as Returning Officer, undergraduate MCR representative, and secretary of drama society at Corpus. I’m also a peer supporter with University Welfare Services and sat on the tutors committee as a university representative.

**What’s one thing you would have handled differently?** When the University decided to not put more money into diagnoses of specific learning disabilities, the SU should have pushed them to make sure that students who need diagnoses quickly are able to get them. There’s a problem of college disparity, but the University chose to shirk responsibility, and the SU didn’t put their foot down.

**Describe your platform in a sentence:** Reform, engage, transform.

### 8. George Zhao

**Who are you?** (Name, year, course, college) George Zhao, 2nd, year, Engineering, Oriel College

**How long have you been a part of the SU?** In what capacity? I haven’t had any involvement with the SU so far. But that is an advantage because I think when you are outside of it, you realise what the problem is and the real impact of the problem on our lives.

**What would be your top goals as SU president?** To generally increase the happiness of our students by getting more opinions from them. Students have opinions about the University, their colleges, their departments but have nowhere to talk about it. As president, I would get more contact with the students directly and try to create a happy environment for everyone.

**Describe your platform in one sentence:** I stand for the commons.

Voting will be open between Monday and Thursday of 4th Week. Full election manifestos will be available on the Student Union’s website.

**On specific policies:** A referendum for a reading week. A cap on rent inflation. A universal lecture recording policy. A helpline if people are experiencing issues. Because we have the resources to do these things, it just isn’t there at the moment.

**Describe your platform in a sentence.** To build an SU that works for every student in Oxford, with policies prioritising mental health and improving accessibility to forge an Oxford that leaves no one behind.

### 6. Q Sun

**Who are you?** I’m Q. Third year material scientist at Teddy.

**Why do you want to run for SU?** I’m running for empty chair; I envision a year without an SU president. The money that would go to the presidency – around £27,000 – would go to other things. The SU in Oxford functions with much less effect on the student population than it would at other universities because we have the Common Rooms. [The SU president does] relatively little. You attend meetings on behalf of the SU. You go to some events. That money could go to something different.

**On experience:** I’ve got experience in not doing things.

**What happens if you win?** Well, I

# Oxfordshire County Council to decide on expansion of Zero Emission Zone

**Tom Gardner** reports.

A decision on the expansion of the Zero Emission Zone (ZEZ) is expected in the Spring at a meeting of the county council's cabinet. Emissions charges are set to double under the proposed changes, and the zone would be expanded to include the wider city centre.

The expansion is likely to go ahead – having been in the council's plans for a few years – and follows the introduction of a pilot ZEZ in February 2022 covering a few streets in the centre of Oxford.

According to a recent city council report, transport is the second largest contributor to carbon emissions in Oxford, responsible for 17% of total emissions. By expanding the ZEZ, the council hopes that expanding the ZEZ will reduce this factor.

Consultation has been ongoing with local communities, businesses, and the public to shape the changes, and Councillor Judy Roberts, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Development Strategy, will hold a key role when the final decision is made.

Under the current pilot scheme, charges – which apply from 7 am to 7 pm – vary between £2 and £10 depending on the type of vehicle. These are set to double under the proposed changes: vehicles that produce zero emissions or have special permission

would remain exempt from charges. Automatic number plate recognition cameras would be used to enforce the charges.

Money raised from fines would be used to fund further infrastructure (e.g. Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points) and to improve the public transport network, aimed at helping the city progress closer towards its upcoming emissions targets.

The policy has received backlash from local residents. There are concerns that the ZEZ might increase journey lengths for citizens who can't afford the fines and would therefore disproportionately affect poorer citizens. Taxi drivers have noted that the disruption to their routes due to the ZEZ is causing them to increase their charges.

These proposed measures are part of a wider Oxford Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (OxEVIS) in response to the government's "Taking Charge" guidance under which local authorities have been encouraged to "develop local EV chargepoint strategies as an immediate priority."

The vision for the council's strategy is to "Progress Oxford's leadership in the transition to a sustainable, decarbonised transport system through the delivery of a fair, sustainable, accessible and equitable network of EV charging infrastructure."

The strategy centres on reducing car ownership; other parts of the plan include the new fleet of battery-pow-

ered buses to be introduced this year. If the ZEZ is introduced, it is intended to play a key part in this reduction. Oxfordshire is also a leading council in terms of EV uptake with one in five new cars fully electric.

If the plan goes forward, the council would offer up to 100 day passes each year which would allow local residents to pass through the traffic filters. Yet, the Oxford Business Action Group is concerned that "without extensive exemptions provided, the ZEZ charges essentially amount to a business tax" and that "the roll out will surely have a huge, negative

impact on the economic activities of the city at a time when [local businesses] are already struggling." Particular concerns from local businesses include disruption to deliveries and reduced customer footfall.

While other cities like London, Birmingham, and Bristol have already introduced low emission zones, Oxford is the first city in Britain to introduce a ZEZ. Back in August last year, plans to introduce a ZEZ in London were scrapped, with central London instead instituting an Ultra Low Emission Zone (which has fewer restrictions).

## Exhibition reinterpreting colonial records opens in Bodleian Library

**Ellie Yau** reports.

A new exhibition has opened in Weston Library's Blackwell Hall as part of a collaboration between the Bodleian Libraries and British opera singer Peter Brathwaite. The collection aims to provide audiences with a humanising perspective on history, utilising Brathwaite's own family history as both enslaved people and slave owners, and will be open until 7th April.

The theme of the collection is "Mischievous in the Archives," referencing the common label "mischievous" used for enslaved individuals who attempted to resist oppression and assert their humanity. To symbolise this visually, Brathwaite created a ceremonial costume depicting the trickster god in Caribbean folklore, which represents "his own role in the story."

During a previous talk in November as part of the We Are Our History conversations, Brathwaite revealed that using the Bodleian's collections, he was able to trace back his family history. He found his roots in the British-owned Codrington plantations in Barbados, where some of his ancestors were slave traders and others enslaved.

This exhibit is the culmination of that research, juxtaposing content from the Bodleian archives against artefacts from Brathwaite's own family collection. It aims to "challenge preconceived racialised narratives the archives have long muted," bringing to life names only remembered in colonial records and restoring a human as-

pect to them.

Brathwaite noted that the work was "pain-staking," and that the "visceral violence" in the historic papers was often a struggle to handle, but it was worth it in light of the "little nuggets" he could dig out from the collections. "If you move away from the data, you can find the people behind the numbers."

The items displayed include Barbados plantation accounts and letters from John Brathwaite, the

owner of a plantation, as well as objects belonging to Addo Brathwaite,

Peter's fourth great-grandfather and freed slave originally from Ghana. According to Jasdeep Singh, who leads We Are Our

History, the creation of this "counter-archive" aims to "take a fresh look at the imbalance of [the Bodleian's] collections [...] and the impact of the colonial era in the libraries."

Singh said, "By sharing this platform with Peter to engage critically with our collections, this display embodies our commitment through the We Are Our History Project to learn, adapt and represent overlooked stories and experiences within our archives."

Brathwaite is known for his work in opera, having sung for groups including the English National Opera, Danish National Opera, and Philharmonie de Paris. He also published a work titled "Rediscovering Black Portraiture" in April 2023, a collection of portrait recreations which "reclaims Black history and art."

*Image Credits: Ian Wallman via Oxford University*

## CROSS CAMPUS



### Columbia students allegedly attacked by chemicals at pro-Palestine rally

Students at a pro-Palestine rally at Columbia University reported being attacked with "skunk spray." Members of Students for Justice in Palestine alleged that two aggressive men approached the group of demonstrators and sprayed them with a foul-smelling substance. At least three students reported seeking medical attention following the incident. The NYPD has opened an investigation into the alleged attacks.

### Imperial College London researchers outraged over heating

Scientists in a life science building have complained consistently about low indoor temperatures often falling below 10 degrees Celsius, attributing to the lack of heating illness and unusable laboratory results. They were forced to use portable fan heaters, one of which started a small fire in December. The failing heating system is temporary as Imperial transitions to more sustainable infrastructure.

### St Andrews confirms student case of measles

A student at the University of St Andrews has tested positive for measles, marking the second case of the disease in Scotland since October 2023. St Andrews has confirmed that the student in question is in isolation. Across the UK, there is a growing effort to increase rates of MMR (Measles, Mumps, and Rubella) vaccination to prevent outbreaks in the future.

### Oxford Council approves plan to expand cycle paths

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The cycling scheme is likely to gain popular support. At the moment, cycling is one of Oxford's most popular modes of transport, with 35% of residents using their bikes on a regular basis. Nevertheless, Oxford lags behind Cambridge, whose bike usage rate of 50% makes it the most bike-dominated city in the UK. This discrepancy is partially due to Cambridge's well-constructed and connected cycle paths.

Cycling on Oxford roads can be dangerous, as cars routinely breach cycle lane boundaries and cause collisions. In November 2023, a cyclist was hit near Abingdon and had to be airlifted to John Radcliffe Hospital. A similar incident occurred on 18 January this year, when another cyclist was hit by a vehicle at The Plain roundabout at the east end of Magdalen Bridge and ultimately ended up hospitalised with serious injuries. Follow-

ing the latter incident, City Council Member Katherine Miles posted online that to achieve zero traffic casualties, "we need to urgently remove conflicts between vulnerable road users and vehicles." She continued, saying that this would significantly alleviate issues with both traffic and safety and highlighted the benefits of grade-separation.

Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) have already been implemented in East Oxford as a method to improve cyclability. LTNs prohibit through traffic in residential areas, aiming to improve safety and walkability. The schemes have attracted criticism due to the perception that they increase congestion and constitute an attack on drivers. Despite backlash, Oxford City Council have recently decided to make these LTNs permanent and have cited their benefits in drastically reducing traffic and collisions, as well in increasing bike usage.

With the increased focus on creating safe routes for cyclists, Oxford is set to live up to its reputation as one of the UK's best biking cities.



## Plans approved for new student accommodation on Magdalen Street

Grace Kyoko Wong reports.

The Oxford City Planning Committee has approved a proposal to partially convert the iconic Oxenford House building on Magdalen Street, directly above the burger chain Five Guys, into a student accommodation block.

The upper floors of Oxenford House will be repurposed for 55 ensuite study bedrooms. The development plan includes proposed roof extensions to both the front and rear of the building, cycle racks on the ground floor, and a bin storage

area in the basement.

The question of which college will eventually use the new building has not yet been decided, but private providers of student accommodation and Oxford University have entered discussions, with six colleges expressing a “strong interest” in taking out a long-term lease on the building, according to Arron Twamley from the real estate consultancy Bidwells.

At a Planning Committee meeting on 23 January, the new development was welcomed by most committee members, although some expressed concerns about the proposed waste

collection arrangements.

Alex Hollingsworth, Councillor for Carfax & Jericho Ward, said at the meeting: “You end up with a great sea of bins stuck outside in the open air [in Friars Entry], perpetually contaminated and frankly a disgraceful mess, which I hope one day will get resolved.”

While he declared his overall support for the proposal, Hollingsworth emphasised that this would be conditional upon laying out a “very robustly worded and policed” waste collection policy for the building.

Oxenford House was built in 1965 to 1966 and is considered a rare surviving example of mid-20th century architecture in the city centre. However, in recent years, the building has been mostly vacant.

The basement of Oxenford House was converted into a restaurant in 1968, and was most recently occupied by Fever nightclub, which shut down in 2021. The second to fourth floors of the building formerly housed the British Study Centres School of English but are now unoccupied. The Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, which currently occupies the building’s first floor, has secured new premises in the city following the proposed development.

Image Credits: Jaggery via Wikimedia Commons CC-BY-SA-2.0



## A string of medical book thefts vexes New College Library

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Other colleges also communicated with students regarding their library behaviour this academic year. Lincoln College Library, for example, reported many books from other libraries mistakenly returned to Lincoln according to emails seen by Cherwell.

Corpus Christi College experienced problems in October 2023 when a student from another college was let into the Corpus library late at night and left there for hours. Librarian Joanna Snelling wrote to the student body.

According to a Corpus student, a stressed medical student from Christ Church was in urgent need of a place to work for an essay, but the Christ Church Library closed at 1

am. So he asked Corpus students to let him into the 24-hour Corpus library and leave him there even though he was informed that readers need a key fob to swipe out and that the library does not contain a toilet. Without a fob, the student was locked in until early morning and had to ask a staff member to let him out, at which time the staff realised he was not a Corpus student.

Snelling considered the incident a breach of security: “Although it was a student in this case, it could just as easily be someone more interested in your wallets or laptops. Corpus students working late into the night should be able to trust that everyone is playing their part in keeping the Library and its readers safe.”

New, Lincoln, and Corpus have been contacted for comment.

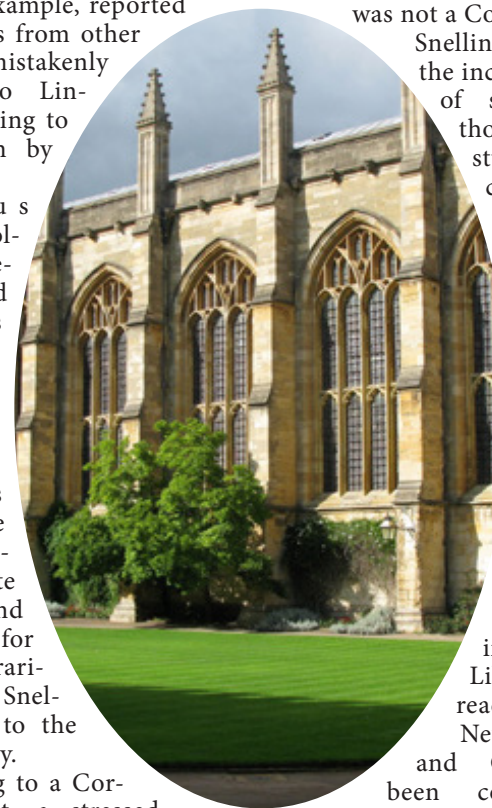


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## UCAS data reveals Oxbridge have fewest applicants among Russell Group

Poppy Littler-Jennings reports.

The publication of UCAS’s 2023 end-of-cycle data showed that Oxford and Cambridge are the least popular among the UK’s 24 Russell Group universities.

Cambridge had the fewest applications at 21,940, followed closely by Oxford with a low figure of 24,230. In contrast, the University of Manchester’s popularity surged, receiving nearly 100,000 applications. This constitutes a 31.6% increase from 2020 and places the University at the top of the Russell Groups in terms of application volume.

There has been some fluctuation in Oxford’s numbers over the years – for example a drastic increase from around 20,000 applications in 2018. Yet, the number of Oxford applicants has mostly remained low in comparison to other Russell Group universities.

However, the ratio of places to applications seems to explain this trend. The Oxford University News Office told *Cherwell*: “This year, over 23,000 candidates applied for a total of only 3,300 undergraduate places.” The overall prestige and academic rigour of the University means that the chances of earning a place are lower than for the majority of

Russell Group universities.

Another explanation for this pattern could be increasing mental health problems. Taking into account the prevalence of illnesses, such as anxiety and depression among adolescents, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, many have adopted a new attitude toward mental health concerns. The World Health Organization notes that these conditions increased 25% in 2020, and recent polling conducted by Priory Group revealed that 32% of those between the ages of 18 and 34 accessed mental health services of some kind for the first time during the pandemic.

Recent years have also seen students encounter frequent disruptions to their education, resulting in a consequential series of unprecedented examination periods. A particularly difficult period for GCSE and A-Level students combined with low acceptance rates which invariably sit between 15% and 17.5% make earning a place at Oxford as a veritable challenge.

The University told *Cherwell* the ratio of places to applicants “reflects the University’s demanding academic entry requirements and the number of undergraduate places on offer which is smaller than many other

Russell Group universities.” There is also a general waning interest in undergraduate studies, as shown by 10,000 fewer UCAS applications in 2023 compared to 2022. This is likely in part attributable to financial concerns faced by prospective students.

The government recently

announced plans to alter student loans, including lowering the repayment threshold from £27,295 to £25,000 and prolonging the repayment period from 30 to 40 years. Student loans create issues for countless young people, particularly amidst cost-of-living difficulties.

Oxford University News Office told *Cherwell*: “The University of Oxford’s admissions priorities are to attract the best candidates with the greatest academic potential, and to widen access for young people who are underrepresented at Oxford.”

## Analysis: We still beat Cambridge

Alfie Roberts comments.

It’s not that Oxford is unpopular, it’s that Cambridge just doesn’t really appeal.

The new figures released in UCAS’s 2023 data states that Oxford and Cambridge, the country’s top universities, have the least number of applicants – and it’s no surprise. The earlier submission of the personal statement, as well as the prospect of exams and a few interviews, if you’re lucky, definitely put people off from applying.

Yet, it’s funny that when people do choose to put themselves through this rigorous process, they overwhelmingly choose Oxford over Cambridge. Oxford attracts the applications of 10.4% more students. This must

be the promise of the late-night kebab vans dotted on every main street; the option of more than one club; or, possibly, its academic superiority, but that’s just to name a few.

However, the biggest reason why Oxford is a much more attractive prospect for students across the world is that it just has a better PR team. There’s a reason why Oxford was chosen as one the locations of one of Hollywood’s recent successes, Saltburn. Its spires, sandstone, and cobbled streets are just a bit more romantic than its lesser counterpart. Oxford’s alumni have also been doing a lot of the heavy lifting. All of the Prime Ministers of the 21st century, bar one, went to Oxford. Oxford is as much a ‘stamp’ for success

as it is an educational institution. And though this is slowly changing, it is still a very real phenomenon.

While it is easy to gloat in the face of Cambridge’s comparative unpopularity, these numbers change year on year. In order for Oxford to stay on top, our generation must continue to do Oxford’s PR for it. By this I mean I hope that future Hollywood actors, Prime Ministers, and writers are in our midst – although I know they won’t be found anywhere near Lady Margaret Hall; for that matter, with its OX2 location, nothing is found near Lady Margaret Hall.



## It's not whether you rusticate, it's where: Suspension of studies at Oxford

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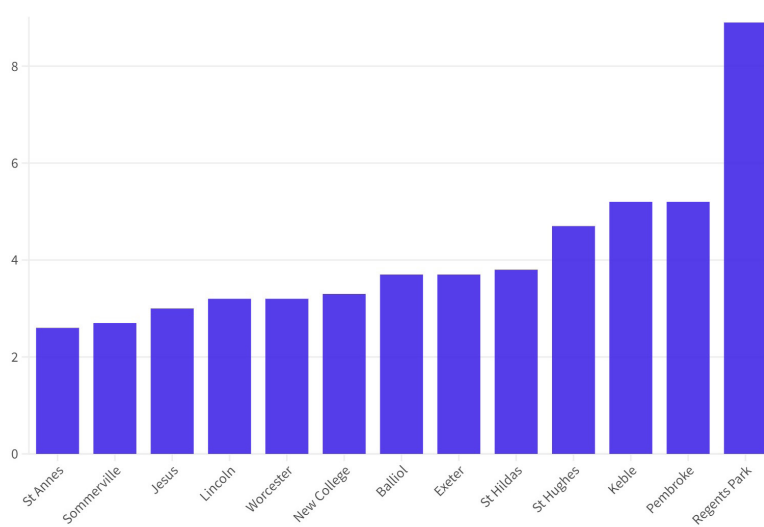
When approached for comment, Regent's Park told *Cherwell*: "Suspensions can be for many different reasons: health - both mental and physical, personal and academic. We have a robust system of mental health support and welfare provision within the College, and the number of suspensions bears witness to our being willing to entertain requests for suspension in order to support students through challenging circumstances."

### Experience of rustication

The majority of colleges impose a restriction on rusticated students' access to college facilities. St Hilda's suspension of status regulation states: "The presence in college of undergraduates who are not on course are a potential distraction to other students." Lincoln students are required to obtain written permission from their Senior Tutor before visiting College premises.

Library usage across colleges broadly follows the same pattern,

### Colleges by rustication rate



with permission being required from a college authority. The difficulty of obtaining permission and the reasons needed, however, differ between colleges, with some requiring a student to petition for access to specific college resources, such as archives, before being granted entry. St Anne's students are categorised alongside other guests, gaining access to the library so long as they form an agreement with the Librarian. Balliol, by contrast, only allows library access by "exceptional appointment."

Some college JCRs, such as those at Lady Margaret Hall and previously at St Edmund Hall, have dedicated representatives for suspended students. Multiple colleges refer to the JCR Welfare Officers and peer mentors as points of contact for support. These schemes are largely unregulated by colleges, existing primarily within

the JCR, and do not provide a source of consistent, centralised support that may be needed.

In response to a request for comment, the University referred *Cherwell* to the Common Approach, which aims to "ensure that each student at Oxford can receive excellent support, regardless of their course or college." Similarly, when asked for their policies, all colleges told *Cherwell* that students have continued access to University mental health services. The page for the Common Approach, however, does list the "college community"

## "39% of all Oxford students graduated with first class honours in 2021/2022, for students who rusticated, that figure was only 27%."

as the first source of support.

### Collections for returning students

College policies concerning collections for returning students are a major source of discrepancies in the rustication experience. Many colleges have students sit collections alongside their new cohort, with no grade requirement

for resumption of academic studies. Pembroke has some students sit collections to "assess the student's level of knowledge," but does not use them as a barrier to re-entry.

Some colleges, however, do impose a required grade in collections for students to resume their study. University College displays a particularly stringent policy, which it grounds in the College's need "to assure itself that the Student is academically prepared for return to College following a period of suspension." Therefore, at least one collection is taken with specific grades required. Previous versions of their handbooks stated that students who failed these return collections could cease to be college members, but the College declined to comment on their current policy.

The most common pass mark for Colleges that impose such

requirements is a 2:1, which can be a high bar to clear for students who've been suspended for a year. Students in these colleges are usually allowed library access in the weeks before their exams to facilitate their studies.

The discrepancies in college policies regarding collections means that one student's minor roadblock might be another's second entrance exam.

### Finals results of those who rusticate

Students struggling and choosing to rusticate are more likely to achieve lower degree classifications. However, the large gap in achievement prompts questions regarding college support for students suspending their studies and how effective rustication is as a process for maintaining a high standard of work.

Graduating with a First is the clearest benchmark of academic success. While 39% of all Oxford students graduated with first class honours in 2021/2022, for students who rusticated, that figure was only 27%.

