

Cherwell

Oxford's oldest independent newspaper, est. 1920

VOLUME 303, ISSUE 3

SATURDAY 8th FEBRUARY 2025

3RD WEEK, HILARY



Town conquers Gown in Union boxing showdown

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Stephen Fry
on mythology,
knighthood, and
student theatre

PROFILES – PAGES 12-13

Of mice and mould: Housing quality tied to college wealth

By SUBHAN ASLAM

Oxford University students are facing serious accommodation issues, from sky-high rents to freezing rooms and persistent mould. *Cherwell* surveyed 650 students across 32 colleges to uncover the reality of student housing. The results expose stark disparities: while students at wealthier colleges enjoy better value for money, those at poorer colleges contend with pests, faulty heating, and unresponsive administrations.

Respondents rated their overall housing, as well as their bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom facilities, on a scale from 1.0 (“very unsatisfied”) to 5.0 (“very satisfied”). These scores were averaged to provide a comprehensive measure of student satisfaction, with the same approach applied to ratings of value for money. Students also had the chance to report problems with heating, mould, or pests and to evaluate how well their college handled maintenance complaints, ultimately shining a light on which colleges provide the best places to live.

Student satisfaction

Across the student body, the average rating was 3.60/5, indicating that students generally felt “neutral” to “satisfied” with their accommodation.

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Abseiling police arrest Rad Cam protesters: In photos



Abseiling police arrested 13 Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P) protesters following their occupation of the Radcliffe Camera Library on 24th January. Just one was an Oxford University student. The occupation lasted from 9am to around 5pm, and came to an end after police and fire crew used abseiling gear to arrest the handful of protesters gathered at the exterior ledge of the Rad Cam.

At 9am, OA4P protesters entered the library wearing masks and gave those inside one minute to vacate the premises. Shortly afterwards, security arrived and prevented access to the library from the main entrance and the Gladstone Link.

By CHERWELL NEWS

Some of the protesters situated themselves on the outside ledge of the library and used books from inside the library to hold down Palestinian flags. A protester with a megaphone told onlookers that this action was “made necessary after the University ceased contact with OA4P” and demanded “complete divestment from all Israeli interests and an overhaul of the ethical investment policy.”

Outside, a crowd gathered to resist the arrests. As law enforcement took protesters out of the Rad Cam and into their vans, a physical confrontation took

place. The crowd tried to block police vans from leaving with arrestees inside, with both sides pushing each other.

At around 4pm, a law enforcement officer abseiled from the roof of the Rad Cam down to the ledge, where the last three protesters remained. Another officer exited the window and put a restraining jacket on one of the protesters, who was then clipped onto the abseiling gear. Together, the two abseiled down to the ground. The final protesters were then carried to Broad Street by police and taken away in vans. In total, all 13 protesters who took part in the occupation were arrested.

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Oxford University redundancies highest in Russell Group last year

By NOAH ROBSON

Despite an overall increase in headcount, Oxford University made 519 redundancies in 2023-24, over 100 more than any other Russell Group university. This figure includes staff at the end of fixed term contracts, a practice which is widely prevalent at Oxford, with 66% of employees on such contracts compared to an average of 40% at other UK institutions, according to a report from the University and College Union (UCU) released in October 2023.

This number does not include staff from Oxford University Press (OUP), where 137 additional contracts came to an end, bringing the overall sum to 656. The number also does not include redundancies made by individual colleges. In total, £5.3 million of compensatory payments were paid for the 656 terminated contracts. A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*

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University to allow 'non-traditional' exams to reduce attainment gap

By CONOR WALSH

Oxford University has announced its new Access and Participation Plan (APP), which aims to reduce gaps in educational attainment between students from different backgrounds and to reduce barriers to entry for undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The APP will operate from 2025 to 2029 and aims, in part, to “expand the range of summative assessment available to departments”, giving departments the scope to move beyond traditional exam formats. The expansion of assessment options has received backlash in the national media, with former Prime Minister and Oxford alumnus Liz Truss calling the reforms “nonsense”.

It is alleged that this “expansion” will entail less rigorous exams or coursework instead of collections. However, aside from focusing on inclusivity and the provision of reasonable adjustments, it is unclear from the initial report what assessment reform will actually amount to.