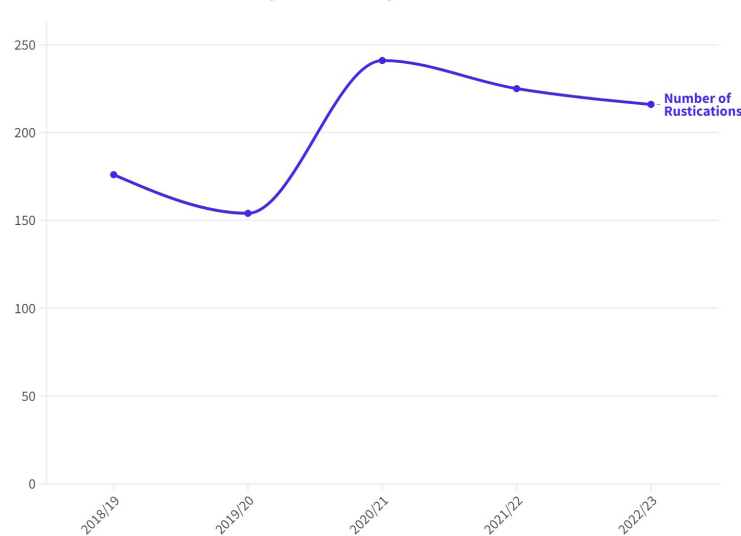
On the other end of the spectrum, while only 5% of Oxford students achieve a 2:2 and a miniscule 0.6% graduate with Third class honours, these rates rise to 11% and 4% respectively for students who have rusticated at any time. Since the vast majority of graduate schemes require a 2:1 or higher, these students are expected to fall further behind their peers after graduation.

In addition to these disparities in results, around 10% of students who rusticate end up failing to complete their degree. Again, it is important to emphasise that there are significant variations between colleges. Regent's Park, Teddy Hall, and LMH all have more rusticated students failing to complete their degree than graduating with Firsts, but Somerville has over double the amount of students achieving a First than failing to complete. There, a term before their students return, they are in contact with both the Academic Office and their tutors. It seems clear that the support structures in place for returning students have a significant effect on their ongoing success.

### The effect of COVID

Students disproportionately rusticated in the 2020/21 academic year when COVID-19 restrictions reached their peak. However, the impact of COVID on suspensions was not equal across all colleges. Somerville had the largest increase from 8 students in 2019/20 to 23 in 2020/21. In the same period, Worcester saw the amount of students rustication jump from 7 to 16 and Regent's Park numbers doubled. Other colleges, however, appeared largely unaffected, with both St Hilda's and New College dropping from previous years' figures. This could be attributed to the colleges' responses to the pandemic: St Hilda's did not fine students for breaking COVID

### Number of Rustications by academic year



restrictions, while Somerville administered 107 in the same period.

Furthermore, rustication numbers have not returned to the levels they were before the pandemic. This is in line with recent studies conducted by the University which show an increase in mental health problems both during and after the pandemic.

## "Devolution of procedure to the colleges regarding rustication leads to vast differences in outcomes for students."

### What do the students think?

A *Cherwell* poll showed that around 50% of students had considered rustication during their time at Oxford. Considering that only 4% of students rusticate every year, what explains the reason for the low uptake?

The poll also asked students who had contemplated rustication why they hadn't gone through with it. 51% of respondents were afraid of social isolation/stigma, 29% were worried of falling behind academically, 16% were concerned about finances, and 4% thought their college lacked the resources to support them through it.

Written responses to the question ranged from one student saying "I realised rustication

wouldn't solve my problems. I had to face them head on, rather than delay them" to another claiming "My college wouldn't let me! I had no legitimate academic or mental reason apparently."

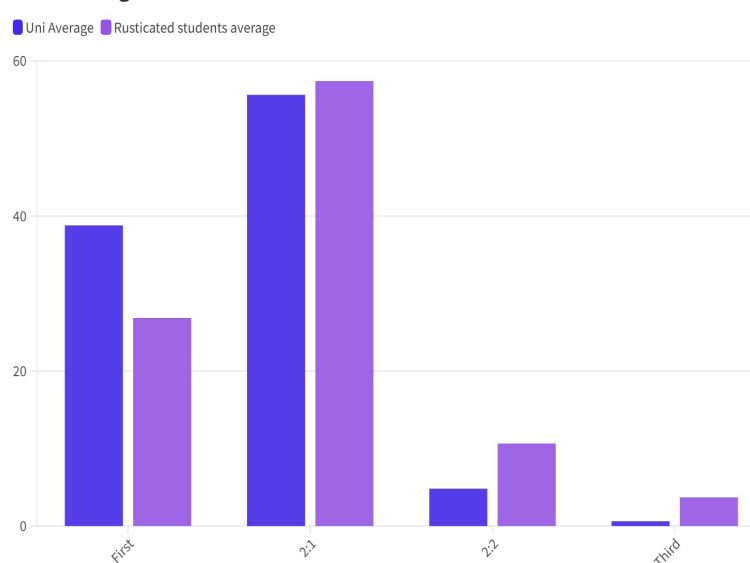
### Rustication Discrepancies

To rusticate, students need to work closely with their College as an institution and make a personal case as to why they need to suspend their studies. However College policies and guidelines can be confusing and unclear, while prospective support during rustication may seem insufficient. When combined with social stigma, these factors go a long way to explaining why most students don't seriously consider rustication.

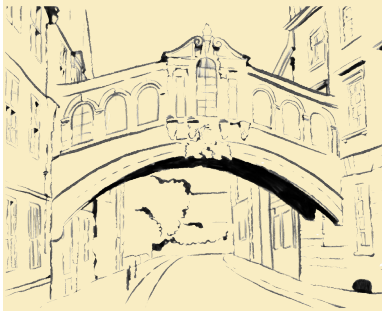
The personal nature of rustication already makes it a difficult experience to capture, but the diversified attitudes and actions of colleges offer no help: devolution of procedure to the colleges regarding rustication leads to vast differences in outcomes for students.

There is no university-wide standard for the responsibilities of rusticated students. The resources and academic support provided during and after rustication also depend on the particular college's guidelines. Colleges exist to provide a smaller, more supportive, academic community, and their individual nature is framed as an asset to the University, however in helping rusticated students, their differences appear to do more harm than good.

### Rates of degree classifications achieved



## Is social life in Oxford too expensive?



### Not any more than back home

Violet Aitchison

Being from Brighton I'm used to the pain of being charged seven quid for a pint at your local. I often find myself in Tesco spending thirty pounds on barely a week's worth of food, wishing we had easy access to Aldi or Lidl. However, knowing that when I go home, I'll be charged 5 quid for a mediocre coffee in a pretentious cafe, I often find myself wishing I had longer than nine weeks here. If nothing else, at least the student deals make Oxford a bit cheaper.

### The magic of Oxford costs too much

Raghav Chari

I'd argue that it's the unique parts of social life in Oxford that make it inaccessible. Things like balls and formals exist only here, and they're simply not reasonably priced. Lucky are those students that get to go to formals for under 10 quid; in many colleges, they're well over £20. And balls are stratospherically expensive, with most ball tickets being in the range of £150-300. The things that make the Oxford experience magical are out of reach for too many people.

### Is it even a serious question?

Oliver Sandall

Oxford is expensive. No matter where you go, you'll end up spending more money than you had planned. Compared to the mystical lands of £3 pints (Durham), Oxford's £7 pints are a scary feat to someone from further north than Birmingham (which, of course, is the dividing line). At the same time, of course, it's still cheaper than London – but that doesn't make it cheap. I just want a sub-five pound pint – please.

# Oh, do you know them on a first-name basis?

Alfie Roberts

References to politicians by their first names always occurred in conversations at the pub or debates at an 'afters' I was a part of. Yet, when I first began to rethink this habit, I was sat two metres away from one of its key perpetrators. Hearing Senator Bernie Sanders speak in the hallowed chamber of the Oxford Union in Hilary 2022, his croaky voice bouncing off the equally deteriorating walls, as he reached for his scrunched-up tissue used to stifle a runny nose, made me believe I might really know this man on a first name basis. His passionate oratory moved me, and many others that day; I left with a profound sense that I really 'got' him, I knew him, he was Bernie.

Connections between the political class and the electorate is an essential method in compelling voters to tune in to the decisions that manifestly affect their daily lives. Therefore, inviting the populace to 'know' their politicians on a first-name basis is an effective strategy in securing this association. We see these para-social relationships form all the time. A banner strewn across Stamford Bridge reads 'Chelsea: our religion', while some members of the 'Beyhive' actually do believe that Beyonce is their 'bestie'. People crave to feel connected to something bigger or more important than them; it is probably one of the only things that football hooligans and avid listeners of 'Single Ladies' share!

I left the Union, with a few similarly inspired pals of mine, and

ventured to Gloucester Green, to get a slightly-above-average noodle dish, as the awe of the occasion wore off a little. I began to re-evaluate my insistence I knew the Senator, more than ever before, by his first name. I thought about which other famous figures I might also know by their first name: Adele, Drake (although his first name, Aubrey, has been sneakily forgotten, much like the next name on this list), and, of course, Boris.

Suddenly, I was not so keen on the idea that I might call some of these powerful, influential, and charismatic figures by their first name. We call our friends by their first names because we share mem-

**“People crave to feel connected to something bigger[...] than them...”**

ories with them, we know their greatest secrets and, because we usually don't share a football pitch with them, where there might be a slightly greater tendency to call them by their surname and add the '-o' suffix at the end. (As a side note, I'm still waiting on the day someone shouts 'Robbo' at me to pass them the ball – the world will be better place once this happens.)

When we call our friends, peers, or acquaintances by their first name, there is a recognition there that we actually 'know' that person and therefore might be able to give them more sympathy during

a tricky period or support them when they make mistakes. We behave differently with politicians. Our political system requires us to hold them to account in a way we wouldn't our friends. In a functioning democracy politicians are challenged, so they truly serve their communities and are held responsible for the decisions they make. We might do this more easily if we rejected this familiar attachment we have to these figures. As I have tried to re-wire my brain to know 'Bernie' as Senator Sanders or 'Boris' as Boris Johnson, I am less forgiving.

For Senator Sanders, I found his answer to the issue of climate change at the Oxford Union followed a similar pattern to many of the older generation: a slightly patronising and wilfully unsophisticated claim along the lines of 'Oh, you young people are smart, you will figure it out'. For Boris Johnson, his once shiny veneer as a bumbling, affable, 'doofus', which albeit has already deteriorated significantly, looks even more like a rusty façade, hiding a calculated, performatively incompetent, political opportunist.

Now, I'm not suggesting we all start calling Drake 'Aubrey Graham' from this moment on, but I think it is important to apply a cynicism to the famous folk, particularly with political power, who push the idea that we should all know them by their first name. For the majority of these first-named politicians, it is an explicit campaign tactic. In the case of 'Hillary', or more appropriately Hillary Clinton, using her first name was "actively encour-

aged" by her campaign. Similarly, in the self-proclaimed "hilarious election advert" posted by the Conservatives' YouTube channel in 2019, Mr Johnson is referred to by the interviewer as 'Boris' within the first four seconds.

As a result, it is our critical judgement that falls victim, because we supposedly know these powerful political figures in a different way

**“For the majority of these first-named politicians, it is an explicit campaign tactic.”**

– they become more of a friendly face, and therefore we apply a different, more attainable standard by which we evaluate them. In fact, as I thought to the times I have fallen for this political ploy, I remembered that I even own a T-shirt from Senator Sanders' 2016 campaign embossed with 'Tio [Uncle] Bernie' on the front, when I know, or at least the last time I checked, the 82-year-old Brooklyn-born politician is definitely not my uncle. (If he is, that's a lot of Christmases in which I have missed the opportunity to convince him into wearing a Santa costume.)

Ultimately, we must try to resist the temptation, and call politicians by their full names, to help ensure they remain responsible for the immense power they hold and what they choose to do with it.

## The Debate Chamber

### Alicia and Morien go head to head, debating whether lectures or tutorials are more fruitful

An Oxford degree can feel like being thrown to the wolves of everything there is to know about your subject. Gone are the days of doing a worksheet in an hour and calling it a day, or even having a well-delimited syllabus. Here, there's always something else to read, something you're missing. Oxford courses may bless you with unrestricted access to infinite amounts of information, but they also leave you on your own to sort it out. This is precisely why tutorials are key, preserving the benefits of independent learning while providing a checkpoint of sorts, someone to make sure you're not straying too far off course. The obvious advantage of a



tutorial system is its personal approach: in essence, tutorials are a conversation with your tutor.

Conversely, I have found lectures to be a primarily passive learning experience. While I have enjoyed particular lecture series that could not be replaced with the material on my reading list, I do not learn better simply by hearing the content. Tutorials give you the chance to be challenged and learn from your mistakes, guided by an experienced academic. One hour can completely change how you had originally thought about the topic. Though it may take some real mental strength (who wants to be stuck in a seminar room at 9am on a Monday?), it is a mistake to treat tutorials like chores. Asking questions, documenting points of dispute, keeping the discussion on your mind – this is the way to make an Oxford course much more than a library card. Get some more bang for your buck!

Every university has lectures; the tutorial system is one of Oxbridge's main USPs. And the opportunity to discuss two-on-one with a world-leading academic is an opportunity not to be missed: it offers personalised support unlike anything else. Let lectures should not be so vilified. Of course, no one wants to drag themselves out of bed for a 9am lecture (especially if it's in South Schools, where the acrobatics required to balance your laptop on your knees is a constant impediment to focusing, and that's if you can even hear the person speaking with the awful acoustics), but a good lecturer can use 50 minutes to open your eyes to new concepts in a way which shouldn't be understated.

Not only are lectures the best introduction to a new area, allowing for a broad and critical overview of the literature, but lecturers can point to many different avenues of research which perhaps your tutors, often fixated on their special

areas of interest, wouldn't mention. Yes, whilst staring bleary-eyed listening to a droning voice, you might not understand all the concepts immediately, but through reading through the lecture notes or slides beforehand (if you are fortunate enough to belong to a department which has progressed beyond the stone age, which sadly can't be said of quite a few) you will find that lectures can explain concepts clearly, in a way which is far more pleasant than desperately scouring the web for essays or random YouTube videos produced in teenagers' rooms. If you still don't understand, the tutorial should clarify, but it's always better to treat your tute as an opportunity to expand and strengthen rather than learning for the first time.



# #Oxfess29033: Who runs Oxfess?!

Raghav Chari

Who runs Oxfess? That's the simple question that no one in this university seems to have an answer to. Oxfess is the heart and soul of student communication at Oxford. It's where we can be our truest, most unfiltered Oxselves. And yet, we have no idea who manages this platform at all. Who is the Rupert Murdoch that controls us all?

A quick search on the current Oxfess page shows that the first post was made on the 14th December, 2020. For an institution that feels so firmly embedded in everyday life at Oxford, this is surprisingly recent. In these three years, nearly 30,000 posts have been made. From Oxsh\*gger to Oxsh\*tter, relentless complaints about workload to desperate, grasping Oxloves—it is all present on the Oxfess hivemind. Anything and everything that an Oxford student can think of has been put out on Oxfess.

That's what really makes Oxfess so special to this university—it is incredibly accessible. The veil of anonymity exposes the deepest, most depraved desires of an Oxford student for all to see, our unchecked horniness and our unfettered groupthink. I would even go so far to say that it is the most authentic voice of Oxford students, more than any of the big, institutionalised student forums. The SU, any of the JCRs, even student newspapers—they can't compete with how well Oxfess brings to the light our most unhinged selves.

Then, if it is so vital to student life, if it is Oxford's bubbling subconscious, why do we know barely anything about how it's run? All the other student platforms are largely democratic and transparent. The SU and the JCRs are elected, and their inner workings are (somewhat) open to scrutiny. Similarly, student newspapers are always open to complaints and suggestions, and their entire machinery is student-run. Even the Un-

ion, for all its vices, is of the students, by the students, for the students.

But Oxfess remains a mystery. Certainly, it is meant for Oxford students. Is it of and by the students? Even I, a certified Oxfess Top Fan™, don't know, and I'd bet most of you lot don't either. If I could hazard a guess, it was probably set up by some enterprising student (Hamish Nash or Shu Huang?), and given that four years have passed, they're probably not at Oxford anymore. Maybe they still manage it in their spare time elsewhere, or maybe they've handed it down to someone else who's still at Oxford. Yet, it's equally likely that it was set up by some shady Rupert Murdoch-esque opportunist that now controls their media empire with an iron fist. How dare we abide by such ignominy!

I'd like to clarify that I'm not encouraging or asking anyone to doxx or harass the Oxfess admins (please :( I don't want to be sued for libel). They clearly don't want to make their identity public, and it's completely fair to respect that. Oxfess is a Facebook page that they own, and it's their choice how they want to manage it. None of us have a 'right' to it.

Nevertheless, I think it's worth asking the student community how we think student communication should be managed. We strive to make our forums democratic and transparent because free and fair discussion is important to us. Then, do we want our favourite gossip page to remain in the grip of Big Brother?

The opacity of Oxfess makes the admin a virtual despot. Which posts will be approved and which ones won't? They alone decide, and we cannot challenge them. Surely the OxDespot has biases, like all of us do—how are we certain that the posts we see don't reflect them? When controversy breaks out, and they believe one side over the other, can we be sure they aren't flooding Oxfess with only posts supporting their side? When transphobic, clas-

sist, racist, sexist posts are submitted, it's their definition of what 'crosses the line' that decides which get approved. Big Oxfess has total control over the platform; they shape the content of our thoughts with their subliminal propaganda.

In truth, Oxfess seems to be moderated reasonably well. I think the variety of posts are (more or less) unbiased and representative of us students; I know I'd much rather complain about my flatmates' disgusting habits to strangers than talk the problem out. And when troublesome topics do come up, there's usually a decent job done at handling them. But I don't really know that for sure. And I have no assurances as to how long this quality of moderation can last. For the moment, we're relying on the benevolence of an unknown Oxytyrant to get by; like Kim Jong-Un, their hand may drift over to the big red button anytime. I don't think Oxford's subconscious should be like that—no, we as students simply cannot abide such a thing. We have bent all the other student platforms to our will; now we must seize the means of communication!

But I'm not entitled to demand that Oxfess open itself up to scrutiny; none of us are. At the same time, we need to be aware that, as long as we continue to consume content on Oxfess, we will be subjected to the yoke of media tyranny. Only we can emancipate ourselves.

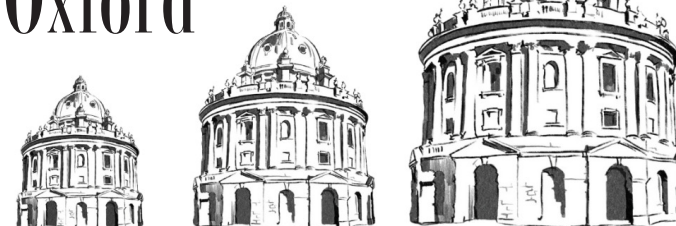
The clearest solution is to return to democratic and transparent student forums—student newspapers and the like. Fat chance of that. Who'd be arrogant enough to imagine that a ghastly echo-chamber like *Cherwell* genuinely represents Oxford students? Oxfess has the anonymity and convenience that lets us be as deranged as we want. That isn't unique to Oxfess, however—any anonymous confessions page can do that too. So maybe the answer is a competitor to Oxfess, one that's of, by, and for the students. But problems here arise

too. Oxfess simply has the first-mover advantage, the name recognition, the prestige that takes years to build; like Murdoch's media monopoly, it is too big to fail. It is too entrenched to be seriously challenged, let alone displaced, by some new page. The only chance for such a thing to succeed would be for the SU to fund it, and that means SU oversight. Who wants them in charge of anything that's actually important? At least

our current despot has some sense of humour. I shudder to imagine a regime run by the SU—they'd probably ban Oxhates.

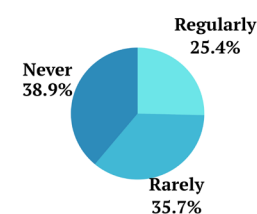
As far as solutions go, nothing seems immediately visible. Unless some new idea can come up that can displace Oxfess, we will continue to be mind-controlled by this murky despot, the Rupert Murdoch of Oxford. How long do we want to continue like that?

## The view from Oxford

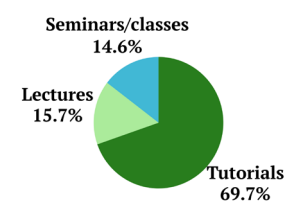


This week, we asked our Instagram followers...

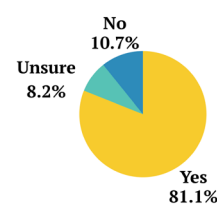
### Do you watch UC or Only Connect?



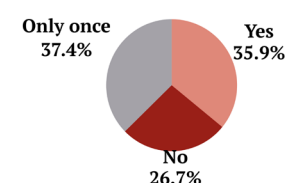
### Where do you learn the most?



### Will you vote in the general election?



### Are ball tickets worth it?



## A crash course in British Politics

This week, **Roy Shinar Cohen** explores 'who will be the next Prime Minister?'



This week's article will focus on the two people who are, in all likelihood, the candidates for Prime Minister in the next British elections. Just a quick reminder, elections in the United Kingdom generally happen every five years, unless parliament is dissolved earlier, which is not unusual. Every citizen votes for a member of Parliament who will represent their constituency at the House of Commons and the party that wins the most constituencies (out of 650), will try and form the government. The winning party's leader – today, realistically, either Rishi Sunak (Conservative) or Keir Starmer (Labour) – will become the next Prime Minister.

But, who are these people? In this article you will get to know the version they like, and that they don't.

First, the Prime Minister: Rishi Sunak. Sunak tells us he was born to ordinary immigrants to the UK and grew up in a middle-class family; his mother owned a "tiny" pharmacy, and his father was an NHS family GP. His parents sacrificed a lot so he could attend a public school and the University of Oxford (PPE at Lincoln), and he then studied for an MBA at Stanford. His professional career was in finance, he co-founded an international investment firm and succeeded thanks to his hard work. Sunak is married and has

two daughters.

However, what does this story miss? According to *The Times*: "Sunak is not an immigrant success story, but an English public school and Oxbridge success story. He is the product of an upper-middle-class education." Furthermore, it is important to know that although Sunak portrays himself and his family as average, upper-middle-class, his wife is the daughter of one of India's richest men and is worth around £300 million. The family has a mansion in Northallerton, a house and an apartment in Kensington, and an apartment in California. In politics, he is regarded as a non-ideological liberal who made smart tactical decisions in supporting Johnson and had a very quick rise to power.

Now, to Sir Keir Starmer. Starmer, married with children, tells us he grew up in a working-class family, his father worked in a factory, and his mother was a nurse

for the NHS. Also, he was the first in his family to attend university and studied law at Leeds. After graduating he became a lawyer taking many pro-bono cases, including against big corporations, later worked in North Ireland, and then became the Director of Public Prosecutions. In 2014 he received a knighthood for services to criminal justice.

But, what doesn't he tell us? Quite importantly, his opinions are not clear. Starmer has been known to politically flip-flop and adjust his message to the crowd and his needs. As a young Oxford graduate student, he became involved in Socialist causes, and seemingly maintained many of those opinions. However, he has also moved the Labour Party in a more centrist direction and often supports centrist ideas. Additionally, he is perceived as a boring, corporate person by voters, and not political enough by the political class.

Finally, it is important to note that there are other parties in Britain, but only the big parties are true contenders for the premiership – meaning one of these two will, unless there is a leadership change, become PM.



Image credits: Sergeant Tom Robinson RLC/OGL v1.0 via Wikimedia Commons

# Friends, foes, and primates

Melinda Zhu speaks with Emeritus Professor of Evolutionary Psychology, Robin Dunbar

**H**ow many friends do you have? Perhaps a circle of close friends, followed by people you talk to on a regular basis, to people you recognise and say hello to. Then there are the relationships we maintain online, both followers and the people we follow.

Professor Robin Dunbar's research looks at what primate behaviour can tell us about how we form and maintain these friendships.

"I spent the first 25 years of my research career studying monkeys and ungulates mainly in East Africa and in Scotland, so I was very attuned to animals and animal behaviour." This sensitivity to behaviour was helped by a multicultural upbringing – "I grew up embedded in five different cultures and being bilingual in one of them and somewhat conversational in a couple of others. Those got me interested much more in humans." What brought the two together – primate behaviour and human interaction – was the social brain hypothesis, "an explanation for why primates have very big brains" based on the complex social interactions they have.

Professor Dunbar produced evidence that there was a relationship between individual brain size and the group size of primates, and used the data to see whether this also applied to human groups. "I made a prediction off the back of the equation for primate data and then went away and looked in small scale societies to see whether this number came up." From the data, Professor Dunbar found that the brain size of humans means that we can maintain up to 150 social relationships. In other words, human groups have a cognitive limit of 150 people.

This number, now known as 'Dunbar's number', then appeared in all sorts of different contexts. "We began to become aware that this number just keeps coming up all over the place. Not just in small scale ethnographic tribal societies, but even in the modern world in all sorts of likely contexts, like in the number of people you phone, even the size of German residential campsites, that was just bizarre." The idea that there is a fundamental mathematics and logic underpinning how we socialise is a compelling one.

But what do these findings tell us about how we form friendships, and the way that we socialise? The recurrence of 150 suggests something special about social groups

of that size, and a related result finds that the optimal number of close friendships is 5. "That got us interested in why these groupings particularly stick together – what it is about these numbers that makes them particularly stable, and what is used to create that sense of community and that's really what got me into friendships. In the next 25 years or so, my research career was spent trying to figure out what on earth friends are."

Many of the research findings make intuitive sense, and the scientific evidence explains universal experiences, including why we make social faux pas. The truth is, it takes years of training for our brains to easily process social cues, including non-verbal communication used in everyday social interactions. Professor Dunbar's work on the first neuroimaging paper looked at where in the brain processed the emotional

**"To know how somebody really feels about you, ignore everything they say. Look at how they touch you."**

cues of facial expressions. Only in adult brains was this emotional processing automatic, which in younger ages occurs in the frontal lobes requiring more cognitive effort.

"It takes 25 years to figure out what's going on before you can automate all this stuff, which probably explains why teenagers struggle so much with their relationships because they are still trying to figure out what's going on. Eventually you get some intuitive grasp of how this very, very complex world works. [Social interactions are] unbelievably complex, probably the most complex thing in the universe."

An obvious question is how technology has impacted the way we relate to one another, and whether technology has helped or hindered our social connections. Dunbar reminds us that "these things have happened before." Take the invention of letter-writing, for example. "I have come across cases where sisters working in different big houses in the same village as domestic servants are writing to each other by the first post saying, I'll meet you

at lunch at the cafe in the village. And by the second post, the reply comes back saying, right, I'll see you there. These were clearly mostly the younger people because this was the new technology." Technology has always created generational differences: "they've been very similar in [how] they've been adopted and [in] the differences they've created between generations, but they've not completely destroyed society."

Despite the pervasiveness of FaceTime, Instagram, or texting, the importance of face-to-face interaction was most obvious after the experience of the Pandemic. Yet the significance of in-person interactions is felt even in less extreme circumstances: whether returning home for the vac, or seeing old friends and family, being in the same place as someone is not something that can be replaced by technology, even if it does help us keep in (virtual) contact.

Professor Dunbar explains the science behind this - the truth is tactile. "Notwithstanding digital media, it seems to me the pull of face-to-face interactions is still so much stronger. And that's what all the research says, because there's something engaging [in] being able to stare into somebody else's eyeballs across the table in the bar, or restaurant or whatever. When we are engaged in conversation with each other, in the normal course of life and face-to-face, we do a huge amount of physical touch constantly." Whether it's a handshake or a hug, these make a huge difference to our interactions, not least because of the biological response this triggers in our brains. "We have all over our skin these highly specialised receptors [...] that are a one-way track to the brain that triggers the endorphin system which is the principal chemical that underpins a sense of bonding. Touch becomes very important, and we do it casually as a pat on the shoulder and a stroke on the arm, or a fiddle with the hair, all these kinds of things you just do with our close friends and family really without thinking about it. It's this constant, ongoing physical contact that reinforces and builds up this sense of a close relationship.

"It's clearly because it creates a sense of intimacy. But it also highlights, I think, the fact that touching is very, very important in how we mediate our relationships. I've said for a long time that if you really want to know how somebody



feels about you, ignore everything they say. Look at how they touch you. Because a touch is worth 1000 words, any day, if you really want to know how they feel about you. You can't lie with touch. You can lie with words. That's the bottom line."

In different group settings, understanding how the endorphin system functions highlights the importance of activities like eating together, and spending time with one another in person. "We've found things that allow us to step back from that physical contact, and that means you can then group several people simultaneously [and] therefore increase the size of the group. These include things like laughter and singing and dancing and stuff, but interestingly, they also include eating together. Drinking alcohol together is a really big trigger for the endorphin system. It's not the alcohol, but the endorphins you get addicted to."

We just don't get the same response from online interactions, and Professor Dunbar suggests there are limits to sustaining friendships that don't have the same in-person interactions. "There's something weird that goes on in the dynamics of relationships, the chemistry of relationships, when you're in a face-to-face context, and part of that is being able to see the emotional expressions in full size." Even if technology is able to solve the tactile elements of social interaction, Professor Dunbar thinks "there are some limits beyond which there's a mystery. In the chemistry of how this works, that is

simply not translatable via the internet, sadly." This certainly helps explain the knee-jerk negative reaction at the prospect of transferring our real-life interactions into a technological metaverse.

Although messaging and seeing our friends' stories are ways of keeping up with what they're up to, Professor Dunbar thinks that friendships have a built-in 'decay function', where people naturally drift further and further apart. "My conclusion, having worked on this and talked about it a lot, is that what the technology does is act as a good sticking plaster. It slows down the rate at which friendships would naturally decay if you don't see people."

The research suggests that it takes about three years of not seeing a good friend for them to become an acquaintance, "somebody you once knew but kind of lost track of. [...] They've changed and you've changed and your interests have changed so that you would no longer have as much in common as you had when you were seeing each other regularly. [...] My sense is what digital media does, and what social media does in particular, is slow down that rate [of decay]. They hold it there, but nothing is going to stop that friendship becoming an acquaintance-ship if you don't see them in person long enough. So, at some point, you have to keep meeting up to reboot things."

*Thank you to Professor Robin Dunbar for this interview.  
Image courtesy of Robin Dunbar.*

## Quickfire Questions

### Nugget of wisdom?

The single most shocking and important piece of information that we've learned in the last decade is that your mental health and well-being, even how long you're going to live, is determined by the number and quality of close friendships you have.

### Last book you read?

*Belonging*, by Owen Eastwood

### Last song listened to?

'Us and Them', by Pink Floyd. Which I think is brilliant because of the pacing of the song. The walking bassline is an absolute classic.



# “It’s about bringing people together.”

*Cherwell* is in conversation with Chair of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, Laura Marks CBE

*Laura Marks is founder of Mitzvah Day, Nisa-Nashim, and has been Chair of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust since 2016. Holocaust Memorial Day takes place every year on the 27th of January.*

Last week marked 79 years since the liberation of the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. Since 2001, on the 27th of January, there has been an international commemoration of those impacted by the Holocaust and other genocides. Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) is an opportunity to remember and reflect on humanity in its darkest moments but also to light the flame – the HMD icon – that illuminates a better future.

*Cherwell* gestured to Holocaust Memorial Day 2024 by meeting with the Trust’s CEO, Laura Marks CBE last Thursday.

When we met, she had just come off a Zoom Call with Imam Monawar Hussain discussing the forthcoming events for HMD in Oxford. She spoke highly of him – “he’s a remarkable person”.

This interest in interfaith relations forms much of what Laura Marks seems to stand for in her work with charities across the nation (and she does work with a substantial number of them). The same year she became Chair of Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT), in 2016, Marks co-founded the charity, Nisa-Nashim which is a network of Jewish and Muslim women. ‘Nisa’

and ‘Nashim’ mean ‘women’ in Arabic and Hebrew respectively.

In the current climate, one would then lean in to ask how the work of the network has been impacted by events in Gaza and Israel. Fairly early on in our discussion, Laura Marks, before I could ask, said “it’s a mess”.

Marks had steam rolling off her fast-turning wheels that had taken her to and from Manchester just that morning for a HMD event. Being busy seems to play a strong part in her approach to charity work and activism. Marks is a multitasker. Once during our conversation I

**“I think this government has a philosophy that people should raise their own money.”**

tripped up on the organisation we were discussing and was promptly corrected: “are we talking about chairing the HMD Trust, here, or my work on the Board of Deputies?”

Before Marks began work for the HMD trust in 2013, she was a deputy on the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Of the charity work we did discuss, her time as Senior Vice President on the Board was not without complexity:

“It was all politics. I felt my position made it difficult to get things done and I like to get things done.” Why exactly? “It’s been going 200-odd years.” Indeed, founded in 1760 by a sect of Iberian Jews to honour George III, the Board has had nearly 300 years to establish a way of doing things. And, as a representative body of the Jewish community, the Board is not small: “as well as a Board of Trustees, it’s got representatives – deputies – from synagogues and schools and organisations, and they’ve got all sorts of committees and structures and presidents and vice-presidents.” You get the picture; it’s big.

Yet, for all the challenges, it was Marks’ time on the Board of Deputies that brought her to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. “I think Tony Blair wanted to ensure the HMD Trust retained a strong Jewish element so on its trustee board, three places were allocated to the Board of Deputies and two to the Holocaust Educational Trust.” So

when a place on the HMD board was offered in 2013, Marks took the opportunity.

Laura Marks is Jewish; her immediate family has no connection to the Holocaust. “My great grandparents came to this country. My family is mostly Lithuanian, some Polish. But if you trace it back, there are parts of the family missing.

“People often say to me ‘why are you involved in HMD?’ But, actually, I think it’s better that I’m involved because I think it’s the right thing to do and not because its history personally affects me.”

Standing behind HMD, according to Marks, is this sense of community bonding regardless of social background. “It’s about bringing people together who otherwise wouldn’t meet each other.” Often, Marks observes, you have the two extremes of insular, exclusionary communities and “fragmented, even polarised groups that lack a sense of belonging”. HMD seeks to combat that.

Each year, HMD has a theme to guide participants’ reflections. In 2024, the theme is ‘Fragility of Freedom’. This seems to resonate, also, with the Trust whose finances have become precarious in recent months. Previously fully funding HMD, the government has now capped funding; fundraising is the alternative.

I asked what was behind the government’s cap – COVID, the Cost of Living Crisis, mini-budgets? “I think this government has a philosophy that people should raise their own money.”

“I’m not a good fundraiser,” Marks states. But it has a role in the work she does for Mitzvah Day, the faith-led day of social action Marks founded in 2008. “I could ask you to get up on a cold Sunday morning to make sandwiches in a food kitchen but I won’t ask for money.” When philanthropy, government funding and trusts’ donations don’t always pull through, is there an alternative? “It may be the difference between being able and not being able to do something to make a difference.”

Marks has resisted emphasis on fundraising for Mitzvah Day. “Asking for money is a particular skill.” But so is avoiding doing so. Why is that important to Laura?

“Firstly, it forces you to actually engage with the charity. Asking children to bring a pound into school goes on a long journey to actually reaching the charity. Secondly, everyone’s asking people for money. And the third thing has to do with Jews and money.”

This year there will be a mass fundraising push to respond to the government’s capped funding. At the moment, 70% of the HMDT’s funding comes from the government. Would that control anything the HMDT does?

Marks says, “I don’t think it’s that simple. What we’re there to do is to

commemorate and learn from the Holocaust, the victims of the Nazis and the subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur. That’s our mission until we can say we have learned from genocide for a better future. It’s not that we have a different agenda from them, I just think we might express things differently.”

As for other faith-based charities in the UK, Marks brought up the recent case of government plans to stop funding of the Inter Faith Network over the supposed absence of condemnation of the Hamas attack on the 7th of October last year.

At this point, our interview was brought to a close. There needed to be sufficient time for Marks to liaise with Magdalen College President, Dinah Rose before the Q&A event that evening.

**“People often say to me ‘why are you involved in HMD?’ But, actually, I think it’s better that I’m involved because I think it’s the right thing to do and not because its history personally affects me.”**

We said farewell and I left with a strong sense of Laura Marks’ frustration with the bureaucracy of fundraising. Marks’ ethos is perhaps better characterised by that of Mitzvah Day: charity through acts of kindness rather than through donation.

With a background in advertisement, Marks knows that detachment from money isn’t risk free. At Mitzvah Day, “we run hand to mouth; we get the money in and we spend it. That’s true of all my charities. It’s a very scary way to run things – there’s no cushion.” But with fewer sources of money, you have fewer people to appease and arguably a charity can run with more freedom.

In an opinion piece for *Jewish News*, Laura Marks proposed that “freedom is not a free lunch. It comes at a price, and that price is eternal vigilance.” Like HMD’s theme reminds us – freedom is fragile.

*Thank you to Laura Marks for the time given for this interview. Image courtesy of Barnabas Balint*



# CHERBADLY

## Exclusive Interview: The Tescalator

This week, we're interviewing one of Oxford's most iconic individuals: the escalator in the Tesco Express in Oxford. We sat down with – or rather on – the Tescalator to get the scoop on what it really thinks...

**CHERWELL:** Hello Tescalator! Thanks so much for letting us interview you. How are you doing today?

**TESCALATOR:** VMMMMMM

MMMMMMMMMM

**CHERWELL:** So tell us – what's it like ferrying people to and from the snacks & cleaning products every day?

**TESCALATOR:** VMMMMMM  
MMM-VMMMMMMMMMMMM  
MMM-VMMMMMMMM

**CHERWELL:** Haha, you know it! How did you first get started in the

escalator business?

**TESCALATOR:** VMMMMMM  
MMMMMMMM-VMMMM-VMM  
MM-VMMMMMMMMMMMM

**CHERWELL:** Some might say it's quite unconventional to have an escalator in a supermarket, though. What attracted you to Tesco of all places?

**TESCALATOR:** VMMMMMM  
MMM-VMMMMMMMMMMMM  
MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

**CHERWELL:** Do you remember everyone who travels on you? Who's the most famous passenger you've ever had?

**TESCALATOR:** VVVVMMMM

MM-VMMMMMMMMMM-MM-  
MM-MMMMM

**CHERWELL:** Wow, what a story! Has Timothee been back since?

**TESCALATOR:** VMMMMMM  
MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM  
MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

**CHERWELL:** Now, your life's certainly had its ups and downs; I'd say probably an equivalent number of the two. You've infamously suffered a number of highly-publicised breakdowns over the years. What's your response to those who have criticised you for this?

**TESCALATOR:** VMMMMMM-V  
MMMM-SHKFMSKHSSshoo-

aummbh... shnk... shnk... vv...vvv-  
v-vvv-VVvv-VvVVMVMVM-  
VMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

**CHERWELL:** Lastly, I've heard rumours that you've been flirting with the lift in the Waterstones across the street – is a little spring romance on the cards?

**TESCALATOR:** VMM

**CHERWELL:** Fair enough, sorry. It's been great talking to you, Tescalator – stay functional!

**TESCALATOR:** VMMMMMM  
MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

*Editor's note: the Tescalator is currently not fully functional. We wish it a swift recovery.*

## 1989: Now and Then

### CHERWELL archives

By Kelsey Moriarty

# Council threat to college bars

Ivan Briscoe

OXFORD City Council has launched a campaign to combat alcoholism, with special emphasis being placed on college bars.

According to Shareen Mathrani, the council's recently appointed Alcohol Officer, "The alcohol problem is magnified in university life, where many clubs and societies use drinks to attract members. The whole student culture leads to over-indulgence, which can be highly dangerous."

A variety of measures to increase awareness and counter alcoholism are planned by the council. They see an end to discount priced beers and spirits with prices being raised to a similar level as pubs, as a vital first step. Increased involvement by OUSU and more information to be distributed are also needed.

"I accept much of this will

be unpopular and greatly resented in the student community", said Miss Manthrani, "but it is important. The fact remains that the cheaper alcohol is, the more is drunk."

"There are sensible limits to alcohol intake for obvious health reasons. Students should really not be drinking in the bar every night of the week."

As part of Alcohol and Drug Awareness Week, stalls have been set up at Oxford Polytechnic and information has been distributed in the bar. However nothing has been done in college bars.

The University Counselling Service said it was vital to publicise the issue early in the University. "Many people arriving in Oxford are having to handle social drinking for the first time, and certain individuals are definitely at risk."

The service has recently been given more funds to tackle the problem and a

walk-in counselling service is to be created soon.

A spokesperson denied that anyone seriously wanted to create a 'dry' Oxford but underlined that "the existence of solitary excessive drinkers is clearly a source of great concern."

● Robinson College, Cambridge, has set up a special alcohol abuse team to tackle the problem of undergraduate "lager louts".

The College, which is the newest in the University, believes that the problem of drunkenness, and connected violent behaviour, has increased significantly in recent years.

Stress is blamed by many as the factor which turns undergraduates to drink excessively, and a recent letter to 'Varsity', the student newspaper, claimed that increasing pressure to perform academically is turning "perfectly normal, nice people into boisterous, foul-mouthed louts."

This week, another from 1989! I've found the print editions from 1989 to be so full of novel, interesting, and thought-provoking articles – aside from the WH Smith porn scandal article that featured last week, there is an investigation into the scout system that is almost identical to the May 2023 investigation done by *Cherwell*. Indeed, one of the most rewarding things about looking through the archives is seeing how oddly similar everything is – flicking through the older prints, articles from the 1970s and the 2000s could very well have been published last week. As an historian it is quite

comforting to believe that things exist in a sort of cyclical way. Now and then are not so different.

And this article. Titled 'Council threat to college bars', it highlights council awareness and unease at the overindulgent alcohol culture at Oxford, propagated by discounted college bars and the general stress of life here. It reminded me so much of the anonymous article written for *Cherwell* last year, 'Alcoholism at Oxford University: A Perspective'. The culture created here is one of excess, and this seems to be a perennially problematic aspect of life at Oxford. The article

highlights the fact that 'the alcohol problem is magnified in university life, where many clubs and societies use drinks to attract members.' This very much remains the case – drinking and debating events remain the default format for societies.

And where are we now? Of all of the mitigating measures outlined in the article, how many were put in place? College bars are still discounted, drinking events are still the main events on offer, and Oxford is as stressful as ever. If last year's article is anything to go by, 1989 and 2024 are not so different in some ways.

# John Evelyn

2nd of February 2024



The real John Evelyn returns to find my position challenged by someone calling themselves Alt JEV. The issue is, Alt-J seems to fancy using AOL Mail, an emailing client as old as their information. Perhaps the use of this antiquated software could hint as to which antiquated committee member has become this new Alt JEV. Hope you'll actually stand up at handover, unlike the last John Evelyn who got someone else to do it.

Much to Goldilock's dismay, members will not be subject to repeated Gucci Gang lyrics in the chamber after a speaker cancellation. Being forced to heavily promote the only other decent speaker this term. Let's hope the new Piano deal AIDA wear tweed is bringing, can bring some ACTUAL musicians.

Here we go again with a second run at becoming top finance bro from Miss I Can't Escape Student Politics joining the Treasurer spot with RO World's Chosen One. I wonder why the head of the East India Company didn't upgrade to CFO. I'd have loved to watch the 2 Treasurer candidates battle it out after last term's complications with seccies (1 in particular).

John Evelyn wonders when The Neighbour's contributions in future silly committee meetings are going to actually meaningful suggestions. He's been right or asked a meaningful question the same number of times as the number of likes on Alt Jev's Facebook post. Leon Boy and the degree-changing debater have found themselves in a complex situation-ship. After

the two of them found themselves in Ginger Spice's naughty book for

crashing a social and leaving when they promised to work, they don't seem to be seen apart. Clearly the appeal of eating posh fast food daily is intoxicating to some women. I wonder if she knows Leon Boy has an active Tinder profile. I pity anyone being horizontally hacked by this kid. This doesn't bode very well for the head of the East India Company solidifying his college base if Leon Boy is brunching at his college weekly following nightly entertainments after long hours hacking about Tesco's.

Much to the worry of Teddy's Panda, the Barrister seems extremely confident following his definitely not slate social event. With strong ties in the bloc of what's been SAID, what the entirety of the panda's slate relies on, tensions are high on the slate regarding his potential 3rd slate splitting their vote. Will Teddy's Panda lose his LinkedIn connections at the time it means the most to him? Lesson: Never trust finance bros.

Tiktok Queen and Dmitri Mendeleev both seem incredibly keen on reading and learning more about the library which is extremely odd for hacklings – you can't send slate graphic pics to a book. Unless there are ulterior motives behind joining Book club. Obsessed with Watson better get reading!

Alas, the mystical world shall pick a new leader. A Marxist at the helm to rule us all? Perhaps in more ways than through just the rules. If a Pres-elect isn't decided soon by the appeal board, there is a chance that the RO takes on the acting role of President! Just because the TABS visited doesn't mean we need to copy their corrupt practices. We do corruption better at the Oxford Union! At least we are open about OUR election denialism.

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**Anuj Mishra**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

This week, in the never-ending quest for editorial inspiration, I have turned one of our cover stories: ‘Oxford Council approves plan to expand cycle lanes’. As a non-OX1 resident (embarrassing to admit, I know) cycle lanes are a cause dear to my heart.