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Careers Service data shows high pressure, few spots for internships

By MORIEN ROBERTSON

Internship pressure is intense in Oxford, but it's not felt uniformly – demand is concentrated in a few select sectors which have been favoured by structural economic changes. Whilst some people love their weeks in the office, for many it's just an endless stepping stone to the next thing

One way in which Oxford students try to break into the jobs market is through the Oxford University Careers Service. They offer both micro- (a week long) and full internships exclusively to Oxford students, as well as running a

range of workshops and talks throughout the year. Micro-internships are a popular way of getting experience: you're “just competing against other Oxford students, so it's easier to get in”, as one put it. However, for some of the positions advertised, competition can be fierce.

Cherwell's Freedom of Information request shows that in the 2023-24 year, the most competitive sectors for summer internships were Media and Journalism, with over 50 applicants per place, followed by Banking with 33, and

Consultancy at 25.

The large majority of these applicants are undergraduates, with just over 30% of the undergraduate body applying to summer and micro-internships. The highly competitive nature of some of the positions, compared to other sectors with virtually no applicants, suggests that lots of the applications are a segment of the student body fighting over the same few positions.

Whilst some subjects, like Law and Engineering, have clear job paths, others suffer from worse reputations. An

English student said that work experience “feels especially important for the humanities and degrees that are generally valued less in the jobs market” and saw their internships as a way to “stand out”.

The most competitive region is North America, with 24 applications per internship offered; Asia has the lowest ratio of applications to internships offered, despite boasting the greatest number of places advertised out of all regions.

Read the full story on pg. 8

McDonald's to close at midnight after relocation down Cornmarket Street

By NOAH ROBSON

McDonald's has been refused permission by Oxford City Council to remain open until 3am when it moves several slots down to a new location on Cornmarket Street, where Leon previously was. So far, the council report indicates the new venue will be allowed to stay open until midnight.

In its current location, McDonald's has a licence to open from 6am to 3am every day, and the company applied for this same licence at its new location. The council has rejected this application on the basis that it is too close to residential areas, including student housing which is located above the new site.

In its reasoning, the council said that a 3am closure would "generate a level of activity that would be considered harmful to residential amenity", pointing to nearby accommodation "including residential flats, The Store hotel, and Jesus College". It

said that "midnight is deemed an acceptable limit," and the same hours are permitted to Cosy Club and the former Burger King in a similar location, both of which have consent from nearby student accommodation.

The new site will offer a larger space for the restaurant itself, with submitted floor plans suggesting up to four floors will be employed, although only two will be open to customers. The basement will be used as kitchen space, whilst the second floor is set to be converted into offices and an employee break room.

In response to these devastating developments, one student told *Cherwell*: "McDonald's has saved me after many a night out, and I know that I am not alone in feeling incredibly shocked at this news."

Although the relocation was meant to happen this month, that now seems unlikely according to *The Oxford Mail*, giving students at least a few more weeks of late night Big Macs to savour.

Image Credit: Selina Chen



Oxford had most redundancies of Russell Group universities

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that the overall number employed by the University rose by over 500 to a total of 16,905 staff.

In its annual report and accounts, the University set out the figures under "compensation for the loss of office." Comparison with previous years shows that this is the highest number of redundancies (excluding OUP employees) in a single year since the data began being publicly released by the University in the 2018-19 report, including the period affected by the pandemic.

When compared to the annual accounts of the 23 other Russell Group universities, Oxford is a clear exception, with a figure far higher than the average of 210 employees. Cambridge is second on the list, with 414 redundancies, with Nottingham close behind on 408.

David Chivall, the President of the Oxford branch of the UCU, told *Cherwell* the main reason for this high number is the University's "exploitation of casualised contracts to the point where University practices aren't always consistent with employment law".

"[This] has a detrimental effect on staff wellbeing and, for example, limits the ability of staff to find secure housing. The end of a fixed-term contract is legally classed as a redundancy and because Oxford relies

more than any other UK University on fixed-term contracts, it has to pay more redundancy pay than any other UK institution."

In Oxford UCU's 2023 report, 52.7% of surveyed casualised staff reported experiencing unequal treatment compared to their permanent colleagues, with 44.9% of respondents rating their job security as 'very bad' – the worst possible score.

In response to these redundancy figures, an Oxford University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "As a large employer, the University has a wide range of operational needs and therefore has a requirement for both temporary and fixed term staff, including where a role is linked to external funding."

"Each year many fixed term contracts come to the end of their term for a variety of reasons, while others begin. However, during 2023/24 the overall number of staff employed by the University increased by more than 500 to 16,905."

"Last year the Pay and Conditions review, commissioned by the Vice-Chancellor, reported on its outcomes which included a number of the actions arising in relation to fixed-term contracts. These included ensuring that all employees are able to access the University's contractual benefits equally, and addressing the use of repeat fixed-term contracts in some areas."

Two Oxford students face imminent trials for Just Stop Oil action

By JESS TAIT

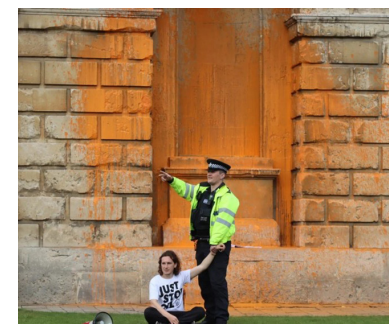
Daniel Knorr, 22, a former Oxford biochemistry student, began trial earlier this week for their role in an alleged attempt to disrupt Manchester Airport in August of last year. Knorr was also arrested alongside Noah Crane, 19, for throwing orange paint on the Rad Cam, allegedly causing upwards of £2,000 worth of damage. Both activists are set to go to trial in August for the Rad Cam incident, after being charged with causing criminal damage and having an article with intent to destroy or damage property.

Knorr has been involved in other examples of direct action with the

organisation. In August 2023, they were fined and given a community order after briefly stopping play during an Ashes Test at Lord's Cricket Ground. They are currently on remand in HMP Forest Bank.

This trial comes shortly after Just Stop Oil activist and Oxford student Niamh Lynch, 22, has requested not to be tried in May or June so that court proceedings do not clash with her exams. She is one of two protesters facing trial, alongside Rajan Naidu, 72.

Both Lynch and Naidu have pleaded not guilty to two charges of damaging an ancient monument and intentionally causing a public nuisance after orange powder was thrown onto



Stonehenge, the Neolithic English Heritage site in June 2024. Both have since been released on bail to await trial.

During proceedings on January 22nd, Ms Audrey Mogan, who acted for Lynch's defence, asked the judge to consider the importance of her client's academic commitments – her final exams – when deciding the date of the hearing. Judge Rufus Taylor later confirmed the trial would begin on 20th October at Winchester Crown Court.

Image Credit: Jakub Trybull

University's Access and Participation Plan includes potential exam reform

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Aside from examination provisions, the University will spend £12.9m on programmes providing transitional support to incoming undergraduate students. This is in addition to the £3.3m spent on programmes designed specifically for Black and other racially minoritised students.

The University will also continue to fund sector-leading access programmes, such as UNIQ, which offers application support and residential places to disadvantaged school pupils from under-represented backgrounds at Oxford.

The APP pays a particular focus to Black, socio-economically disadvantaged, and disabled students. As part of these measures, the University hopes to guarantee that 94% of students from Black, disabled, and free-school-meal backgrounds will receive a 2:1 or above. The plan also aims to increase the proportion of undergraduate entrants who received free school meals to 10.7%. In the UK, a child can be offered free school meals if their parents are recipients of various income supports, depending on their local council.

At Oxford, 81% of Black students achieved at least a 2:1 in their degree compared to 95% of white students in 2021. The report acknowledges that "Black students are significantly less

likely to be awarded a good degree than their white counterparts." It suggests possible reasons for this could be an "intersection with socio-economic disadvantage" and also a "lack of ethnic diversity among University staff", "under-representation in curricula and teaching", and "racism".

Universities are required to provide access and participation plans by the Office for Students (OfS), as stipulated by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and the Equality Act 2010. These plans must be approved by the OfS in order for universities to increase tuition fees in line with the government's tuition fee cap of £9,535.

Compared to other UK universities, Oxford performs well in completion rates and attainment gaps between various student groups. However, access remains a problem with only 7.9% of Oxford entrants having received free school meals compared to the national average of 18.6% across UK higher education institutes.

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell* that: "In the coming years we will continue our access and outreach work to increase the number of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds admitted to Oxford, and will put in place additional measures as part of our ongoing programme of on course support with the aim of

supporting specific student cohorts to achieve good degree outcomes."

On access and participation arrangements at Oxford, one JCR President told *Cherwell*: "The financial support offered for disadvantaged students, especially to fund work experience abroad, has transformed my university experience for the better."

"There is no doubt that Oxford should admit the most capable applicants regardless of background, but the root of the issue is inspiring such students to apply in the first place. I'm especially glad to see Oxford recognising this and targeting it directly with schemes like UNIQ."

The Student Union told *Cherwell*: "Having played an active role in the development of the APP last year, we are pleased that the SU's submission has been incorporated into the University's plan, and we welcome the University's ongoing work to improve access."

"Historically, like other universities, Oxford has not always met its APP targets. The SU has been clear that our priority should not just be around access, but enabling the success of all students whilst studying. We will continue to encourage and work alongside the University to ensure sufficient reflection takes place in order to meet future targets."