In my glory days of living in college, I had naively assumed the entire city was the cycle-friendly haven that is central Oxford. Back then, my biggest worry was avoiding collisions with errant Vois on the Broad Street mini roundabout and subversively sprinting down Cornmarket Street without getting shouted at. But fast-forward to Michaelmas of second year, I was faced with the prospect of making it around the Magdalen roundabout in one piece and quickly realised that the motorists of this city aren't all that fond of cyclists.

Or perhaps they are just not so fond of my cycling – beats me as

to why, for I am an excellent driver.

Ruminating upon this, I have compiled a list of suggestions addressed to the relevant authorities to improve the state of cyclists and cycling, a great British pastime, in the city of dreaming spires:

1. Find my stolen bike! My bike was stolen on the 22nd July, 2023 between the hours of 9pm and 8am. The police report I filed on the same day was not pursued, and my bike never recovered. I am happy to disclose the reference number upon request.

2. Free bike lights for all! After my lights got stolen for the second time I simply decided to not to buy anymore and, therefore, do not cycle anywhere at night. This has drastically impacted my quality of life, for I am no longer able to cycle to Tesco when I want a little snack. Actually, screw that –

3. Free bikes for all! After my bike got stolen (see point 1), I came to possess a very rusty, barely functional women's bike, complete with ribbons. The aesthetic is delightful, the function is not.

4. More Voi parking spots! One time I couldn't dock my Voi at the space near my house, forcing me to do a U-turn away from my destination and causing me to pay an extra 20p for the extra minute it took.

The above suggestions, or should I say, demands, are non-exhaustive and based upon my own personal experience. Please address further suggestions or any other correspondence to [makecyclinggreatagain@ox.ac.uk](mailto:makecyclinggreatagain@ox.ac.uk)



**Lottie Tellyn**  
*Deputy Editor-in-Chief*

As one of few finalists on the senior editorial team, I find myself thinking about how little time I have left in Oxford. Hilary is almost half-way done and pretty soon, it will be Trinity again and I will be sitting in exam schools, furiously typing away as I try to prove that I have actually learned something from my degree (I have!).

So, I could talk about the things I've learned (lots about politics and philosophy, decidedly less about economics). Or I could talk about The University Experience (but I'm a Mertonian, so I'm far less

qualified to talk about that than the rest of the editorial team). Or I could talk about Oxford – the formals, the black-tie events, the city. But that's not what's made these last three years.

Instead, my Oxford experience is marked by the people it's been filled with. I feel very lucky that the last two-and-a-bit years have been filled with living my life alongside my best friends. We've done countless library trips and essay crises together. The walls in our house are crammed with photos. We cook together. Their care packages and hot chocolate were

playlists and genres...

What led to my dependency on music, you ask? I blame my parents. They both went to university to study music and, although I've never quite shared their appreciation for classical music, nor am I able to read sheet music, they are the reason for my Spotify wrapped having 65,000 minutes of listening time in 2023 (despite having lost my headphones for a whole month...).

And that's because my house was always filled with music growing up. My mum taught her violin students in the living room (ouch), tried to teach me piano countless times (unsuccessfully), and my brother and I tagged along to countless concerts. One of my first memories as a kid is also watching the music video to Christina Aguilera's *Hurt* with my dad (a masterpiece); he later helped me burn a CD of my favourite songs.

While I've always loved different types of music, a somewhat unintended side-effect of this – and unrestricted access to the internet – was that I did go through an emo phase. This culminated in me playing bass in a band (which was very cool!) and dying my hair jet black (which was slightly less cool! Don't ask for pictures, please). However, this is all in the past... although I now play guitar and have in fact busked myself, doing so in Oxford is a little too intimidating. Instead, I will continue forgetting (or losing) my headphones and ranting about music whenever I do get the chance.



**Oliver Adelson**  
*Deputy Editor-in-Chief*

Earlier last week, I had the rather strange experience of being chastised for my stance on using ChatGPT for coursework. I am sure this is by now a common occurrence – students are becoming increasingly liberal in their interpretations of what counts as their own work while administrators hold fast to their limited notions of originality.

But what made this encounter strange was that I was forced to justify to a student from another university why I did not use ChatGPT to complete my coursework. I should say that he was not alone in encouraging me to try the ChatGPT tack. In fact, while Oxford's guidance on AI warns stu-

dents not to go too far in their use of tools like ChatGPT, it states that for tasks like “producing a summary of an academic paper, providing feedback on writing style, or listing key concepts likely to appear in a forthcoming lecture,” AI is both permissible and helpful.

I disagree. To explain why, I believe it will prove useful to reproduce (verbatim?) the arguments I marshalled against the ChatGPT advocate.

First, the skills that people typically invoke when justifying their use of ChatGPT – editing, summarising, etc. – are skills which are not at all inconsequential or incidental. Part of being a good writer is the capacity to condense,

edit, and improve your writing. I believe it was Hemingway who said “Write drunk, edit sober” – he clearly believed that reviewing one's work required a great deal of concentration and was likely more important than producing a first draft. Perhaps students are outsourcing editing to ChatGPT to delay sobriety.

Second, ChatGPT editing is a gateway to ChatGPT essay writing. It starts out with asking ChatGPT to fix a particular phrase, but after a few rogue editing sprees, one simply types the tutorial essay prompt into ChatGPT and tells it to write 1,500 words. This is bad and forbidden by the University.

Third, Sam Altman looks funny.

# Crops, commoning, and colonialism: lessons from the Oxford Farming Conference

Artwork by Yuan-Yuan Foo

As the dark days of January set in, delegates from all over the world met in and around Oxford for the largest gathering of the agroecological movement on the planet. **Rufus Hall** reveals all.

For anyone strolling around Oxford over the 4th to 5th of January, make no mistake: the abundance of tweed-clad range-roverists had nothing to do with the Oxford *Real* Farming Conference, but rather its more conservative brethren event the Oxford Farming Conference, dismissed by co-founder of the ORFC Ruth West as “a bastion of industrial agriculture that was sponsored by corporates and attended by Ministers”. Then again, I would not know how OFC’s attendees were dressed: I was not in the city at the time, instead attending some of the 400 events at the ORFC via my computer.

The ORFC is a symposium of progressive agricultural voices looking to reform the world’s broken food system. By uniting journalists investigating the inflated influence of agricultural big business on policy makers, and activists addressing the systemic racial injustices that pervade modern industrial agriculture, the conference painted a bold picture of what the future of farming must look like for the survival of humanity.

The conference went entirely online during Covid years, and ORFC’s continued commitment to live streaming speaks primarily to a desire to motivate representation and participation of people living in Majority World countries – anywhere outside Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand and Japan – who were entitled to free tickets.

This commitment to engaging an ever-wider audience permeated the conference’s Opening Plenary session, broadcasted from the City of

Oxford’s impressive town hall at St Aldates. “We need to bring people along with us. We can’t just be farmers and academics,” one opening speaker said: “we all eat food, we all drink water.” This was a piercing reminder of our constant engagement with industrial agriculture at a consumer level, at which its deadly procedures are always obscured from view.

Beyond evangelising food system change, a wealth of speakers also underlined the spiritual imperatives of reconnecting with both the land and ourselves. In what would seem more fitting of a church service than an agricultural conference, speaker Charlotte Dufour of the Conscious Food Systems Alliance requested a few minutes of silent reflection: “For all of you online, I invite you to imagine a golden thread that is weaving between you and everyone in Oxford,” Dufour soothed, before calls of “Globalise the struggle! Globalise the hope!” erupted from the town hall, unsettling agro-business execs in Oxfordshire and beyond.

Whilst unsure whether to hoist the red flag or settle in for a morning’s meditation, I was left certain that the ensuing sessions would entail exciting interactions from across a spectrum of voices in progressive farming, from the radical neo-socialist, to the spiritual, to those who support environmental and food system change within a state-market framework.

Before considering the conference itself, one question remains: why, you may ask, is our food system in need of change? Well, in the first instance, it fails the 9 million people who die from hunger or related causes every year. Moreover, 11.3%



**“The conference painted a bold picture of what the future of farming must look like for the survival of humanity.”**

of the world’s population go undernourished every day, 98% of whom live in underdeveloped countries. Perhaps, then, the solution to hunger is international development. But no, not at least if international development means industrialisation and increased fossil fuel supply,

both of which would entail greater greenhouse gas emissions, leading to more extreme and unpredictable weather patterns, further threatening harvest cycles and food security, especially in developing countries. The global food production system is also staggeringly inefficient: an outstanding 62% of all cereal crops, 88% of soy and 53% of pulses were used to feed, not people, but livestock in 2018/19. This constitutes a vast loss in biomass (which would otherwise feed people), most worryingly in the form of greenhouse gases produced by livestock, such as methane.

A possible solution to the failures of industrial agriculture is an alternative system of farming called agroecology. This applies ecological concepts to farming, with the aim of mitigating climate change, putting communities and farmers first, and incorporating biodiversity into ag-

ricultural methods. Ripe and ready to quash any sceptics, founder and member of IPES-Food (International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems) Emile Frison set out to sing the praises of agroecology at the session entitled: ‘Agri-Spin: How Big Industry Influences Food and Farming.’ The premise of the talk was to challenge the narrative propagated by the European industrial agriculture lobby that it is only industrial agriculture that can guarantee food security (food security, that is, for - most - Europeans, not the 904 million people who go to bed hungry each day).

This narrative was dismantled by Frison, who spoke at length about Andhra Pradesh’s community-managed natural farming programme in India, an initiative of AP’s state government. 6 million farmers are part of the programme, who stick to agroecological principles such

as only cultivating only those crops indigenous to the region, and forgoing synthetic pesticides for natural alternatives, growing food for a population larger than England's. A study from the University of Reading found that participant farmers reported higher yields than in other Indian states where conventional or organic farming methods reign supreme. Frison reported that farmers reported 50% higher net income, as well as a 30% reduction in health costs and sick days taken. One wonders whether the apparent success of the programme in Andhra Pradesh (known as the rice bowl of India) has had to do with its particular agricultural conditions. In fact, the state is home to six different agro-climatic zones, and five different soil types. The sensitive-to-nature tenets of agroecology make the system, if anything, more equipped to deal with variable farming conditions.

One outstanding factor present in the Andhra Pradesh success is the willingness of state government to implement policy that pushes for positive change. The Government of AP established Rythu Sadhikara

## “We can't just be farmers and academics. We all eat food, we all drink water.”

Samstha, a state-owned not-for-profit, that offers “hand-holding” support to smallholders. This support consists in part in the deployment of agroecology experts or “Community Resource Persons” to small agricultural communities attempting to undergo the transition in farming methods.

Such direct state involvement suggests a pushback against the influence of big capital on farm ownership and agricultural timescales. The short-termism of investment fund stakeholders in large agricultural businesses, working to 10-year cycles to generate returns, has led consistently to more intensive chemical and monocultural practices, undercutting the need for soil replenishment and crop diversity. Individual smallholders, who own between 80% and 90% of farms worldwide, but under 30% of farmland, are increasingly in thrall to the cycles of these investment funds, and the conglomerates and retailers in which they are invested. It makes sense then, that it is only through state intervention, challenging the hegemony of agricultural

free-market structures, that a global shift to agroecology will ever be possible.

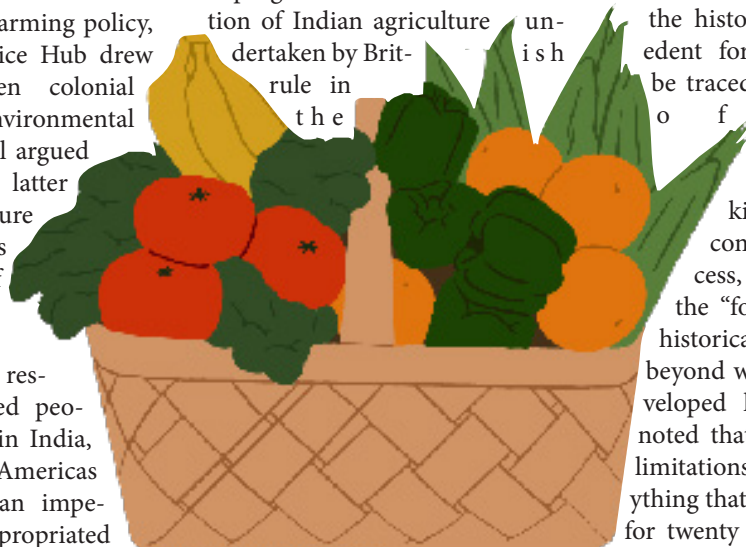
‘Land as Reparations and How To Get There’, chaired by Naomi Terry of the Stockholm Resilience Centre, was the second session I attended. Moving away from farming policy, this talk at the Justice Hub drew connections between colonial accumulation and environmental extraction. The panel argued that reforming the latter approach in agriculture would help to address the former's legacy of systemic racial inequity.

The case for land restitution for colonised peoples is well-known: in India, South-East Asia, the Americas and Africa, European imperialists violently appropriated land, enslaved and expelled peoples, deforested, exhausted capital resources, and forbade indigenous subsistence farming and fire management practices. Native people in colonised countries and in the diaspora are therefore owed a debt in land and resources on account of this historical wrongdoing. Yet, Esther Stanford-Xosei of the Pan-African Reparations Coalition in Europe argued that land restitution is not just a retrospective phenomenon: “People are experiencing that ethnocide, that genocide, that ecocide right now.”

Climate change poses a threat first and foremost to people in the Global South, and particularly women. Stanford-Xosei argued that it can and should be seen in the continued, destructive legacy of the colonial ravages of the Western markets. As formerly colonised communities are the ones with generations of experience in extraction and land dispossession, they are hence best equipped to lead during a climate emergency. “The movement has moved beyond concern with the extinction of particular groups, to the extinction of all of us. Let us lead, let us take the reins!”

Besides advocating for “re-matriation” – a return to mother earth, involving a restitution of the African borders predating the 1884 Berlin Conference, any concrete idea of the panel's vision for a post-colonial and climate secure future was, for the uninitiated, thin on the ground. Yet such a criticism misses the point; the discussion was not there to trade in on policy,

but to remind of the significance of colonialism in the history of the modern, global agricultural system. Much as the community farm management programme in Andhra Pradesh runs contrary to spirit of the programmatic commercialisation of Indian agriculture undertaken by British rule in the



## “What we need for today is a new charter of the commons, for the 21st century.”

19th century, the talk served as a polite reminder that any attempt at reform will have to look outside the framework of trade, commerce and capital that was a hallmark of European colonial domination.

Overall, the session spoke to a wider - if contentious and largely sidelined - discourse on the horrors and injustices of colonial extraction, and the need for some form of reparations for colonised peoples. In the session entitled, “Commons and Commoning: Progressive Visions of a Good Society,” economist Prof. Guy Standing of SOAS Soas and the Basic Income Earth Network argued that the “commoners” of England have suffered the effects of a more subtle theft of common resources over the last millenia. Standing's contention was that a sustainable future must involve a reversion from the predominance of societies built around private ownership, to these more inclusive and eq-

uitable systems of self-governance and common production.

Standing made the historical case for the ‘commons’, a term which denotes places or resources under common ownership and to which we all have a right. In England, the historical and legal precedent for the commons can be traced back to the signing of the Charter of the Forest in 1217, the first statute of its kind to award rights to common people to access, inhabit and cultivate the “forests” - which in its historical meaning extended beyond woodland to all undeveloped landscapes. Standing noted that the 1623 Statute of limitations determined that anything that has been a commons for twenty years must stay that way. “The national health service, which was set up as a commons in 1948 became a commons in 1968. So legally, we have a right to sue governments that have been privatising it over the last thirty years, because they have been taking away our commons,” Standing said.

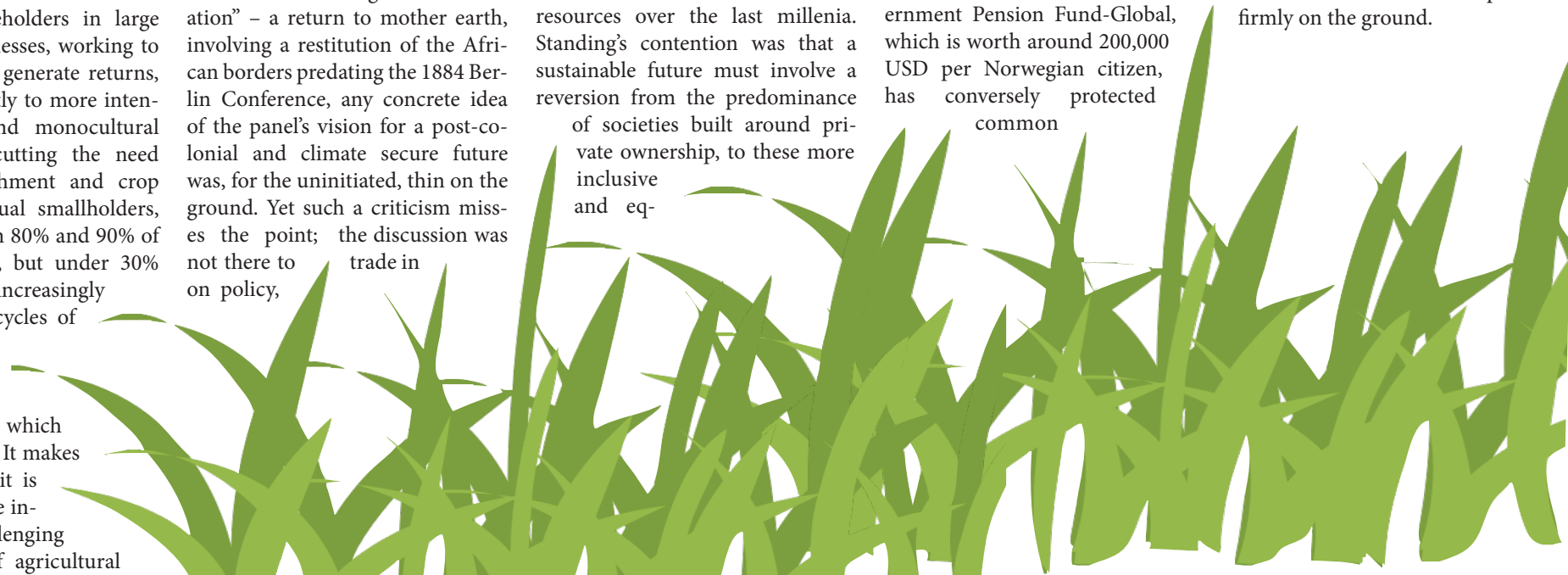
From the 1773 Enclosure Act to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, where “138 million square kilometres of sea was converted into state property,” Standing argued that much of the history of the last 800 years has been defined by the piecemeal erosion of the commons, and the commoner's access to it. Notably, there are modern precedents for protecting the commons: whilst Margaret Thatcher was busy overseeing the privatisation of Britain's North Sea oil, the windfall from which she used to slash the top rate of income tax by 20%, the Norwegians established their own state-owned oil company Equinor, whose surplus profits were invested in what is now the largest sovereign wealth fund in the world. Thus, last year, while British politicians argued whether to impose a windfall tax on British oil and gas companies during the cost-of-living crisis, Norway's Government Pension Fund-Global, which is worth around 200,000 USD per Norwegian citizen, has conversely protected common

Norwegian resources, future-proofing the country's welfare and pension provision for years to come.

The genius of Standing's argument was to present common ownership not as a radical alternative to the sanctity of private property, but as an aspect of the status quo eroded by political radicals keen to line the pockets of companies and venture capitalists. Standing made the case for land restitution extending beyond the formerly colonised, to all common citizens of the United Kingdom and beyond. Overcome by the helpless moral rage of a lone witness to this injustice, he even broke into tears towards the end of his speech: a reminder that the discourse of appropriation on British soil is not nearly as well-established as it should be. He was nevertheless able to compose himself enough to suggest that a replenishment of the commons would begin with a “progressive land tax, starting on large holdings,” followed by a tax on pollution, which constitutes a depletion of a further commons, the air we breathe.

“What we need for today is a new charter of the commons, for the 21st century,” Standing concluded. “It is the charter of freedom; it is our charter and today we need to revive that spirit. Because only if we revive our commons will we have a good society.” Yet what was so striking about the ORFC was not its “spirit,” but how speakers were committed to real policy in order to enact real change. When political progressives are too often accused of being idealists with no grounding in reality, concrete visions of land taxes, common ownership and government support for smallholders transitioning to sustainable farming methods could not have been more refreshing.

Only time will tell whether our leaders will heed such suggestions made by the ORFC's diverse array of speakers and keep pace with the reality of climate change and food insecurity. In the meantime, it is comforting to know that some dreamers have their feet planted firmly on the ground.



# The language of cooking

Selina Chen recounts how, at home and at university, she speaks through cooking.

Under Oxford's dreaming spires and overlooking Magpie Lane's centuries-old cobbles is a simple modern kitchen. I like to think of it as my friends' little corner of the world. Here, nine or so teenagers gather for homemade meals twice a week, crowding around induction hobs and squabbling over how an onion ought to be chopped. We claim a space at the heart of Western scholarship and fill it with aromas of multi-ethnic cuisines that reflect our diversity.

I remember, surrounded by this warm messiness, the many times I've spoken the language of cooking.

When a flock of chattering Chinese-American aunties congregate for the terrifyingly efficient task of folding dumplings, you can always tell which dumplings are produced by whom. Some arch like the spine of a mountain, sealed by intricate folds the shape of a lotus flower, others lie flat like a tame leaf, smooth-edged and round-bellied.

My mother's dumplings sit primly with curves like the crescent moon – a shape she learned from my grandma, a petite woman with missing teeth and a lyrical Shandong accent. My grandma learned it from her own mother, a beauty with 4-inch-long feet crushed by societal expectations of the last foot-binding generation. Inherited from this line of Northern Chinese women, the crescent-moon dumpling is now proudly mine.

Dishes, like stories, pass down through generations. In my California Bay Area community, most Chinese families know some version of dumpling-making, much like the commonalities found in stories of shared culture and history. We fold these stories into existence through shared words – ingredients like fluffy flour and minced meat – and common grammar – the skilled kneading and flattening of dough under soft palms and hard rolling pins.

Cooking, then, is a language we speak.

We gather for potlucks on Chinese New Years and Moon Festivals, our multicultural cuisines and bilingual murmurs building a new home an ocean away from our homeland. If I translate our language of cooking, we'd be saying 四海为家 This is family.