Image Credit: David Hays



Europe's 'Silicon Valley' to be built between Oxford and Cambridge

BY ELIZABETH HAMILTON

Chancellor Rachel Reeves has announced plans to develop the area between Oxford and Cambridge into what she said could become "Europe's Silicon Valley." She described the plan as building a "growth corridor" aiming to better harness economic and research opportunities. In a speech at Siemens Healthineers in Oxfordshire, Reeves outlined several major investment plans, including proposals to expand transport links and housing between the two university cities.

The project would give increased funding for East-West Rail, which already links Oxford and Milton Keynes, to guarantee its continuation onto Cambridge. It also proposes 18 new towns along the rail line in the hopes of attracting and accommodating "world-class talent" to the "world-class companies" which operate in and around the cities. Oxford University's Vice Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey expressed support for the plans, referring to the Oxford-Cambridge region as a "powerhouse of innovation and an economic crown jewel."

The initiative has also been backed by Susan Brown, the leader of Oxford City Council, who commended its potential to create "well-paid jobs for our children and grandchildren". Local Liberal Democrat MPs including Layla Moran said in a statement she was "pleased to see the government's commitment to East West Rail", but that there is still "much further to go".

The Chancellor also announced a new Growth Commission for Oxford, similar to one already set up in Cambridge, and appointed Sir Patrick Vallance as "Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor champion." Vallance has said that he is in a hurry "to get things done" and has called the initiative "a crucial development".

He also offered assurances that the plans would not "overturn the things that we need to do for biodiversity", emphasising the corridor's potential to advance "green technologies". Since first being proposed in 2017, the project has been condemned by environmental groups such as the RSPB and Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

Extinction Rebellion protesters dressed as Suffragettes protest on Cornmarket

BY CONOR WALSH

Extinction Rebellion members, dressed as Suffragettes, took to Cornmarket Street to raise public awareness about the increased number of protesters who face criminal sentences. Members of the group were handing out leaflets and talking to the public during their protest on Friday 24th January.

The group's actions precede the appeals of 16 climate protesters at the Royal Courts of Justice on 29th and 30th January. They hope that their presence on Cornmarket Street will draw awareness to these sentencing appeals and generate public awareness about new laws restricting disruptive protests, introduced last year.

One Extinction Rebellion member told *Cherwell*: "This is about courage, about sticking up for things that you believe in. It's really important that the public knows what's going on."

Extinction Rebellion is an environmental protest movement who use nonviolent methods to try to influence government action and public opinion. Members of the group are normally distinguishable

by their green and black banners, but this afternoon they ditched their normal attire for outfits resembling the Suffragettes who campaigned for women's voting rights in the early 1900s.

They hope to draw parallels between imprisoned Suffragettes and members of their own movement who have been prosecuted under new protesting laws.

The Public Order Act 2023 was introduced by the previous Conservative government in an attempt to crack down on disruptive protests. The act allowed courts to introduce specific restrictions on protests with "serious prevention orders". Infringing these orders carries a maximum penalty of six months imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

Home Secretary at the time, James Cleverly, said that "the public has a democratic right to protest and this government will always uphold that. However, recent months have shown certain individuals are just dedicated to wreaking havoc and causing severe disruption to the everyday lives of the public." He said that the legislation aimed to stop those who ignore warnings from law enforcements to go "cannot continue to cause turmoil unpunished".

Ines, who was taking part in the public engagement on Cornmarket, said that: "The majority of climate protesters adhere to non-violence, and these changes to the law seem absolutely ridiculous. They're draconian in their implementation. We might cause disruption, but we're never violent. The current laws simply don't seem proportionate for their non-violent protests."

This was not the only Extinction Rebellion activity Cornmarket bore witness to this week. The following day, the group protested outside of Barclays, holding a flag which read "this bank funds climate change" and playing drums loudly. Flyers being handed out described Barclays as "Europe's biggest financier of fossil fuels" and said that it "funds extreme oil and gas projects incompatible with tackling the climate crisis".

A Barclays spokesperson told *Cherwell* they had no comment on the protest activity itself but noted that "building a new energy system that provides clean, reliable and affordable energy won't happen overnight – a period of transition is necessary."

Read the full article at [Cherwell.org](https://www.cherwell.org)
Image Credit: Conor Walsh



Botley Road to remain closed until 2026



BY EKAM HOTHI

Botley Road will continue to be blocked for another 18 months, until August of 2026, according to an announcement this Friday from Network Rail, the public company in charge of the project. By the time it re-opens, it will have been closed for over three years.