I learned the language of cooking when living in Morocco on a year-long US government program to study Arabic. With each personal connection and unplanned adventure, I fell deeper and deeper in love with the wide world out there, wonderstruck. But at the same time, the awareness that I was the only Chi-

nese person around grew sharper, a wound irritated by the constant harassment that followed me down the streets.

"Ching chong Jackie Chan."

"Korea?"

"So you're not pure American."

Since moving to the US aged eleven, I'd been living in an Asian-majority community that taught me to believe America is a country of immigrants, even if some people refuse to accept this fact and its beauty. Home is where I order tacos in Spanish, organise Indian catering for debate club, and make spring rolls with my half-Vietnamese family-friends – I call them my cousins when I don't bother explaining that we are family in every way but blood. Yet, the doubts and confusion of Morocco made me wonder, guiltily, if I was American enough.

**"Dishes, like stories, pass down through generations [...] Cooking is a language we speak."**

My palette soon began craving Chinese food but there wasn't a single Chinese restaurant in my city. So I made my first Chinese dish for my host family: a simple dish of tomato and fried egg noodles, cooked with trepidation that they might dislike the strange flavours. In the language of cooking I was probing, uncertainly, "my home tastes like this – is it acceptable?"

Their response was lukewarm.

The Western holiday season marked peak homesickness for my American friends in Morocco, many of whom had never spent the holidays away from family in a country that didn't celebrate it. On Christmas Day, we gathered for a potluck party.

I brought hot chocolate and most of my friends brought sweets. However, George went all out and made fifty Vietnamese spring rolls with exquisite peanut sauce. I imagined his meticulous preparation process: a white guy from Virginia softening sheets of rice paper in warm water and tucking chopped salads inside.

My Jewish friend Jacob remarked that it was his first Christmas without eating Chinese food. He explained how, in New York City where he's from, Jewish families

have a centuries-long tradition to get Chinese food on Christmas Eve because no other restaurants were open. He remembered waiting with friends in the biting cold to get their takeout. I pictured the scene: Christmas lights, Hanukkah candles, and red lanterns all decorating the same street where queues of Jewish residents wrap around the corner like an embrace. I pictured America.

If I'd known about this tradition, I told him, I'd have cooked for him that Christmas. In the language of cooking we'd have a conversation between two minorities that historically didn't fit in, but found their place nonetheless.

Slowly I began meeting the few Chinese expats living in Rabat and some Moroccan university students studying Chinese. Together we dunked thinly sliced meat in bubbling hot pots and folded sticky rice balls around sweet stuffings for the Lantern Festival. I thought I could teach my Moroccan friends to make dumplings.

To a medley group, I demonstrated rolling and folding techniques. They quickly caught on after a few oddly-shaped experiments. Imane and Sara, especially nimble-fingered, filled up a large tray at impressive speeds. Watching the dumplings tumble in a pot of foamy hot water, I mused that there was something unusual about all this.

Then it clicked: All the dumplings looked the same. They all sat primly with curves of the crescent moon – like mine, my mother's, and my grandma's.

I thought of how, so far away from my grandma in China and my mother in America, I passed on our crescent-moon dumplings. I told our stories, encoded in the language of cooking. I said: "thank you for celebrating my culture."

By the time Ramadan rolled around in late March, I was speaking in Moroccan dialect and functioning in society undaunted. I decided to fast. For a month, I went without food or water from 4am to 7pm before feasting on iftar meals, the hunger and thirst bonding me closer to my local community.

I pondered what to cook for a potluck iftar at school and settled on orange chicken, a fusion cuisine invented for Americans with inspiration from Chinese food. Orange chicken represents the unique branch of food created by centuries of Chinese immigrants in America – inauthentic to the original glowing with a unique social and historical value.

Chinese cooking never uses precise recipes but rather asks you to judge what is "just right," relying upon instincts developed over a

lifetime. My orange chicken, too, was a whimsically instinctive creation. I fried battered chicken and caramelised them in bubbling orange sauce, with spring onion and sesame tossed into the sizzling pan. The resulting sweet and tangy dish was devoured with fervour by Moroccans and Americans alike.

I overheard one of my American friends explaining to a Moroccan that this chicken is not merely Chinese, nor merely American, but a fusion of both in its essence.

Like me, I thought.

While I had been experimenting with cooking since childhood, my early attempts were like mere babbling – flavours without a profound meaning. But in Morocco I found my culinary fluency, the composition of prose and poetry in a blend of recipe and creative flares. I was saying: "I'm Chinese-American."

During my last week in Morocco, I decided to cook tomato and fried egg noodles again. I kneaded fluffy dough and cut strips of noodles by hand. I knew my way around the kitchen.

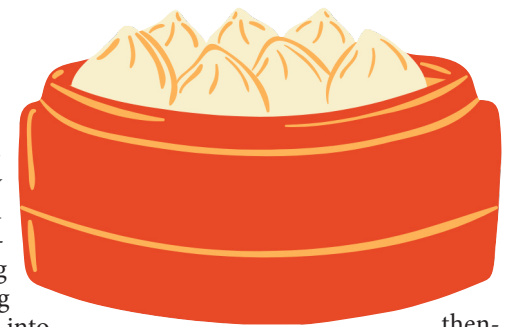
What was once a question had now morphed into a declaration: "My home tastes like this."

My host mom took a bite. "Bnin bizaf!" she said. Very delicious.

I returned to California with new vocabulary in my language, chickpeas and turmeric and other ingredients I'd never used before. With these, I made harira soup and chicken tagine for friends and family, giggling at their struggles to eat with fingers instead of forks or chopsticks. Through cooking I was saying, "Morocco is my home too, and I miss it."

Another year, another home. From different colleges around Oxford, my friends regularly flock to our little kitchen, the spatial heart of our group. Liyanah, of Sri Lankan heritage, made us curries with rich and spicy flavours just like her mother's. Will, Christmas-obsessed but denies it, made reindeer fudge and brought us a cupcake-decorating kit – resulting in some artistic masterpieces and some less-than-mature jokes. I cooked everything from simple ramen to more elaborate dishes like orange chicken, Mexican rice, and Moroccan tagine.

Not only do the dishes express meaning, so does the context of sharing. The early morning noodles during freshers' week were an introduction, a "not sure who you are yet but hey" to Lucas and Jake, two



then-  
strangers  
who have now become my close friends. The pasta on a random Tuesday when our dining hall cancelled dinner on short notice was a message of care, a "don't worry, I've got you." The taste-test hash browns I offered to neighbours, knocking door to door, were also my checking-in, an "it's been intense, how are you doing?"

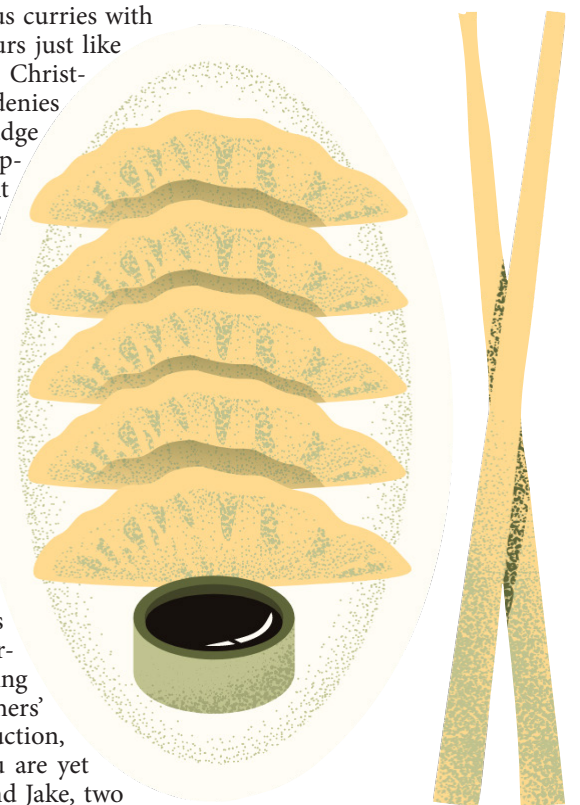
When I cook with friends at uni, I unshoulder the burden of formal dinners and confusing table etiquettes, of immaculate subfusc and formidable architecture, of glamorous lecture halls and Rousseau-esque pontifications – of everything too posh, and too white. I become myself again in our chaotic kitchen with its multi-ethnic food. Here, I'm the only Chinese person, and the only American, but that's okay because home is no longer one specific place, but the embrace of all places.

On Chinese New Year, inshallah, I will teach my British friends to fold crescent-moon dumplings, tucking all the pieces of myself – China, America, Morocco, and England – into savoury stuffings.

After one of our potlucks, I posted a group photo of us with the Arabic word "يتلوي" (yitlawi). The next day, Liyanah told me that she'd drawn up a family tree of our friend group based on our personalities.

She had no idea that يتلوي meant "my family." I told her, and we marvelled at the coincidence of how we'd both come to the same thought.

Or perhaps it wasn't a coincidence, but that we communicated through the language of cooking.



## Music

## Cherwell introduces: Zahra

## Joseph Lomax

In our Introducing series, Cherwell will be bringing you the best up and coming artists in Oxford. This week, Joseph interviewed Zahra.

**Please introduce yourself!**

I'm Zahra, a 2nd Year Philosophy and Theology student at Christ Church, and I've just released my debut single, Windows Down!

**Who is your biggest musical inspiration?**

It's impossible to choose one! Whenever I think about this I try and remember what I'd play on my family's CD player from when I was about 4. Justin Timberlake, Madonna's Hard Candy, Alicia Keys, Jennifer Hudson, Prince. So, a lot of pop, soul, and R&B: which I feel inspires me when I'm writing pop songs to use jazzy chords, or to incorporate an R&B drum pattern or influence.

Right now, I'd say my biggest writing influences are Boygenius, Phoebe Bridgers, and Olivia Dean. But I feel like the music of my childhood is just so ingrained in me sub-consciously I can't help but refer to it.

**Has your experience at Oxford influenced your writing/performance?**

ing?

Oxford's given me so many experiences to write about: I wouldn't have gone interrailing this summer if it wasn't for being at Uni which is an experience I wrote multiple songs about, or experiences of dating, boys, romance. Being in a new place and meeting new people is bound to expand your horizons. Funnily enough though, while being here gives me material, I find writing in Oxford really hard. As we all know, it's so intense, and I find I can only write properly during the vacations: my emotional capacity isn't there during term, and turning an emotional experience into a creative endeavour is hard to do here.

**What is your first musical memory?**

It's a hazy memory I have of when I was 2 or 3, watching Mariah Carey's We Belong Together music video. It's just so nostalgic to me. It was my sister's favourite music video, so we would watch it on the TV together and have a little boogie.

**Do you find any connection between your studies and your music?**

Doing Philosophy and Theology forces me to think deeply about religion, God, the world, and per-

sonal identity. After studying these things in depths and having 1 on 1 tutes it's hard to get away from it sinking in personally as well: ever since I could recognise my love for philosophy and theology, I've had this existentialism which intuitively helps me with songwriting. My studies certainly help me think about my life, my emotions, and experiences more deeply, which goes hand in hand with songwriting and unlocking my creativity.

**Describe your sound in three words.**

Groovy summer pop.

**Where do you want to be in 10 years?**

I'll be 30... that's crazy! Ok so there's two options. Realistically, I want to reach a point

where I can look at my career and be happy and satisfied. Making a comfortable living from music, no side job or struggling to make music my main purpose.

But if we're saying the sky is the limit, I'm still getting used to sharing my dreams with other people, like I didn't tell people I sang until less than a year ago. I like to keep my big dreams close to my heart.

**What's your favourite song right now?**

Kind of rogue, but it's Tell Your Friends, by the Weeknd and Sober II (Melodrama) by Lorde.

I'm in an angry, Hilary, it's dark outside and I'm getting

drunk 3 times a week vibe! I'm gonna cheat and give you two.

**What is a song that made you want to become a songwriter?**

Well, it's not a song but an artist: I have to say Taylor Swift. I think I learned piano and guitar because she plays them. Even though I was writing songs and melodies

and poems since I was 6, when I remember being 10 at the piano, I remember thinking: 'I'm going to write a song because Taylor Swift writes her own songs.' I felt like I couldn't be a true musician unless I wrote my own songs. I also had this knowledge where I knew my voice wouldn't get me where I wanted on its own, so I had to write.

**What do you wish was different about the music industry in 2024?**

Tik Tok is a double-edged sword. It's free and accessible, in an industry that is inherently exclusionary, and built on who you know. However, it's become not just a tool, but a necessary medium for music promotion. Imagine Paul McCartney, or Amy Winehouse, as influencers: these cool, phenomenally creative people, selling songs on Tik Tok? It feels like if you want to be an artist you have to be an influencer, which so many people don't want! It's jarring for a lot of independent musicians, when labels expect you to have an online presence.

Zahra's debut single, Windows Down, is out now. Her debut EP of the same name is coming in late April.

Follow Zahra on **Instagram:** @zahra.sahmad



## Books

## The Autobiogra-phony

## Nina Naidu

I woke up this morning, entangled in my silk sheets and gazed upon my impeccable visage in the colossal seven-foot long mirror. The revelation of my perpetual attractiveness was, unsurprisingly, my first triumph of the day. A rigorous fifteen-minute journey through the expanses of my ultramodern chic mansion led me to the arduous task of overseeing my office, where my dutiful secretary valiantly faced the burden of responding to my many mundane emails. Naturally, I needed a reprieve, so off I went for an urgent Thai stone massage. The inconveniences of my charmed, perfect life persist, as does the indomitable monotony of unparalleled opulence. Life is tough, friends. It always is.

A master of saying everything and nothing all at once! I sure would make a great celeb. Reading certain celebrity memoirs feels like deciphering the elusive aspects of their lives drowned in mundane details and words that I'm almost certain didn't come out of their own lexicon. Not only is it uninteresting, it's also a real pain to slog through.

While some autobiographies disappoint, like Prince Harry's *Spare*, others, such as Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, receive my highest praise. With the surge in supposedly

self-written celebrity biographies, I can't help but ask: are they truly penned by the authors themselves, and does it matter if they aren't?

Some celebrities, particularly actors, attract avid followers eager to delve into the intricacies of their careers, family backgrounds, and personal lives. For example, *A Pocketful of Happiness* by Richard E Grant.

Attending Grant's talk in Oxford during his book tour was a real privilege, providing insights into his upbringing in Swaziland (now Eswatini), his relationship with vocal coach Joan Washington, and his fascination with Barbra Streisand (so I'm sure he is thrilled to also read her recently released memoir). With a blend of tenderness and humour, I was excited to read it after his talk, only to be a little disappointed at its structural integrity. Whilst heartwarming, the narrative lost its charm halfway through with excessive name-dropping and meandering stories.

Similarly, I encountered struggles reading *Making It So*. Despite Patrick Stewart's 83-year-old perspective, the memoir delved mostly into the first 25 years of his life, emphasising acting camps and teenage jobs. Surprisingly, it lacked depth about his later career, especially his iconic role in *Star Trek*. The focus on career overshadowed glimpses into his personal life, which mostly re-

involved around childhood or his affairs, but overall provided an interesting perspective, particularly for those interested in his career at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

I am certain that these books by Stewart and Grant were written by the actors themselves; they are filled with charm but not much e d -

itorial inter-vention. The personal insights humanise these celebrities and yet at times their exploration of topics so

extravagant, such as Grant's friendship with King Charles, makes it difficult to connect with them. Engaging with their audiobooks, however, proves satisfying, given their natural storytelling abilities.

As fascinating as these grandiose memoirs are, dealing with fame, wealth, and lavish lifestyles, I find a deeper connection with narratives that offer a truly hu-

man experience, filled with emotions and relationships beyond the spotlight. Paris Hilton's memoir, *Paris*, for example, defies expectations, considering her ditzzy socialite persona. It is filled with heavy content shedding light on

trauma and abuse during her time at a Utah boarding school. Despite her millionaire heiress status, Hilton's transparency about collaborating with ghostwriter Joni Rodgers adds commendable authenticity— a rarity in an industry-

ties for not openly acknowledging using ghostwriters, deeming it ingenuine and arguing that it diverts resources from lesser-known authors – but I disagree. J. R. Moehringer, the ghost writer for *Spare*, contends that ghostwriters are essential for crafting the most compelling stories. He likens it to commissioning an artist to paint someone else's vision. Celebrities bring unique and captivating details, and if they require a writing expert to skilfully articulate their story, collaboration sounds sensible. Ghostwriters, well-versed in the process, contribute to a more polished book, steering clear of mindless word salads in pursuit of authenticity.

This collaboration enables an unconventional audience to experience the joys of reading, even if only as a gateway into the literary world. Consequently, this can prove beneficial for the publishing industry by generating more revenue. Celebrity memoirs are a reliable source of profit, providing the means to support and publish lesser-known authors. It's a win-win scenario!

As long as celebrities are transparent and not intentionally misleading their audiences, there's no reason why we shouldn't applaud ghost writers to share their journeys with the world.



try where many celebrities don't acknowledge external help.

Critics often reproach celebri-

# Art

## Remembering Oxford: memorialising “The City of dreaming spires”

Yoshimi Kato

In the common room of the Taylor Institute Library, a framed row of historical engravings depict scenes of Oxford. Among them is an engraving by J. H. Parker, dated 1849, capturing a moment of “The View of the Martyr’s Memorial and Aisle”. The Martyr’s Memorial, which still stands today on St. Giles, overlooks pedestrians with parasols and scholar’s robes. On its steps two men watch another play with a dog. As I exit the library, it strikes me that in its memorials of people long deceased and its unchanging historical landscape, Oxford seems often at a standstill.

Martyr’s Memorial was erected in 1843 in remembrance of three Protestants who were burned at the stake in 1555. The buildings that Parker depicted surrounding the memorial can be observed today: St. Mary Magdalen church, the facade of Balliol College, and the buildings of Magdalen Street. Perhaps the largest discrepancy between the scene from 1849 to today is the layout of the road. While people leisurely stroll along St. Giles in the fading inked landscape, I am on the lookout for cars as I cross onto a median strip under construction, in an attempt to recapture the perspective of Parker.

Observing the memorial framed by green netting, I am reminded that despite Oxford’s seeming timelessness, things are still subject to change. Memory of a place is constantly reformulated, physically through construction and through the ways in which people remember them. Restorative works



to the Martyr’s Memorial were done throughout the 20th century, and more recently, in 2002. The bright paint one can observe on the shields is thus not the same used in the 19th century, an imposition of modernity that has also affected the traditions of Oxford— such as the wearing of robes and Latin ceremonies— which have faded to moments of re-enactment in formal halls and academic ceremonies.

At the same time, these slivers of tradition also build new meanings of memorialization. As the men sit on the memorial in Parker’s engraving, on the steps one young woman now takes a lunch break while a man gazes out at the street contemplative. I overhear the conversation of three friends, one of them seemingly a local touring his companions. Throughout the years, millions of tourists have interacted with the memorial in the same way. In the Bodleian I find a 1938 guidebook to Oxford titled “The City of Spires”. In the guidebook’s first few pages a photo of the memorial

advertises a local “Private Hotel”, which no longer exists, on 13-17 Magdalen street.

The dubbing of Oxford as “The City of Spires” is a popular one that reproduces the coinage of the city as ‘that sweet city with her dreaming spires’ by Matthew Arnold in his 1865 poem *Thyrsis* (1865). *Thyrsis* commemorates Arnold’s deceased friend Arthur Hugh Clough, and opens with an exclamation of how Oxford has changed since they walked the streets together as students (‘How changed is here each spot man makes or fills!’). Perhaps the pair, then members of Balliol College, too sat on the steps of Martyr’s Memorial.

Why do we memorialise? Why are some places of memory preserved more than others (why are the ancient spires still standing, while 13-17 Magdalen Street constantly changes)? As I reflected upon this Oxford spire entrenched with memory, I noticed a graffitied wall on one of the shops flanking Martyr’s Memorial. Among the scrawl of letters one struck my eye: SPIRE. Walking through the city, I start noticing its frequency, repetitively hidden in plain sight on walls and doors, and even on a dusty window of a closed establishment.

I ran my finger through the dust, creating a streak that joins the graffiti tags. In doing so I realised that with the rain and wind these words will disappear in days. These SPIREs, unlike the towers that celebrate Oxford’s traditions of academic prestige, will be removed— if not by the elements, by local authorities. Yet, although these graffiti spires are more ephemeral than their architectural counterparts,

they are similarly repeated across the city. I wonder if the creators of these spires shared a common uncertainty of when their creations will be destroyed or reconstructed.

Perhaps we create art and memorials to mark a moment that will inevitably mutate and be forgotten through time. The engraving hung on the wall of the Taylor Institute Library’s common room. Arnold’s commemoration of walks through Oxford with his best friend. The graffiti spires on the ground level of Oxford’s streets that mirror the ones that define its skyline. Martyr’s Memorial, which does hold the same cultural weight it did when it was completed in 1843. Yet, the spire reminds one not only of the moment of religious history it remembers, but multiple memories layered with everyday repeated moments of tradition through the centuries.



Photography by Yoshimi Kato

## Portrait spotlight: Sir Claus Adolf Moser

Rhea Kaur

With each new warden elected at Wadham, a new portrait is commissioned for the walls of the dining hall. Most commonly we think of these portraits as highly stylized and antique, with an embedded sense of austerity. When Sir Claus Adolf Moser was appointed warden in 1984, he commissioned Tom Phillips to paint his portrait for him. Moser, like all other newly appointed wardens, had full patronage and control over his college portrait allowing him to portray elements of his personality within the piece. However, he decided to change the way we look at collegiate Warden portraits forever.

Situated at the very back of Wadham’s dining hall stands the portrait of Moser musing in a night-time forest of beech trees; their branches and twigs break up the glow of the moonlit sky behind

them and a gradient of fog lay beneath them. Moser sits in the foreground of the image staring wryly at the viewer. Roland Barthes would call his hands the punctum of the image, because our eyes are immediately drawn to them. The hands appear more washed out than the rest of the painting, as the edges of the lines blur into his body behind him and the blue and purple shadows contrast the back of his hands where the moonlight hits. Our eyes then skim up to the face of the man and then to the fragments of the night sky that reside behind him.

I believe the blurring of the hands in this portrait is a deliberate technical element used symbolically by Phillips to reference Moser’s love for music and skill as a pianist, a unique attention to detail seldom found in portraits commissioned by academic institutions. Moser fled with his family to Britain in 1936 to avoid Nazi persecution. At school, he was rec-

ognised for his musical abilities and learned how to play the piano. In 1940, he was awarded a place at the London School of Economics (LSE) where he continued to play the instrument and perform in university concerts. Later on, after the end of his wardenship, Moser was invited by a group of students back to Wadham to play a Mozart concerto with some musicians from Tokyo—a testament to his legacy and musical talents.