Botley Road continues on from Park End Street, past Oxford Railway Station, and leads to student accommodation and popular shops with students, such as Aldi, Sports Direct, Decathlon, and Waitrose. Past the ring-road, it connects Oxford with the A34 and A420 road.

The road closed in April 2023 in order for £161 million worth of improvements to be made to the station, including the construction of a new bridge. A large white fence blocks access to the road just before the railway bridge, with traffic being diverted right past Said Business School into the carpark of Oxford Railway Station, and slowing down pedestrian and cyclist access.

The closure was originally meant to be just six months. Network Rail have explained that some of the delays for the closure were caused by "complex utilities diversions" that could not be completed on schedule "despite concerted effort by all organisations involved. Archaeological discoveries such as a Victorian brick arch and a grenade dating

to World War II have also impacted the extended period of closure.

The closure has caused much disruption over the last two years. For example, in July of 2024, Oxfordshire County Council postponed a trial of traffic filters because of the delay, and many businesses have reported financial losses as a result.

Rail Minister Lord Hendy visited Oxford to speak to residents and businesses put out by the delays. More than 100 people gathered ahead of his visit on Friday 24th January to protest, demanding that the road be reopened.

The leader of Oxford City Council, Susan Brown, said in a statement posted online: "It was welcome that Lord Hendy was clear that Network Rail needed to improve their communication with local residents and businesses and that their commitment to do so was given." She added "in the light of previous broken promises on timelines, [I] was clear over the importance of keeping to the latest opening date."

The Green Party councillors called for Oxford City Council to take legal action over what they described as "mismanagement" by Network Rail on Monday 27th January. They have demanded a public enquiry and a reasonable completion date for the project.

Network Rail have been approached for comment.

Image Credit: David Hays

NEWS SHORTS

Oxford alumnus revealed on 'The Traitors'

'The Traitors' contestant Alexander Dragonetti was revealed to be an Oxford graduate after fans tracked down his Hinge. Dragonetti rejoined the series after initially sacrificing himself in the first episode. He studied Modern History and is a former British diplomat. Unfortunately, his time at Oxford did not help him with the show, and despite making it to the final, he was unable to win the prize money.

Oxford vapers ranked most eco-friendly

Oxford has the most environmentally-friendly vapers in the UK according to research conducted by Electric Tobacconist. Oxford City Council's Recycle Your Vapes initiative allows residents to place their vapes in a clear bag for collection and has collected more than 80,000 disposable vapes.

'Kindness' named Oxford's Children's Word of the Year

Following a survey of over 3,000 young people, aged six to 14, 'kindness' was chosen as Children's Word of the Year 2024. Runners-up included 'artificial intelligence' and 'conflict'. Previous years' winning phrases were 'climate change' in 2023 and 'Queen' in 2022. The top three slang words chosen were 'slay', 'sigma', and 'skibidi'.

CROSS CAMPUS

Cambridge Corpus Christi students banned from formal

All undergraduate students at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, have been banned for formals and slacks (bops) for two weeks, following "unacceptable behaviour" at a formal last week. An email from the college's dean cited "reports of singing, banging on tables, general disruption, and walking through to Fellows' rooms" as well as "large amounts of vomit on the floor and in the showers" and "faeces on the floor and in the bin."

Linacre College owns Durham student house

Linacre College owns a house currently being rented out to Durham University students. According to a dataset run by the Land Registry, it is the only property that the College owns directly outside of Oxfordshire. Students interviewed by *Palatinate* did not realise that the property they are living in was owned by an Oxford college. This may be the closest a Durham student will come to getting into Oxbridge.

Stanford students fundraise for animals affected by wildfires

The Stanford student organisation People for Animal Welfare (PAW) have raised over \$1,700 via a GoFundMe to support animals affected by fires in Altadena and Pasadena, California. The decision to raise money occurred after PAW was approached by journalist Alana Belle M. Tirad asking for more focus to be placed on the animals affected and the overcrowding of shelters.



University initiative aims to reduce 'Town and Gown' separation

By SHAHAR EYAL

The University of Oxford has announced new plans to support "town and gown" relations within the local community in an initiative that aims to "support transformative social and economic change locally."

The new programme, entitled "Beyond Town and Gown", outlines plans which aim to "turn the page on that town and gown separation" and "work towards a more inclusive Oxford". The University says that their approach will support local engagement through "championing, connecting, and convening." This involves developing existing community initiatives, making the University more accessible to locals, and bringing people together to collaborate on solutions to local problems.

Key projects include partnerships with schools, such as the College-Primary Twinning Project, which pairs local primary schools with Oxford colleges, and gives them access to college facilities and opportunities to partake in extracur-

ricular activities and tutoring, on college sites, as well as in their own schools.

The plan also includes the expansion of various cultural programmes that the University is already involved in, including long-running outreach efforts that involve opening up Oxford's gardens, libraries, and museums, which host various educational and cultural events for local residents. The University has also supported community organisations through small grants, collaboration with local schools, and has worked closely with Oxford City Football Club.

The University has also been recognised as a University of Sanctuary, providing scholarships and support for refugees. The University is currently working on a project with Asylum Welcome to create a Refugee-Led Research Hub in East Oxford, which will offer opportunities for sanctuary seekers in Oxford.

University Local and Global Engagement Officer, Professor Alexander Betts, told *Cherwell*: "After 800 years of town-gown divide, we know that this will take time and

we are at the start of a journey. We are committed to working collaboratively with the city, the county, and the local community to shape a brighter future for people across the region. We will do that by contributing to sustainable economic growth, sharing the university's facilities and expertise with local residents, and building enduring relationships with the local community."

The "town and gown" relationship has been historically divided, with conflicts between students and townspeople dating back to the 13th century. Today, the separation continues as the university's growth and demand for student accommodation "sometimes strain local infrastructure," according to the University's report. Recently, plans for the redevelopment of a Magdalen College accommodation block by the Cowley roundabout and the construction of a new research lab in Headington were the target of many objections and complaints from local residents, and are at the fore of these tensions.

Image Credit: David Hays.

Researchers call for AI mental health framework

By POPPY LITTLER-JENNINGS

Researchers from Oxford Internet Institute (OII) are calling for a structured framework to assess the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on young people's mental health as it becomes more and more embedded in everyday life.

The research team's study stresses the importance of a critical re-evaluation of how internet-based technologies and their impact on youth mental health is studied. The paper outlines where future studies can learn from the "pitfalls of social media research."

The lead author, Dr Karen Mansfield, a postdoctoral researcher at OII, said: "Research on the effects of AI, as well as evidence for policymakers and advice for caregivers, must learn from the issues that have faced social media research. Young people are already adopting new ways of interacting with AI, and without a solid framework for collaboration between stakeholders, evidence-based policy on AI will lag behind, as it did for social media."

The study cites a 2023 report by UK regulator Ofcom, which found that two out of five children aged 7 to 12 years, and four out of five adolescents aged 13 to 17 years, now use generative AI tools and servic-

es, overtaking the pace set by social media. This report also revealed that 58% of internet users are concerned about the future impact of generative AI on society.

The researchers stress the risk of repeating past mistakes, explaining that poor youth mental health is often explained by social media as one isolated causal factor, which they say is a reductive view of the multitude of ways social media is used and the many contextual factors which influence both technology use and mental health.

In order to avoid similar problems with AI, the researchers call for studies that don't inherently problematise AI, and instead prioritise examining pertinent exposures and outcomes as well as employing causal research designs.

A contributing author, Professor Andrew Przybylski said: "We are calling for a collaborative evidence-based framework that will hold big tech firms accountable in a proactive, incremental, and informative way. Without building on past lessons, in ten years we could be back to square one, viewing the place of AI in much the same way we feel helpless about social media and smartphones. We have to take active steps now so that AI can be safe and beneficial for children and adolescents."

Image Credit: David Hays

New labs accused of being 'selfish, short-sighted'

By MAIR ANDREWS

The University of Oxford proposal to develop a new three-storey lab in Headington was accused of being "selfish and short-sighted" by Headington Heritage regarding its environmental impact. The new three-storey building is proposed to be part of Oxford University's Old Road Campus in Headington, including a substation building, cycle storage building, and associated landscaping.

The Old Road Campus is a University of Oxford site in Headington dedicated to biomedical research and includes buildings such as the Nuffield Department of Medicine Research, the Big Data Institute, and other buildings for research on childcare, tropical diseases, and rheumatology.

Highfields Residents Association (HRA) and Headington Heritage have objected to the plans, fearing that building works will disturb residents and that the height of the building may "impinge visually on the residents" and cause light pollution. Fears of traffic build-up and flooding in the area have also been raised.

Headington Heritage told *Cherwell* that "the endless expansion of facilities with no mitigation and addition of staff is selfish and shortsighted, and environmentally unfriendly to the extreme." It holds the University and Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (OUHT) responsible for "a traffic and housing nightmare" and "environmental damage" because they are using land for "car parking" rather than "to provide housing and alleviate the housing crisis."