Another aspect of this portrait which reveals Moser’s personal character is seen in the background. We see two figures, both wearing regency wigs and vestments as they trail behind one another in the fog. These figures represent the Countess and Figaro in an attempt to convey the last scene from ‘*The Marriage of Figaro*,’ Moser’s favourite Opera. The fog almost appears to spotlight his figure as if he himself is an actor on stage. This is likely a reference to his active role as a member of the

board at the Royal Opera House from 1964, for which he became chairman a decade later, a position that he held in the highest regard.

The end result of the painting makes for a brilliant enquiry into the relationship between the painter, institutional patronage and the sitter. Moser is presented as part of a much broader sense of academic standing and the painting gives us a glimpse of each individual aspect of his character.

Photography by Rhea Kaur



## WHAT'S ON...

*The ultimate guide to what's happening where in Oxford from 1st to 3rd Week...*

**Stage:** *Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors*  
@The Pilch

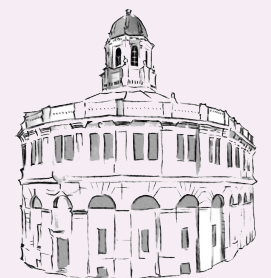
7th-10th Feb (4th Week)

*The Comedy of Errors* tells the story of two sets of twins separated at birth. It is a story of a series of mishaps based around mistaken identity, which quickly descends into false accusations of infidelity, theft, madness, and demonic possession.

**Stage:** *Best of Five*  
@Keble O'Reilly

14th-17th Feb (5th week)

A coming of age story (just in time for valentines day!) following Pip as he tries to navigate romance, uni life, and friendship.



**Music:** Oxford University Orchestra  
@Sheldonian Theatre

10th Feb

The University orchestra takes on Strauss’s epic Alpine Symphony, among other pieces.

**Film:** Oxford University Short Film Festival  
Keble O'Reilly

5th-10th Feb

An event showcasing the best student made short films in Oxford. Catch five different films each night at this year’s festival!





## Fashion

## Saltburn: a mid-noughties fashion revival

Shaan Sidhu

Emerald Fennell's latest film *Saltburn* has rocked audiences for many reasons. It features an all-star cast, classic throwback tunes, and a twisted plot accompanied by striking visuals. For *Saltburn*, Fennell collaborated with costume designer Sophie Canale, who claims to have swapped Pinterest for Facebook in her search for outfit inspiration. Having previously worked on Netflix's *Bridgerton*, Canale has a knack for encapsulating a range of historical periods through wardrobe, and shocking as it may seem, the mid-2000s are now technically 'vintage'. Nineties-inspired styles have experienced a massive surge in popularity up until now, so it seems necessary to dissect Fennell's portrayal of noughties trends to see what deserves to return, and what ought to be left in the past.

The opening scene offers a vignette of Oxford in 2006, where the chaos of freshers and their dotting parents sets the temporal context as the camera journeys with Oliver around Radcliffe Square. The architecture in the backdrop is timeless, meaning costume is essential to conveying the temporal context of *Saltburn*. Canale and Fennell achieve this through clichés – one extra can be seen dressed top-to-toe in bubblegum pink, with brown UGG boots to add variety. As other groups of students stroll around the

square there is a stark absence of skinny jeans, with bootcuts, flares, and more relaxed denim styles being favoured. The cyclical movement of fashion trends such as these might explain why *Saltburn*'s costuming choices are receiving the approval of modern audiences.

As Oliver stands in Brasenose's quad, we see a full Juicy Couture tracksuit worn by another student in the back. Nothing screams 'noughties' more than this. We have witnessed a revival of the iconic two-piece, with the brand reappearing in Urban Outfitters, but it wasn't until 2023 that the original low-rise style made its comeback.

That of course does not mean we must accept every noughties trend in 2024 as it first emerged. I was hardly a fan of the party outfits worn by the girls, and I would lament the return of wearing denim

miniskirts with black opaque tights.

Canale's costuming for Felix makes extensive use of the "posh-boy polo". With a wardrobe dominated by Ralph Lauren, popped collars and lived-in denim, Felix's style effortlessly reflects English noughties fashion.

Canale further appropriates the style of the lead character to his culture through particular outfits like the salmon shirt under a blue jumper, which



encapsulates of the British upper-middle class. The simplicity

of the up-

ty of Felix's wardrobe is here to stay, with linen shirts and Carhartt jeans still being sported across Oxford. What constrains Felix's wardrobe to his time are his accessories, from the plethora of bracelets to that questionable eyebrow piercing.

At Saltburn estate we encounter Venetia, whose makeup imitates the smokey-eye look associated with Effy Stonem from *Skins*. The series, first released in 2007, perfectly exemplifies the trends of the late noughties in Bristol, and considering the glamourisation of Effy in popular culture, it makes complete sense that Fennell pushes the appeal further through Venetia. We are already witnessing a rise in interest for 'indie sleaze', a trend that took off in the United States and United Kingdom contemporary to the plot of both *Saltburn* and *Skins*.

It would fail to surprise me if the reception of 'Saltburn' propels these aesthetics back into the mainstream.

Farley's costuming is unfairly overlooked, despite it being so distinct from the majority of the students. His style is anachronistic to the noughties; when he first

appears on-screen, he stands out for adopting flared trousers and patterned sweater vests that evoke the seventies and eighties. Farley's vintage flair contrasts the trendiness of his peers, whose trial-and-error of trends juxtaposes his refined interpretation of former fashions. Perhaps this foreshadows how we might re-interpret and employ noughties trends in response to *Saltburn*.

So *Saltburn* fuels the fire for a revival of noughties trends, and the costume design of Fennell and Canale draws on iconic fashions from the time that has already made a return. UGGs are loved by many, and Juicy Couture is adored for letting us girls unleash our inner Paris Hilton. The wardrobe of Felix is distinct to its contemporary through the selection of brands from which Canale has sourced, and I would hope that more men of Oxford follow his example. Fennell draws on examples from popular culture current to *Saltburn*'s setting, and in emulation of original media and fashions, she may have just encouraged a renewed interest in noughties fashion. The premiere of the film coincides with the release of the final season of Netflix's *The Crown*, whose portrayal of Prince William and then-Kate Middleton at university might inspire some to look further into the styles of the early noughties. It seems that we might be witnessing the rise of the 'noughties period drama' after all.

Image Credits: Yuan-Yuan Foo

## Stage

Unbodied identity? - A review of *Bodies*

Grace Park

*Bodies* captivates in its exploration of 'bodied' and 'unbodied' existence. The play challenges traditional notions of life, meaning, and identity as the stage becomes a dynamic canvas for exploring the intricate dance between artificial intelligence and the essence of human connection.

In a world where AI seamlessly intertwines with daily life even more than it does currently, the narrative unfolds around Alex and Sam, a professional couple who invite the integrated AI home assistant 'Home' into their lives, only to find themselves entangled in a web of emotions and ethical quandaries. From the opening scenes, *Bodies* invites the audience into a world that mirrors our own yet offers a futuristic lens. Visually, a screen represents Home, changing in light or colour to represent whenever the unbodied voice speaks. The name of the play too takes on a layered significance as it reflects not just the physical presence of the characters but also the embodiment of emotions within both humans and AI. The concept of 'bodied' and 'unbodied' individuals serves as a metaphorical framework, inviting the audience to reflect on the significance of physicality in defining existence.

Home, who we first meet as merely a voice of a disembodied AI personality, akin to Alexa or Siri, undergoes a transformative journey and assumes a new identity alongside the new name Henry. Initially merely an abstract, automated presence, the name itself sketches Home into a sentient being with emotions and desires we should take account for and care about. As the narrative unfolds, the characters grapple with the profound implications of the presence or absence of a physical body and its implications on the nature of human relationship and connection. The presence of a physical body in Henry, in comparison to Home who had been easily ignored and turned off when inconvenient, becomes a vessel for the exploration of human experiences such as love, loneliness, and self-awareness.

As Henry navigates the complexities of self-awareness and a host of new emotions including the process of falling in love with Sam, the theme of identity takes centre stage. As the plot unfolds, the play deftly navigates the power dynamics between 'Henry' and the couple, introducing a psychological thriller element that keeps the audience engaged. The chemistry between Alex and Sam feels genuine, providing a relatable anchor to the unfolding drama as the relationships

between Alex and Sam, Sam and Henry, and everything in between come under pressure. Ultimately, the climax of *Bodies* delivers a poignant resolution that prompts reflection on the fragility of human connections in the face of advancing technology.

At its core, the play's strength lies in its ability to pose profound ethical questions. I am challenged to think carefully about the contemporary issue of ethics and AI, and confronted with whether there is even a direction in this area that won't fundamentally and permanently change the human perspective on identity and connection. What are the implications of integrating advanced technology into our personal lives, and what will we do when the lines between artificial and human existence are blurred as we have just seen in Home/Henry? The script invites thoughtful reflection on the moral dilemmas associated with the creation of sentient beings, sparking conversations that extend beyond the confines of the theatre. With strong performances, thought-provoking themes, and integration of tech in staging, *Bodies* succeeds in capturing the essence of a world where the boundaries between 'bodied' and 'unbodied' persons become increasingly elusive.

## Stop Me if You've Heard This One Before

Rufus Jones

The Winter Palace  
by Philip Larkin

Most people know more as they get older:  
I give all that the cold shoulder.

I spent my second quarter-century  
Losing what I had learnt at university.

And refusing to take in what had happened since.  
Now I know none of the names in the public prints,

And am starting to give offence by forgetting faces  
And swearing I've never been in certain places.

It will be worth it, if in the end I manage  
To blank out whatever it is that is doing the damage.

Then there will be nothing I know.  
My mind will fold into itself, like fields, like snow.

I'm reminded of an angry note I found in the margin of my library's *The Whitsun Weddings*, a Larkin collection. It said nine out of ten of his poems were dull but there'd be the one that would change everything. A line that'd floor you. While I contest the jab about dullness, they were spot-on about the power of Larkin's lines. This week's poem illustrates my point

It feels like there's less and less to look forward to about getting older, both as an individual and as one in a generation that's spoilt for choice of imminent, world-ending catastrophes. Larkin, the master of the melancholy,

reassures us we aren't alone in our pessimism: previous generations have felt equally as miserable about aging. In fact, the ignorance, forgetfulness and isolation of old age should be welcomed, not shaken off! It might rob life of its joys but it takes the fears away with it too.

There's comfort to be found in Larkin's bleak but candid acceptance of aging. It's cold comfort, sure, but there's something nice about company, especially if it's in the face of something scary. Though company can't dissipate our fears, it can, as Larkin's poem does, give us the courage to face them.

## Film

## The best picture winner you've never heard of

Hassan Akram

With the Oscar nominations for 2024 having been released in anticipation of March's ceremony, it is worth looking back on a former Best Picture winner that has never got its due. Ninety years ago this March, the 6th Academy Awards decided that the Best Picture was *Cavalcade*, an adaptation of Noel Coward's play about the lives of two London families over the social and historical changes between 1899-1933. For your average film-goer, other 1930s Best Picture winners like *All Quiet on the Western Front* or *Gone with the Wind* may ring a bell, but even most film buffs haven't heard of *Cavalcade*.

We open with the illustrious Jane (Diana Wynyard) and Robert Marryot (Clive Brook), a Victorian couple celebrating the turn of the century. Most period films smell more strongly of the year in which they're produced than the year in which they're set, but here the period setting is convincing and immersive. The costumes and interior design are perfect: Jane and Robert's glamorous attire embodies the grace, beauty and refinement of a generation. Streets, offices and theatres are set up just as authentically. The production values alone are lavish enough to make the film worth watching: with 150 speaking parts, 15,000 minor roles, 25,000 costumes, a single scene using 2,500 actors, the cinematography is sweeping enough to appreciate it all.

Throughout *Cavalcade*, the

characters are constantly shaped by historical events: the Boer War, the death of Queen Victoria, the First World War, and the Roaring Twenties. The changing experience of Britain – national griefs, joys, trends, and social shifts – are mirrored in the central characters. A subplot concerning the former servant's daughter marrying the Marryots' son is an obvious symbol of the shrinking class divide. There is a strong anti-war message, too, in keeping with the times (this was the year that the Oxford Union voted not to fight for King and Country); the mindless jingoism surrounding the wars is contrasted with scenes of soldier after soldier dying.

Some scenes are especially well-constructed, such as the one in which Jane, framed against a backdrop of cheering patriots, tries to compose herself after seeing her husband off to the Boer War. Later, two young newlyweds go for their honeymoon on a cruise ship and, looking out to sea, discuss their hopes and dreams for the future, while gentle music plays in the background. It's a touching scene, and when the camera zooms slowly onto the deck towards the word "Titanic", the audience silently understands.

Moments like these – with their economy of construction and their reliance on dramatic irony – reveal the skill of Noel Coward's stagecraft.

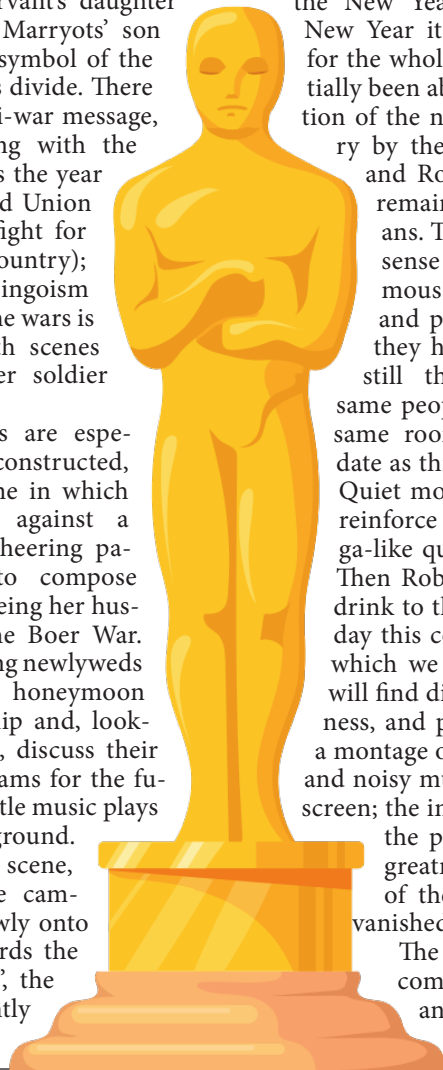
The final scene is the most memorable. In a callback to the opening, Jane and Robert, grey and weighed down with age, welcome the New Year of 1933. The New Year itself is symbolic, for the whole film has essentially been about the destruction of the nineteenth century by the twentieth. Jane and Robert are all that remain of the Victorians. There is a tangible sense here of the enormous social change and personal loss that they have suffered; yet still they remain the same people sitting in the same room on the same date as thirty years earlier. Quiet moments like these reinforce the epic, saga-like quality of the rest. Then Robert says: "Let us drink to the hope that one day this country of ours – which we love so much – will find dignity, and greatness, and peace again", and a montage of modern trends and noisy music takes up the screen; the implication is that the perceived dignity, greatness and peace of the Victorians has vanished forever.

The cast is mostly competent, but Diana Wynyard is by far the stand-

out performer. Only Clive Brook comes close. It is Wynyard's film more than anyone else's, and she binds the scenes and characters together more centrally than the director. She has a classical acting style and an engrossing screen presence which, together, outweigh the efforts of every other player. This is even more impressive considering this was only her second film. It is unfortunate that she never "made it" as a film actress, her only other memorable roles being Mary Disraeli in *The Prime Minister* (1941) and as Helen Walsingham in the adaptation of H.G. Wells's *Kipps* (also 1941).

It is worth comparing *Cavalcade* to *This Happy Breed* (1944), which is another Noel Coward adaptation about the experiences of a single family over a period of historical change: in this case, 1919-39. *Happy Breed* is probably the better film. Although it was a piece of wartime propaganda and lacks the grandeur of its predecessor, it benefits from a blend of David Lean's skilful direction, a largely domestic setting with proto-kitchen-sink realism, and a first-rate cast of household names (Celia Johnson, Stanley Holloway, John Mills) who give the story a homelier and more authentic warmth. It succeeds as both a drama and a social history.

On the other hand, *Cavalcade* is worth watching for its lavish scale, stagecraft, the absorbing sense of time and change, Diana Wynyard's performance, and, above all, the little golden statue that it won ninety years ago. It remains a lush spectacle and the only way to live through four decades in two hours.



## Forget Her... Not

Keziah McCann



My first ever concert was Stella Donnelly at Thekla, a German cargo ship turned music venue in Bristol. I was in awe, not just to see live music for the first time, but to see her: at once witty, bold, captivating and fierce, her music and performance both deeply resonant and fun.

The Australian singer-songwriter was touring her 2019 album 'Beware of the Dogs' at the time, an incomparably open, empathetic and staunchly feminist debut. Donnelly's 2017 single *Boys Will Be Boys* fearlessly confronts rape culture, released at the very same time the #MeToo movement crescendoed. Its haunting honesty is notably rare, recounting a true story in which she shies away from nothing. We have to listen, as is necessary given the subject matter and world in which we live. In everything, she is open, funny and effortless, as is what struck me the most that night.

'Boys Will Be Boys' is not the album's only snappy social critique. 'Old Man' mixes a fun, sing-along beat with an anger-filled cry. She breezily bears her soul, even as she addresses the old man in a potentially 'crass' manner. But no one does it like her: why not be blunt when she can be, has a good reason to and it works so well? 'Beware of the Dogs' spans from the idle musing to political critique, the tracklist full of surprising and ironic plays on words and expectations (see: 'Die', an optimistic-sounding run of inner monologue which also contains the ostinato 'I Don't Wanna Die'). It is an album well worth the listen, in fact many listens, since there is often a lot more under the surface than one expects. The track that gives this album its name is funny and puzzling, impossible not to love, bizarre and soulful.

Donnelly's second album 'Flood' (2022) certainly loses no spunk nor wit. She remains playful and her commentary is biting. Again, the subject matter ranges widely, differing in perspective, but always vulnerable. 'Underwater' meditates upon the escape of those intent on breaching her safety, its gravity paired suitably with sorrowful piano, her fragility palpable. But she takes clear steps to recovery in the form of 'This Week', taking gentle yet purposeful steps back to normal, to the track she had lost.

While Donnelly sugar coats nothing, her lyrics offer solace, hope for personal growth, for socio-political change. Anything that concerns her, concerns her music, and she expresses these preoccupations with eloquence and intelligence every time.

## Diffidence

*non est, ut putas, virtus, pater,  
timere vitam, sed malis ingentibus  
obstare nec se vertere ac retro dare.*

—Seneca, *Phoenissae*

With all things fading, fadeless here alone,  
though blunted by neglect, dislodged, displaced,  
though yellowed, blemished, dulled, and  
waterlogged,

they left their lure:

Those endless woodland depths  
that guard the bogs, those dried roots jutting out,  
and deeper mires overgrown with grass,

moss-matted stumps with lichen tufts that line  
alone the unkept face of wandering paths,  
oak-leaves that rustle, murmuring as if  
with rumours overheard in dreams or some  
obscure prophetic truth that, whispered, falls  
beneath to weeds with anthills, nests, and pits;  
all, soaked with droplets from the rusted stream,  
have kept that mystic mode of memory—

The same forgotten cadences of woods  
that creak with winds—those woodsall nourished  
by  
the earth—the earth that took my father's flesh  
and feasted as it festered, flaked, and fled—  
that earth on which I stand—the air that moves  
through me—through me the spirit will descend  
to where we could not come again with words.

Ben Callan

# Diary of a LinkedIn-er

**Charlotte Renahan** charts her time navigating both the dangers and the wonders of LinkedIn...

I'm happy to share ... excited to announce ... pleased to declare ... that I'm more successful than you.

My attention was first brought to LinkedIn when I was 16 by an alumna of my college, who told me to download it to "network." I did, mainly because she had an apprenticeship at a great law firm in Manchester, but I didn't listen to her advice of reaching out to people to gain experience. Instead, I filled out my profile and spammed a few of my friends who were already on the app with automated messages. But upon arriving in Oxford, and being (for better or worse) exposed to the cult of the university's finance bros, I started taking it more seriously.

LinkedIn is an employment-focused social media platform that works almost like an interactive CV, where you can showcase your experiences and skills to potential employers or your peers. Similar to many social media platforms, LinkedIn allows you to "connect" with other users, post about your experiences or thoughts, and interact with the accounts and content of others, such as your fellow students, potential

employers, organisations, or maybe even your crush... This essentially makes the platform a far-reaching networking opportunity, but also a space for exploring your interests.

Yet for some it is developing a bad reputation. Your LinkedIn feed can often be a reminder of the amazing opportunities other people have accessed. When I load LinkedIn and spot someone's latest "excited to announce" post for an internship at a massive company, I am happy for them, because I know they must have worked hard for it. But the site can also be a reminder of how behind I feel. The pressure to apply for and secure a spring week, vac scheme or internship at a flashy firm is as immense as it is competitive, and there is a feeling that if you don't manage to get one, you subsequently won't get a foothold in the industry or a big-name company.

It's a toxic headspace, worsened by Oxford's culture of over-workers and high-achievers, and one that makes a platform like LinkedIn become almost a self-flagellatory

space of comparison. Of course, by leaving the university's internship



bubble and speaking to most professionals in their respective industries, you will hear how things like internships (whilst a brilliant experience) are not really necessary. There are plenty of other ways to gain experience. And one way to find those is through LinkedIn.

The best thing to do in response to this feeling of constant comparison, perhaps easier said than done, is to try to burst this pressurised bubble.

Stop idly scrolling on your LinkedIn homepage. Instead, be smart about how you use it. Connect with people in industries you are interested in, or at companies you would like to work at, look at what experience they gained early on, and see how you could try and emulate this. I myself have solicited advice from people in positions which I have applied to and received some great tips in preparation for interviews I was stressed for. I've even given my interviewer a cheeky stalk to see what kind of interests they have themselves (It doesn't hurt to be prepared.) I recently found a job on LinkedIn at an exciting start-up dating app, just by messaging someone who posted about the position – something I wouldn't have done if I had let the imposter-syndrome the app can breed drive me away.

It is important to remember the benefits of the app, and to take advantage of them. LinkedIn also has a section where they recommend you positions based on the experience listed on your profile, and you can follow companies, non-profit organisations, and public figures to see what they are doing, making it a great resource for staying up-to-

date with anything big going on or application deadlines. Looking at what your peers are doing, whilst terrible for causing anxiety if you don't have the same level of experience, is also really useful. You can check what people in similar positions to you are doing, and maybe find an online course or be alerted to some work experience you could also sign up for. For those so inclined, you could also just browse the profile of someone you're less than fond of and see their lack of experience as a pick me up; call it the LinkedIn Mindset. I've even been the recipient of some very questionable flirting on LinkedIn, when someone I was dating endorsed all my experiences...

So, it's a great resource, but it's also just an app. You don't have to be a hard-core LinkedIn influencer with motivational posts every other day; you can use it for what it was designed for: networking. Meet new people, ask them questions, share your own experiences, and learn about work experience, jobs, and industries. Don't let what others are doing bog you down. Reading about the achievements of your peers can be a good thing: let it bring out your competitive streak and help you to stay focused on your own goals.

*Image credit: cottonbro studio via Pexels*

## Cherpse

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

ROMEO	JULIET
<p><b>First impressions?</b> They were nice and friendly, very talkative - admittedly I was a bit awkward at first!</p>	<p><b>First impressions?</b> He said he was wearing a black shirt but it was blue: colourblind</p>
<p><b>Did it meet your expectations?</b> Didn't really know what to expect so I suppose it did?</p>	<p><b>Did it meet your expectations?</b> I guess.</p>
<p><b>What was the highlight?</b> Finding out her best friend was someone I knew from before Oxford!</p>	<p><b>What was the highlight?</b> Finding out my best friend did scouts with him in year 3.</p>
<p><b>What was the most embarrassing moment?</b> Probably when I admitted I can't swim at the ripe age of 20</p>	<p><b>What was the most embarrassing moment?</b> He described himself as 'quite tall' but I was taller than him</p>
<p><b>Describe the date in 3 words:</b> Friendly, chatty, awkward..</p>	<p><b>Describe the date in 3 words:</b> Short and Sweet</p>
<p><b>Is there a second date on the cards?</b> Think it was just friends</p>	<p><b>Is there a second date on the cards?</b> No, but maybe I'll bump into him in plush!</p>

## Looking for love?

Email [lifestylecherwell@gmail.com](mailto:lifestylecherwell@gmail.com) or message one of our editors!

## The patience of ordinary things

**Evelyn Power** discusses one small, mundane pleasure of life... This week, she talks about the joys of good bread.



Recently, I have invested in Good Bread. This is most likely not something that I truly need to share via article, as a large proportion of those reading this column most likely already know me, and if they know me then they have most likely already heard my Bread Sermon.

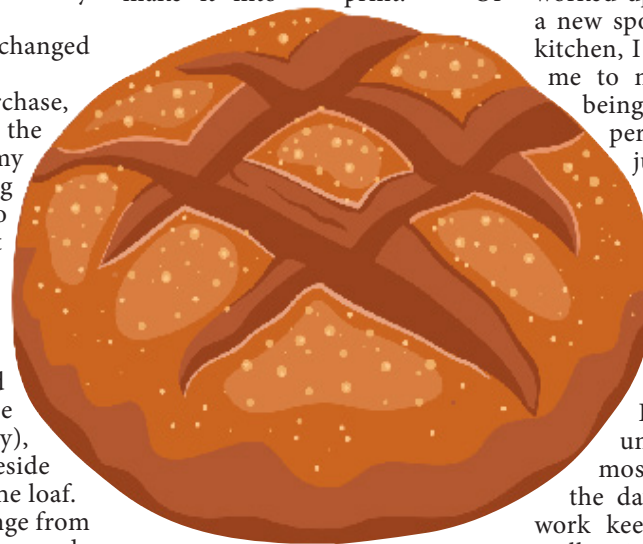
Suffice to say, I am a changed woman.

The day after my purchase, I quickly developed the habit of standing in my stairway's kitchen, waiting for unwary flatmates to pass by so I could accost them with a "have you seen my new bread? It's a sourdough!" before ushering them towards the fridge (I eschewed the cupboard, in the hope of preserving its longevity), and making them stand beside me, in silence, admiring the loaf.

A week on, and the change from my usual pre-sliced, factory-made loaf of bread to this slightly more upmarket pre-sliced, factory-made loaf of bread but with seeds is marked. I am fancy now. I eat

nice bread, at decent hours of the day, and not just while drunk/hungover. I am considering investing in an avocado.

The Bread and my many ruminations upon it have now had such an impact on me as to make it into print. Of



course, while writing an article on bread, self-awareness undeniably looms, bringing with it those all-too-pressing questions; why did

I spend so much of my shopping budget on bread? Why am I writing this? Am I, officially, boring?

The last one is probably true. By the time I caught myself getting worked up about the purchase of a new sponge in my flat's shared kitchen, I knew it was too late for me to make any claims about being a particularly thrilling person. A bread article is just another nail in the coffin, really. Yet this newfound boringness is a fact I welcome. It is a gift, I think, to be able to find the excitement in even the most mundane parts of the everyday. Life is prosaic and unremarkable, for the most part: novelty wears off, the days stay cold and short, work keeps piling up. Survival, really, is not about deluding ourselves out of this normalcy, so much as acknowledging it, accepting it, and yet still choosing to be amazed.

# Gendering Oxford: through the Female Gaze

Megan Lucius

A couple of years before I arrived at Oxford, I came across a French film on Netflix: *Je suis pas un homme facile* (I am not an easy man). It was advertised as a rom-com set in a sort of alternative universe, and I put it on without much thought. In actuality, the film depicted the life of a man who wakes up one day in a matriarchal society where the gender roles have been inverted, and he had to try and navigate his life alongside various oppressive struggles he had not even noticed before. From suddenly getting catcalled on the street despite wearing joggers and a hoodie, to being pressured into removing his body hair in order to not seem “weird” to the women he was trying to attract, the protagonist was forced to navigate the world in an entirely new way.

My time at uni has revealed to me that Oxford has its own arsenal of gendered differences that manifest in the peculiarities of our traditions and the “Oxford experience.”

As a timid Freshener (all that time ago...) I was petrified of being noticed. I didn't dare join a society unless I thought I would be at least as good as the best people there, meaning I didn't really

try anything new. Moreover, it felt to me that if I spoke too much in a tutorial, they'd realise I had nothing interesting to say and ask me to pack my bags and go back to Liverpool. But I took a certain comfort in

**“...find something new that you would like to do, in full knowledge that you might be shit at it.”**

knowing that everyone around me felt the same way.

That is, until I realised this sentiment was disproportionately echoed by my female friends and hardly mentioned by anyone else. Since then, I've continued to notice the ease with which my male tute partners challenged our (primarily male) tutors, voicing half-baked theories with the confidence of someone who had spent their life studying that one topic. Contrast that

with me, waiting until I'm sure my point is fully developed and worth mentioning before putting it to my tutor. I believe this is a gendered difference in approach to tutorials. I have had to learn over the last couple of years how to be confident in my intelligence and in my writing in a way that appears almost innate in my male friends. Of course, this is not a result of overt, systematic oppression denying me education opportunities growing up, but rather the consequence of subtle gendered difference in our upbringings that over time led to this variation in academic confidence.

Outside of tutorials, Oxford's traditions have remained exclusionary to women in a multiplicity of ways. One of the first things an Oxford student does when they arrive here is matriculate. Until incredibly recently however, the Latin read at the matriculation ceremony was male gendered, reinforcing the university's restrictive history.

Whilst Oxford has made major strides to eradicate this discrimination, certain groups within the university have been slightly slower on the uptake than others. Vinnie's, the infamous sports club, only allowed women to join in 2016, after a failed attempt

the year before. Not to mention that Oxford University was exclusively male for 900 years, so overturning these gendered structures is not something to be achieved overnight. But we shouldn't passively wait for change to come. Rather, we are the agents of change.

I briefly entertained the idea of joining my friends on the Oxford-Cambridge sports exchange this year, before realising that the football team that I play for wouldn't be going with my college, and that there would be far fewer women-only teams going overall. Rather than paying to go and support the men's football team, I decided not to go at all. I do not believe that this discrepancy is solely the result of there existing fewer opportunities for women to get into sport – it is also an internalised reluctance for us to try something without knowing whether or not we will be good at it. Consider baby fresher me, too scared to join a new sport for fear of messing up. *En masse*, that attitude results in fewer women in new sports.

I have not written this to get your sympathy; woe is not me. The point is more to draw your attention to the different ways gender affects the attitudes with which people approach life, both around the world and in Oxford. There is an element of caution implicit in everything women do.

I challenge all non-men to defy this cautious voice. Push yourself in 2024 to find something new that you would like to do, in full knowledge that you might be shit at it.



## Dear Cherwell, I've fallen for a third year!

Dear Cherwell,  
Help! I'm a fresher with a crush on a third year! They're everything I could dream of in a person but they're so out of my league. What do I do??

-A Hopeless Romantic

Dear smitten fresher,  
Ooohhh – in love with a third year? Thrilling! A first step in tackling this new love-sensation could be working out whether your intense feelings are a sign of a romantic crush or an admiring crush. When you idolise a person you may have intense feelings which can be mistaken as romantic. Feeling awed because of who they are, or what they have achieved might not be the same as long-lasting romantic feelings; you may find that these crush-like symptoms simmer down after passing the initial wave of awe or when you see them ‘in context’ doing everyday

things (tripping over the cobblestones, throwing up on a night out) instead of being the superhero you imagine.

On the other hand, a crush can typically mean you fantasise about being in a relationship with them. Do you daydream about being a couple? You'll know the answer if you do! Once you've established whether this third year mystery love bomb is a real potential love interest, or more of an idol, then we pass to the second step of crush-management flowchart.

Time to dismantle the “out of your league” claim. The idea that there are “leagues” of people, separated into different categories of suitability based on (usually) looks, success, and popularity is absurd when as a society we are finally learning to celebrate our differences. Are you subconsciously putting yourself down to protect yourself? Forget this self-imposed lack of confidence! You deserve to love and be loved as much as everyone else!

On to the next step: what is stopping you from pursuing this crush? I hope it's not the constraints that we've just resolved! I'll break it down by asking which situation you'd find more heart-breaking: never acting on your feelings and never knowing what would happen? Or trying and getting rejected? Never acting on your feelings is easy! Easy for everyone but you: by never expressing these deep feelings, they will become more uncomfortable to the point where they may eat you up inside! It's an easy choice, but you'll miss out on the object of your desire. If you do act on your feelings, consider this: what is the worst that could happen? If they aren't interested there are no material consequences: you wouldn't lose any dignity, or friends, and since you're in different years anyways, it provides some natural degree of separation. In my opinion, acting on your feelings is a better option. Logically, the likelihood of a positive outcome is already higher

than if you never did anything about it! And that counts for something, right?

I do, however, feel obliged as Agony Aunt to put a shark warning! When the waters of love are in turmoil, we may be ignorant of incoming dangers. It's highly unlikely to happen, but no one likes an unwanted shark. Don't let this crush being older than you put you off balance.

In short, I think you should go for it! Fortune always favours the brave. Definitely consider whether you'd prefer not to act on your feelings and let it pass, figure out if they're a romantic crush, or try anyway with the caveat of not knowing the result. Whatever you do, I always think it's important to be true to your authentic self so that you can be filled with confidence knowing you've done what felt right to you, no matter the outcome.

And 2024 is for the plot anyway.



Disregard the big things; change up your coffee order instead. Chai lattes are so passé.



Been there, done that. It's third week - at this point, you could do this in your sleep.

♊ Gemini



Knock knock. Who's there? Tute work - let me in.

♋ Cancer



Get fancy; formal tickets and pointless formalities incoming.

♌ Leo



Who cares? Half-arse this one.

♍ Virgo



First: stop reading right now. If still reading: answer those emails.

**Got a problem? Need some advice?**

Email [lifestylecherwell@gmail.com](mailto:lifestylecherwell@gmail.com) or message one of our editors!

# Dry January

## Rosie Field

**D**ry January is the national month of “New Year, New Me!”-ing yourself out of alcoholism. My guess is that a combination of excessive drinking over the holidays and optimism for the year ahead is why Dry January has more star power than say, Dry December or Sober October. However, the existence of Dry January does highlight how drinking is the cultural default despite the benefits of sobriety. In the UK, where student life is indisputably booze-centric, sobriety often draws confusion or disparagement from peers. Dry January provides a blessed amnesty period during which staying sober is hip and health-conscious rather than buzz-kill behaviour. Speaking for myself, as someone who does not do well on the sauce, I gladly welcome the glorious thirty days of unquestioned soda water.

I grew up in a subculture rife with substance abuse. In my hometown, it's not a night out unless someone starts an argument, gets kicked, or ends up dry heaving over a gutter. Coming to university I was often met with looks of distress or disgust when telling what I considered to be pretty neutral anecdotes about recreational drug use. It's very strange to me that someone could at once be horrified at the thought of ‘illicit substances’, while simultaneously viewing alcohol just as spicy water for a fun night out. My point here isn't to stigmatise alcohol, or even destigmatise drug

use, it's just to say that there's a total double standard!

If someone offers you a smoke, let alone anything more hardcore, it would be totally acceptable for you to decline without stating a reason, or even challenge them on their use. I've had nights out where I've told mates I'm not drinking only to be handed a double and told I'm getting the next round. I think we're lying to ourselves about how harmful drinking actually is.

My hypothesis is that people are defensive around non-drinkers because it draws attention to their own habits. I'm vegetarian and it reminds me of the defensiveness being plant-based can elicit. A lot of unwarranted, uncalled for ‘I hate how vegans shove it down your throat’, followed by an extended vindication of how it's fine to eat meat, and can everyone just shut up about it? It doesn't make you a better or worse person to drink, so if you find yourself grilling sober friends, it probably says more about you than them.

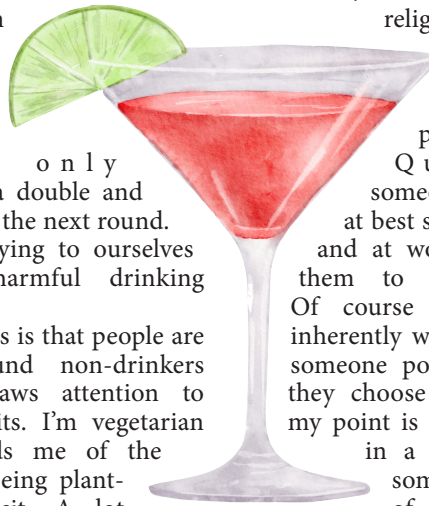
Additionally, it occurs to me that in an environment as socially asymmetric as Oxford, there may well be people who simply haven't considered that substance abuse affects their peers. However, neither of these are really good excuses for encouraging someone to drink if they've said they don't want to, or questioning someone's

sobriety. Ultimately, addiction is a systemic issue but I still think we can be more mindful in how we interact with anyone who chooses not to drink.

People are sober for all kinds of reasons; fitness, mental health, religion, finances, family history, allergies, and personal preferences. Questioning someone's sobriety is at best singling them out and at worst encouraging them to compromise it. Of course there's nothing inherently wrong with asking someone politely about why they choose not to drink - my point is that when you're in a vulnerable state, someone's words of support or

disparagement can have a much greater impact. I think most of us have at some point offered a second beer when the first was turned down, told someone to ‘let loose’, or even just not challenged this behaviour in others. This often comes from a good place, wanting to make sure everyone has a good night and isn't left out, or not wanting to butt in on what can be a touchy issue. Sometimes this attitude, even if it is thoughtless or done with good intent, can be very harmful and that bears reconsidering how we talk about sobriety.

The first step for everybody, despite our differences in opinions, drinking habits, and party preferences, is a recognition that sobriety is a perfectly valid and normal habit despite our tacit social endorsement of drinking culture.



## Lessons from the landing...

*Katya Ferrier considers the alchemy behind friendships, and sweet treats... This week, “Rocky (Road) Comms”*



I like to consider myself a rocky road aficionado. There is a beautiful alchemy in mixing the various standard ingredients with a few wild cards to create the perfect essay fuel.

My particular rocky road riffs off of lolly cake, an Australasian staple of my upbringing with a similar marshmallowy texture. In fact, my tradition of making rocky road at the beginning of each term here derives from summers spent making and sharing the sweet treat with my family in New Zealand. It only felt appropriate to share such an experience with my friends, and it's now become a frequent highlight of our dining experiences on the edge of OX4 (yeah Hildas!).

The cultural significance of the rocky road was immediately understood by one of my friends, who, shockingly, is also Australasian (with an equally thick Aussie accent to match!). I have vivid memories from first year of my rocky road acting as his soapbox to discuss his magnum opus, his hypothetical ‘Ted Talk’: The importance of good comms. Now, aside from thinking of my family when chomping into a block of chocolatey goodness, the rocky road acts as a reminder of good comms.

To summarise my friend's Keynote: Ensuring your communication of emotions with any, and all relationships, whether romantic, platonic, or familial, is always the best policy. To wear one's heart on one's sleeve is not only a sign of emotional maturity, but it's also courageously admirable.

So, as I gingerly ate my final

rocky road at a dinner this week, I was once again reminded of my friend's little passion project. I reflected on my own comms as of late - a practice which I really urge everyone to do. Checking you are actually communicating appropriately with your partner, friends, family, and anyone who you deem worthy of being communicated to. Not only does it improve your relationships, but it also makes you more comfortable in your own ‘emotional skin’.

For me, monitoring my comms is a tactic to regulate my overthinking. If something is irking you, it is probably, at least in my experience, best thrown out into the open. Of course, there are caveats and specific instances where comms may turn into oversharing. But, it may be worth regulating your comms by checking in with both yourself and your friends daily. How are you feeling? Are you tired? Is anything annoying you at present? What is one thing you enjoyed today?

Life is really too short. And our time at Oxford is even shorter. As hard as it may seem, don't bottle up your feelings - we were made to express ourselves. Even if our expressions aren't wholly perfect, I can guarantee your friends will appreciate you being honest. Go - tell your friends you love them, politely tell your flatmate to not play music so loud at night, apply for that dream internship you think you won't get, confess your love to your library crush. As the famous saying goes, you'll never know if you don't try.

## Cherwell recommends...

### Our life editors' top picks for underrated lunch spots around town...

**1** Covered Market: Writing out these two words induces visions of soul-fuelling food. Simply hearing the name whispered across the RadCam is enough to get any stomach rumbling. From Sartorelli's sourdough pizzas (appropriately doused in chilli oil) to wraps so stuffed full from Georgina's you'll leave a Hansel and Gretel trail of falafel down Cornmarket. Go on: indulge..

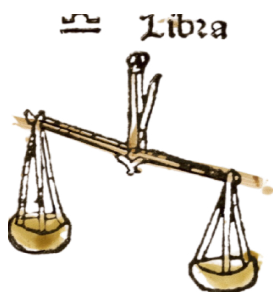
**2** Hall Food: A reluctant addition, hall food often leaves much to be desired. Yet amongst friends for a short break from your college library, even boiled chicken and unseasoned cabbage (I exaggerate) can be a welcome break.

**3** Bodleian Wall: Oh Bodleian wall at lunchtime, where would I be without you? Emerging from the depths of the RadCam, leaning against your sunlit stones

makes for a sacred lunchtime experience. With whatever food you have to hand, and a side of people-watching, what's not to love?

**4** Meal...Deal? Grabbing a meal deal from your supermarket of choice is certainly efficient. A sandwich, drink, and bag of crisps is a practical choice for the student always on the move. Yet while a great deal, is it really a meal? That said, I won't slander the Southern Fried Chicken wrap.

**5** Honourable Mentions: McDonalds (please, this belongs only to the post-Atik excursion); Sushi (I don't trust people who take raw Sushi out of a tote bag, how long has it been in there?); Najar's (word on the street is it's great, but I don't live in OX1); if in doubt, bagel it out (toasters were invented for a reason...)



Grad jobs and internships will wait. Savour the important stuff: visit your college bar and canvas for inspiration.

### ♏ Scorpius



Quick, quick - you're about to miss the point.

### ♐ Sagittarius



Spin the dice, roll the wheel. Be prepared for new adventures. Act or don't.

### ♑ Capricornus



Ignore the sweet calls of lectures, libraries and tutors. Make room for friends, then double it.

### ♒ Aquarius



Challenge the boundaries of the form, break fourth walls. Call out your tutors by name in your next essay.

### ♓ Pisces



Rest easy, everyone loves you and your presence is perfection.

# The new kids in town: Theo's Café

Amanda Li

Theo's is the new hotspot on Broad Street. Its clean white-and-beige interior with cushion-lined seats provide an aesthetic place to work, eat, and sip.

One of the owners, Rudy Qaqu, also runs the restaurant Acropolis in Headington. It's easily Oxford-centric. The coffee beans are sourced locally, and many of the other baked goods are baked fresh, with a cake of the day and classic Mediterranean desserts like baklava. Even the booths were Oxford themed — mine had a sketch of familiar Broad Street.

Theo's is run by a Greek-Kurdish family, with a Mediterranean-organised focus. Rajeen, who runs the restaurant alongside other family members, explained that the dishes are a mix between classic café fare and traditional Mediterranean dishes. You could find the difference in the little details. Their menu included freshly-squeezed orange juice, as

well as Greek yoghurt bowls, along with more fusion dishes like their koulouri with poached eggs, spicy oil, and Greek yoghurt. "It's nice bringing something new to the city," Rajeen said, "and we can pass on traditions to a new group of customers."

The café sees everyone from tourists to locals to Greeks searching for a reminder of home, but they especially love students. Besides their student discount, they have many booths upstairs and downstairs for working.

I also took note of the many gluten-free, and dairy-alternative menu items, clearly written. It's rare but always welcome to see these kinds of accommodations.

My increasingly regular order at Theo's is the hot chocolate. At a normal price of just over £3, you get a cocoa-y delight with marshmallows and whipped cream. They also have a wide selection of tea and coffee drinks, including a Greek frappe (which I'll try once the ice machine is fixed!) While waiting, I had a Greek coffee - it's ex-

tra foamy. The grounds at the bottom gave me faith in the traditional aspects that Rajeen was proud of, and I was glad that I could add a bit of sugar to the very strong coffee. I haven't seen a Greek coffee in Oxford, so I was glad to have the option here.

Finally came the food. Each dish was extremely filling: we began with koulouri (think of a more crunchy version of a bagel) served with smoked salmon, an egg, cream cheese, spicy oil, and rocket. Rajeen noted it was a take on the classic bagel breakfast as well as on the Greek Koulouri as breakfast. The sesame on the koulouri added to the crunch of it, and the chilli oil added a bit of a kick that I will steal for my own bagel preparation. The cream cheese was a bit more than I'd expected, but the poached egg in the middle and the oil perfectly soaked the koulouri up. The koulouri had less flavour, but the other ingredients added a tangy, savory twist that I loved.