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

In photos: OA4P occupies Rad Cam, arrested via abseiling

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During the occupation, OA4P dubbed the library the "Khalida Jarrar Library" after the member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a group designated as a terrorist organisation by the USA and European Union, but not by the UK.

This occupation comes after the University threatened legal action in the form of a court order to end OA4P's encampment around the Rad Cam.

When *Cherwell* asked OA4P about the court order, they claimed that the eviction notice only stated "you must not return to the land for purposes of an encampment"

In an official statement: OA4P said "as Palestinians in Gaza are finally allowed a moment to breathe, grieve,

return, and begin rebuilding their homes, mosques, churches, schools, and hospitals, our efforts must be redoubled. It is imperative to continue pressuring and disrupting the systems and powers that sustain the Zionist project. To take our eyes off of Gaza now would be an abdication of our responsibility to the struggle for Palestinian liberation."

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "We thoroughly condemn the disruption and distress caused to members of the University by the actions of these individuals. While the University supports the right to peaceful protest, this action plainly goes beyond the bounds of acceptable protest and is a clear risk to the safety of protesters, students, staff and members of the public. It is preventing students from using the resources and space of

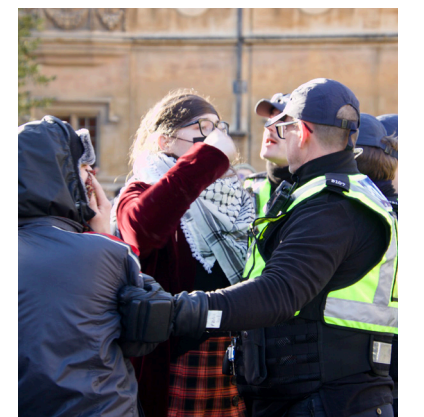
the library to pursue their education. It is also putting at risk on a historic building and its contents.

"The protesters are in breach of University regulations and policies and we will be enforcing the University's disciplinary policies."

In a message to students sent three days later, the University said while it "supports the right to peaceful protest, this action was disruptive and dangerous. It presented a clear risk to the safety of protesters, students, staff and members of the public. We remain committed to ensuring that Oxford is a welcoming and inclusive place, and one in which we express ourselves through robust, civil debate."

The Rad Cam reopened the following Saturday morning at its usual hour.

Image Credits: David Hays.



INVESTIGATIONS

Of mice and mould: Housing disparities tied to college wealth

Continued from Page 1

The most satisfied students were from Somerville College and Worcester College, both of whom gave a rating of 4.14, followed by Merton College at 3.94 and Corpus Christi College at 3.93. One Merton student praised the “fantastic accommodation and maintenance team,” adding, “honestly, for the amount we’re paying, it is insane that we get such a good service.” The least satisfied students were from St Edmund Hall, which received a rating of 3.17, with Lady Margaret Hall and Pembroke College close behind at 3.18.

Bedrooms received an average score of 4.12, standing in stark contrast to the much lower rating of 2.94 for kitchen facilities. One Exeter College student described sharing a “tiny kitchen” with 115 people as “anxiety-inducing,” while a Brasenose College student described their “kitchenette,” which amounted to little more than “one mini fridge with a microwave and toaster placed on top” for eight people. Bathrooms fared slightly better, averaging a score of 3.62 across all colleges, though experiences varied widely. Mansfield College students praised the accessibility of en-suites whilst a St Anne’s College student however, told *Cherwell* that in their first year they shared a bathroom “smaller than an airplane toilet” with seven others.

“Mushrooms growing out the wall”

“Cockroach and ant infestation”

“Constant stream of water coming out of the ceiling”

Value for money

Students at LMH reported the lowest value for money with an average score of 2.10. Following closely were Wadham College with a score of 2.54 and St Peter’s College with 2.56. On the other end of the spectrum, students at St John’s College felt they were getting the best value with an average score of 4.21 - no surprises there since students from John’s reported the cheapest rent of all the colleges surveyed. Students at Balliol College and Merton also felt they were getting a good deal, with both colleges averaging a score of 4.07.

Cherwell found that the more someone

is paying for their accommodation, the poorer they will rate its value for money. With a higher rent, one would expect more reliable heating and better protection from mould and pests. However, this is not the case. In fact, the survey showed quite the opposite. As the average rent of a college increased, so did the percentage of rooms experiencing issues with heating, mould, or pests. In short, at Oxford, paying more for accommodation does not guarantee a better living experience; rather, it may mean dealing with black mould, silverfish, and cold, sleepless nights.