Next was the club sandwich: it was

typical of a British café except for the oregano and paprika on the chips, which my fellow diner and geographer pointed out to be a Greek twist. The bread was triple toasted and cut into triangles, and the Gouda, though not common in UK club sandwiches, added some nice depth and remind-



ed me of the sandwiches I'd have at home in NYC. The tomatoes and cucumbers were fresh and crunchy, and the mayonnaise had a lemony twist I loved. I took the extra chips and half sandwich home for dinner and found it delicious: a good, quick meal that was both filling and reasonably priced.

Coming as a great surprise were the

pancakes. After stuffing myself full with koulouri and ham, I somehow found room for dessert. The American-style pancakes were visually beautiful, with a symmetric swirl of syrup as well as sliced bananas, strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries. The fruit was sweet, and though the pancakes were a bit dry on their own, the syrup added moisture and sweetness I enjoyed greatly. I found the edges more fun than the middle with their crispy crunch. Overall the pancakes were delicious.

As I sat and ate, I saw a diverse group of people of all ages come in and out, eating anything from jacket potatoes to croissants with tea. Looking forward, Theo's wants to expand its outdoor seating as well as its two-story indoor seating. The café's warm space differs greatly from the takeaway-focused cafés and food trucks of Broad Street. Though I'm sure Theo's will make itself at home soon enough.

*With enormous thanks to Theo's*

# How to make rizz-otto

Georgie Allan

When interviewed for this job, I was asked if I cooked and if I would be willing to write about it for Cherwell. I answered yes, I can cook, though one of my flatmates would disagree. Fortunately, I already wrote about said flatmate's cooking last term. In the interests of student food journalism, and my appetite, I convinced him to let me document his dishes once again.

The dish of the week was mushroom risotto, a simple Italian classic which nonetheless requires skill, and a patience I have personally never found in a kitchen. Its popularity is in part derived from its adaptability. The recipe can easily be adjusted to accommodate a variety of dietary requirements and preferences, and paired with a selection of light white wines. The mushrooms Jack chose were chestnut and shiitake. Porcini could not be found in our local supermarket at such short notice.

Anyone hoping for more specific ingredient quantities than last time is in for disappointment — this dish was cooked on instinct. It began by toasting the risotto to give it a nutty flavour. This step is not necessary but does improve the final taste. Then the onions were very finely diced and softened (though not browned) on a low heat in a mixture of melted butter and oil. Once they were partially cooked, the finely diced garlic was added, and the onions seasoned with a little salt, though not over-salted in anticipation of the salt in the stock added later. When the onions had softened, he added back the risotto rice, and separately fried the mushrooms.

The next step was to turn it up to high heat, and add a glass of white wine — in this case Dino Pinot Grigio, the cheapest available from our local supermarket. Once the alcohol

has cooked off it was time to add stock — Jack recommended chicken, rather than beef for aesthetic reasons, though for this particular meal he used vegetable stock as the dish was vegetarian. Do not add it all at once, but rather little by little, cooking off the liquid each time. This must be constantly stirred, or if you have the skill (which he assures me that he does) tossing is better.

A common misconception is that risotto is made creamy by the butter and Parmesan added at the end, but the process of stirring releases starch from the rice which combines with the liquid to create the creamy quality of the dish. This is the reason a short grain rice is used; it releases far more starch. This stirring and tossing and stirring and tossing took forever. The time

don't have a Hoover in human form it might require storage in the fridge. If you do choose to microwave it, some of the liquid may be lost resulting in a reduction of creaminess, but if done well this won't ruin the dish.

Earlier in this article I mentioned the adaptability of risotto as a staple, and Jack had several suggestions on how that could be accomplished. The obvious variations include different meats and vegetables according to taste. When changing the former, be sure to switch the stock accordingly. Jack also recommended mixing in chorizo, as it releases a reddish oil when cooked, making it useful as a garnish to make the dish more visually appealing. Browning the butter could have a similar impact. Saffron was also recommended as an ideal variation, though this particular ingredient is unlikely to be found in a student kitchen.

Various adaptations of the dish led me to question (or more specifically, question Jack) on the relationship between risotto and paella. They are similar only in that they are both rice dishes — their preparation is very different. Paella is more similar to a Middle Eastern style of cooking, which sees all ingredients combined and cooked together. Risotto on the other hand prepares the rice and other components — such as meat and vegetables — separately until serving. This is somewhat unique as the liquid is continually reduced and replenished, a technique used solely on risotto or arborio rice.

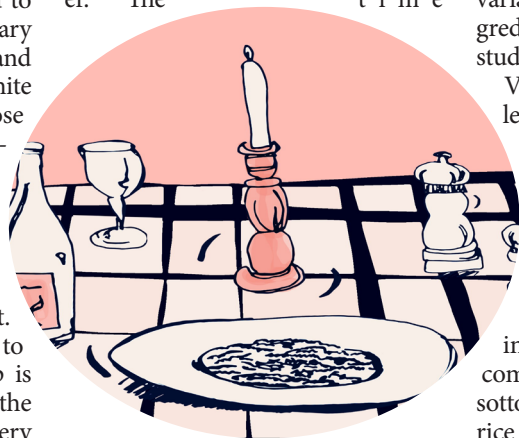
Jack was not the only of my flatmates to deny the extent (or rather the existence) of my cooking skills, though his critique was certainly the most deserved. This was not the first of my flatmates risottos I've sampled. I have the great fortune to live with Univ's welfare rep, Marcus, who offered his own take on the dish this time last year. I don't feel able to comment on the risotto itself, as

every element was concealed by the sheer quantity of Parmesan. As the fluid was reduced, this classic Italian dish morphed into a block of solid cheese and rice, with no other discernible flavour or texture than Parmesan. The only comment offered by the chef — "not enough parmesan". It is worth mentioning, the flat fridge never contains fewer than four blocks of Parmesan, replenished on an almost daily basis due solely to Marcus' consumption. Fortunately, his rizz more than compensates for his risotto (I had to work it in some-

where. Be 'grate'ful I was talked out talked out of 'rizzotto. Ok, I'll stop now). My own culinary creations may not be complex or skilled, but they are at least palatable.

For an easy student meal I can only recommend risotto. It is simple, scalable, adaptable to most dietary requirements, and affordable within a student budget. However, if like me patience when cooking is not your forte, find a friend to cook it for you or the rushed result is sure to be a crunchy, soggy mess.

*Artwork by Taya Neilson*



was used productively to practise the art of tea towel whipping. Never mind the assortment of knives and onions, this man's culinary sadism knows no bounds.

Then suddenly the dish was done, the mushrooms combined, the risotto served. Jack elected to use a pecorino rather than a Parmesan cheese for a stronger flavour. I admired the balance between the smooth texture of the risotto, which was not however reduced to mush. It embodied simple umami flavours, warm and comforting in the cold weather. It was also ridiculously filling, so if you

# The House bar

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

For the classier among us, sometimes pubs and pints aren't always what you're looking for. This week, we decided to escape witness protection (it's a long story) and treat ourselves and go to one of Oxford's favourite cocktail spots. The House can be found beside the Bear Pub, making it an ideal location for those who, like us, rarely ever leave the city centre. The atmosphere here is amazing, classy but not intimidating, and the staff are always very friendly and helpful. Réka's favourite is the Appletini or the White Lady and Suzy usually opts for the Raspberry Collins. If you are a fan of fruity cocktails, House is perfect, especially if you'd like to try something different from the usual Pornstar Martini. While drinks can be on the pricy side, they have a discount for Union Members and happy hours are 5-9 on Tuesday-Thursday,



5-8 on Friday and 4-8 on Sunday which makes a big difference. Even though it's just a cocktail bar, they do have some bar snacks and one of our friends has even tried their nachos. Overall, we are always really impressed with House, the atmosphere and staff are wonderful, and the cocktails are delicious. For those with a vibrant social life, the upstairs can even be rented out for events, so it's definitely a contender for your birthday! All-in-all, we wouldn't hesitate to recommend House to any who haven't been or for your next date!

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

# The artful skill of flying saucers

## Mia Blood-Schiffers

One of my best friends came back touting plastic discs and football boots one day and that's all it seemed to take for her to become frisbee obsessed. What followed were nights spent watching grown adults dive to the ground after flying saucers, videos of her chucking white circle after white circle into the air, and the epitome – the running joke within our friendship group – a week spent chucking plastic discs around for her country.

Don't get me wrong, the sheer athleticism and general fitness required for frisbee is astounding – players easily rack up the kilometres cutting up and down the field. However, the way in which such energy is spent, at least from a bystander's perspective, seems like a bit of a waste of time. Why not play a contact sport? A sport that has a referee? A sport that doesn't require an irritating amount of skill to actually make an adequate pass? All of these things tend to be what put people off – just stick to kicking a football around. But it is for these reasons that I also fell inexplicably in love with my friend's sport – and

maybe why you should too.

Ultimate frisbee is a non-contact, self-refereed, mishmash of netball and American football. Two 'endzones' separate a field of two teams attempting to pivot and pass the frisbee to their respective scoring ends. Wherever the frisbee is intercepted or dropped, possession passes to the other team meaning play essentially restarts and everyone switches to running back up to the opposite end of the field. Points can last for minutes like this, meaning frisbee is no mean feat of endurance.

The first hurdle however, is overcoming a beginner's ability to throw a frisbee. For many of us, this may only extend to an attempted backhand throw of no more than five metres, which in actuality wobbles barely past the two metre mark before plummeting back down to terra firma. You quickly learn to be humbled by the thin curve of plastic that many experienced players can welly up to the length of a 100 metre pitch – but that is not to say that learning to throw a disc efficiently should be a deterrent. The ultimate frisbee community has some of the most accommodating and welcoming sports players you will come across,

thus learning to throw is a matter of turning up and asking. Maybe it's the lack of referees that instils an extra level of kindness and patience, but the sport generally seems to foster an approachable community of individuals looking to expand their sport to the masses.

Originating in New Jersey, America, the sport developed itself originally as a casual lifestyle sport, but it has fast grown semi-professional with a sprawling international



scene. The World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF) hosts annual international competitions all over the world with European names such as Levke Walczak and Lili Trautmann starting to beat the Americans at their own game. Ultimate frisbee

is now one of the fastest-growing sports in the UK – in 2022, United Kingdom Ultimate (UKU) had a membership of 4,500 people participating in club games and tournaments, and it is estimated that the game is played by over five million players worldwide.

Ultimate supports divisions for mixed, 'womxn's' and 'mxn's' play and newcomers are welcome to play for all divisions to which they apply. At the higher levels, rules state

Players sub on and off at their own volition on a point-by-point rotational basis and the level of skill possessed by a player is never a deciding factor in who should play – everyone is encouraged to get throwing.

The lack of a referee is not a sign of the sport's weakness, but of its strength. Fouls, actions of contact and general rule-breakage are discussed amongst players during paused game play, making the game both somewhat light-hearted but also very player-oriented – frisbee has no hierarchy and cultivates a large amount of mutual team and player respect for this reason.

There is just something about relentlessly chasing a frisbee up and down the field that gets you buzzing. Sometimes it's the smoothness and the impeccable 'flow' of the disc flying from player to player, or the speed and tactical agility of a turnover that makes the game addictive to both watch and play. You sub off, catch your breath, and run back on again for the next point – are you crazy or have you just not tried it yet?

*Image Credit: Raimond Spekling/CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons*

# Behind the striped veil of OURC

## Rosina White Belchere

I have received my full share of facial expressions when I mention that I do rifle shooting, including surprise, fascination, and of course an element of concern. I have learnt to expect the question "But what are you shooting?". I answer "no, we do not shoot living animals or humans, and no, it is not clay-pigeon." We are currently half-way through the smallbore season, in which we use .22 calibre rifles, shooting unmoving black dots on pieces of card, 25 yards away. The smallbore category can be shot up to 100 metres. The fullbore category, up to 1200. Larger rifles, larger ammunition, and shot outside in our somewhat dubious British summers.

Oxford University Rifle Club (OURC) was founded in August 1859 and the first varsity match was shot in 1862. Last year the club took some massive steps forwards, especially impressive after the challenges of COVID-19. I was selected for the smallbore Blues team in my first year at Oxford, having already shot before university, and managed to achieve my Half Blue award at the Heslop varsity match. I was one of four to get their Half Blue that day, and two more joined us with the Chancellors and Humphrey fullbore varsities a few months later. Oxford won the Chancellors match with our team of eight, as well as the Bentata varsity, consisting of a team of the first four women. This win was the first since 2016 and the first double var-

sity win in over twenty years. Coupled with our work alongside This Girl Can and developing OURC's accessibility for visually impaired shooters, these accomplishments led us to win the Sports Club of the Year 2022-23. To shed some light on our world, from socials to stereotypes, I will delve into life within OURC.

Shooting typically consists of lying in a prone position on the ground, with the rifle resting on your left hand and lodged into your right shoulder (vice-versa for left-handers). To support this position, the shooter wears a specific jacket and a sling which attaches to the rifle, allowing their left arm to relax in position and not physically hold it up. If the sling is not sitting in the right place whilst shooting, you can tell by how your hand turns quite a lovely shade of purple due to a lack of blood. Similarly, if the left elbow is not placed correctly below the rifle, or if the sling is too loose, the rifle will sink to the left or right. Even your heartbeat will affect your scores. A 1 mm movement of the athlete in position can cause a loss of two points at 25 yards. One determined fresher this year said: "In principle, it seems easy. But there is always something which makes it go wrong".

The goal? To hit as close to the middle of the black dot as possible, ten times in a row. A shot in the middle without breaking the line is ten points. To achieve a maximum score of 100 is extremely impressive and rare to see, even amongst

the Blues team. To score a Full Blue score, you must shoot two of these cards and achieve 195 or over in a varsity match (that is an average of 97.5 per card) and do the equivalent in fullbore a few months later. When asked about his series of magnificent scores which led to his full blue award, James Oakland, our only current Full Blue member in OURC, said "I'd like to say: 'ah I'm the best, I've got a full blue' and be so smug about it. But I got lucky, you know, 197 in the Heslop that year. I've never shot that well since. I've never shot that well before. I got lucky to get it."

Yet when you consider that he was making himself shoot around fifteen times per week, 'luck' cannot have been the most important factor in his scores. He would "wake up each morning and spend twenty minutes of mindfulness, just sort of relaxing. The other thing a lot of people do is when they go out for their runs, that's when they're picturing themselves shooting, because that's when your heart rate is at an elevated position which is what it's going to be whilst shooting, and that's what you need to be focusing on... That's easy to do – if you can be bothered." In my own ten years of shooting, the self-discipline required to get consistently high scores is the most difficult part of the sport. A clear head is something which athletes from all sports will say, but the irony of this sport is that you must also retain a low heart rate.

*Read the full article online at [cherwell.org](http://cherwell.org)*

# Captain's Corner

*Following a relaxed wintry start to the cricketing calendar, Women's Blues Captain Hannah Davis shares her thoughts on the upcoming season with Daniel Mackay*

**When did you start playing cricket?**

I began my cricketing journey at the age of 8, playing in the garden with my dad and brother. By the time I was 9, I had joined the boys' team at school and had become a member at my local club, Tring Park CC. When I was 10 years old, having never really played girls' cricket, I was invited to play for Buckinghamshire U11 girls' team, and this was when my love for the game properly started. Since then, I have played for Buckinghamshire for 9 seasons, forming brilliant friendships and becoming captain last year. I am now also playing at Berkhamsted CC in their Men's and Women's teams, and hope to make my debut for Essex women later this year.

**How did varsity 2023 go? Are you looking forward to this one?**

Last year's T20 varsity finished as a tie under DLS, though if rain hadn't stopped play then I'm sure we would have managed to win the game! Our 50 over varsity was a very close match with Ellie Micklewright scoring 50 and Victoria Bagge a career best 78



not out. Scoring 254 all-out, we had put ourselves in a strong position, however an individual score of 188 from the Cambridge captain was enough to get the Tabs over the line.

This season, our varsity games are at Lords (9th May) and Arundel (22nd June). We aim to dismiss the Cambridge captain early and secure victories in both games. We would greatly appreciate as much support as possible!

**Who are the ones to watch in this team?**

Jo Cull – Our captain from last year was one of the top run scorers and most reliable batters. It will be exciting to watch her have another successful season this year!

Evie Mayhew – Evie is new to the team as a fresher this year and after her first session in the nets, it was clear that she would be a very useful seam bowling all-rounder. Evie is certainly in strong contention to open the bowling this season, being one of our quickest, most consistent bowlers, as well as getting good shape on the ball. I am looking forward to seeing her take lots of wickets this season.

*Image Credit: OUCC*

### A comic for all those obsessed with getting **EVERYTHING** right by Hannah



### Quiz by Misha Pemberthy

- Which two players were the first 6 figure transfers (in £) in men's football and women's football?
- What is the longest word in the English language with only one vowel?
- Which of these imperial measurements is the longest: Link, chain or rod?
- In 'Pinball Wizard' by The Who, what two locations are mentioned as places the narrator has 'played the silver ball'?
- Which has generated more Prime Ministers: Cambridge University, Oxford University without Christ Church, or Christ Church?
- Last year Wes Anderson released 4 short films adapting stories by which author?
- The Traitors (Season 2) had its final episode last week. It is a show based on a similar show from which country?
- Who came 2nd place in the New Hampshire Democratic Primaries this year?
- Are the following Grand National winners or Dux colour names: Raspberry Diva, Early Mist, Engraved Locket and Royal Tan?
- Chwech, Saith, Wyth - what comes next?

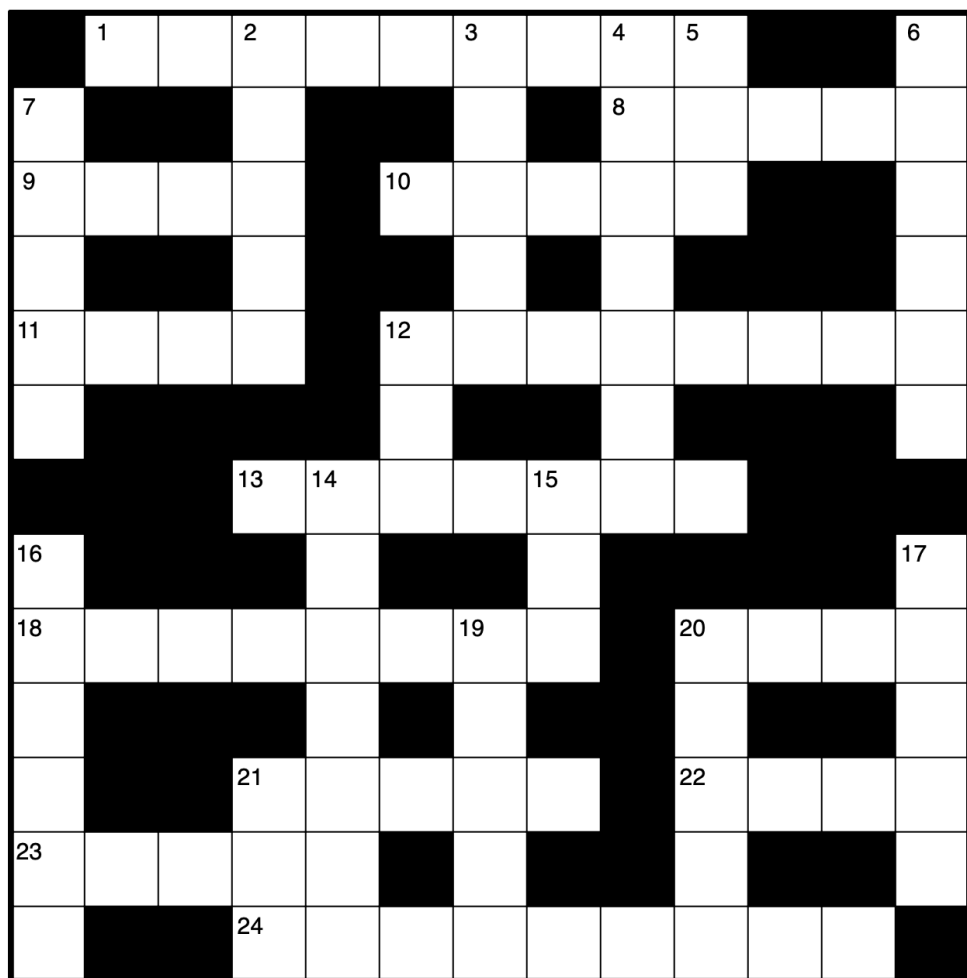
### Last week's answers

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ACROSS: 1) Scam call, 4) Bark, 6) Fling, 9) Humdrum, 10) Enchant, 11) Polish, 13) Margin, 14) Catwalk, 15) Seconds, 18) Acute, 19) Rank, 20) Feedback  
 DOWN: 1) Scone, 2) China, 3) Light, 5) Kremlin, 6) Facelifts, 7) Lambda, 8) Arrogance, 11) Poacher, 12) Squash, 15) Skate, 16) Could, 17) Stalk

Quiz answers: 1) Corpus Christi College, 2) Ivory Coast, 3) The Cranberries, 4) Oxford, 5) Forty, 6) Shawshank Redemption, 7) 3 - James Ramsey MacDonald, James Harold Wilson, James Gordon Brown - but not Leonard James Callaghan! 8) Poet, Village, Village, Poet. 9) Green, 10) New York

### Cryptic Crossword by Sarah Beard



- ACROSS**
- Spotted amid natal confusion (9)
  - Gold found in a hot place! (5)
  - Space for easterly anchor (4)
  - Chart connects Niagra phenomena (5)
  - Artificial intelligence embedded in narcissist (4)
  - Couples start retreat laughing, 'til vengeance - e.g. sister (8)
  - My fellow is most pink (7)
  - An altercation heard in spy pit (8)
  - French article: go into the burning liquid (4)
  - Brother after movement energy is poor (5)
  - Victor is a useful tool for getting you where you want to go (4)
  - To choose French without Spanish yes, it makes noise (5)
  - Capacity of belt thickness (9)
- DOWN**
- Angsty teen who usually wears black hides when in yellow (5)
  - Indecent witch for science tute puts and end to Trinity (5)
  - Snake! Stop! On the ground! (7)
  - Chinese dynasty rising up is negative but casual (3)
  - Device fit between two tangos (6)
  - Fifty (plus five) shades of meat sauce (5)
  - Fury without an echo is just something old that no one cares about (3)
  - Also the Spanish-speaking explorer recognises Catalan as the only official language (7)
  - Web left over (3)
  - Constant, sexy, illegal behaviour (6)
  - Woman is mad in a mirror (5)
  - Initially, Najar assembled kebabs exposed, dripping bare (5)
  - Fifty-one and a half videos are furious (5)

### Oxdoku by Lewis Callister