The most reliable indicator of value for money in college accommodation is the size of a college’s endowment. A systemic issue means that wealthier colleges can offer better-quality housing, while students at poorer colleges are left to contend with mice and mould. The graph below illustrates that colleges with larger endowments per student tend to have lower average rent costs and thus receive higher value-for-money ratings. The 10 colleges with the lowest endowment per student charge an average of £1,926 per term for rent, while the 10 wealthiest colleges charge £1,689 per term on average. Moreover, 57% of students from the least well-endowed colleges reported issues with heating, mould, or pests, compared with 50% from the wealthiest colleges. Overall, a strong correlation was found between higher average termly rent of a college and an increased proportion of students reporting accommodation issues.

Accommodation issues

More broadly on the topic of heating, mould and pests, respondents to the survey were asked to report any issues they had experienced in their accommodation, focusing on these three key areas. The survey found that 55% of undergraduates living in college accommodation were dealing with at least one of these issues. LMH had the highest proportion of students reporting issues, with 90% living in affected rooms, followed by St Catherine’s College with 85% and Exeter with 72%. Notably, all three colleges rank in the bottom half for endowment per person, highlighting a potential link between funding and facility quality.

38% of respondents reported heating problems

The survey showed that 38% of under-

graduates were dealing with heating problems. One student from St Catherine’s told *Cherwell*: “In first-year accommodation, I was so cold that I couldn’t type on my laptop and was constantly sick.” The worst colleges for heating issues are LMH, with 90% of students reporting issues, St Edmund Hall at 69%, and the aforementioned St Catherine’s at 57%. The problem of insufficient, or broken, heating is not confined to these colleges. A Hertford College student described that “In the November storms the room was so cold I was turning blue and having to wear three to four jumpers”, and they ended up sleeping in another student’s room for a few days to escape from the cold. A student at Exeter reported that in all rooms in their college owned house “thermometers normally show 14°C”, a full 4°C below the NHS recommended temperature for a room. The environmental impact of leaving radiators running was understood by many respondents, and one student from Wadham spoke about how they “understand the need to save energy”, but then went on to say that to deal with the cold they had resorted to “turning the oven on and leaving it open”. The overarching sentiment from students was a desire for greater control over when the heating is turned on in their accommodation, as well as a suggestion that colleges consider improving the insulation of their buildings.

19% of respondents reported pest problems

When it comes to pests, 19% of respondents reported encountering them in their rooms. The most common issue was mice, accounting for 29% of all reports, followed by cockroaches at 23%, and silverfish at 21%. The colleges with the highest percentage of rooms affected by pest issues were LMH, with 50% of students reporting problems, followed by St Catherine’s and Pembroke, both at 42%. A student at Hertford reported that “There were cockroaches and an ant infestation in main site rooms last year, which the college admits is a regular problem and yet not one that they attempt to fix”. One student at Brasenose shared how they came back from the Christmas vacation to find bedbugs in their room. The college responded quickly and treatment was done three days after the issue was reported, however the bites continued for two weeks after this. This time the responses from Brasenose were not as proactive and they told the student to wait as the treatment would take a while to start working. The student asked to move rooms and was told “plainly that this would not be possible”. Having received no compensa-



St Anne’s College accommodation. Image Credit: Euan Elliott

tion, she told *Cherwell*, “the college grossly neglected their responsibility to provide me with a safe and liveable room”.

21% of respondents reported mould problems

An issue that affects student houses across the country is mould, and Oxford is no exception. 21% of the respondents reported dealing with mould in their rooms. Whilst this figure dropped to 15% in the newer secondary accommodation buildings of colleges, it rose to 36% in college owned houses. The colleges that reported the highest level of mould across all undergrad rooms were Magdalen College at 50%, Worcester at 45% and Mansfield at 44%. A student living in the Linbury Building in Worcester described how last year, “every time I moved in, the bathroom would be covered in black mould” and “as part of our moving in routine, my mum and I would use a mould spray and sponge to clean it all”. One student at Mansfield described their windowsill as “entirely mouldy, with the wood rotted away.” They reported the issue to the accommodation manager at the start of Michaelmas, requesting it be replaced by Hilary. However, upon returning this term, they found the mould had been painted over, while the rotting wood had not been replaced.

Reporting issues & responsiveness

Given the number of persistent issues in undergraduate accommodation, it is unsurprising that 55% of undergraduates

reported having raised a problem with their college at some point. These students were then asked to evaluate their college’s response, rating its helpfulness on a scale from “very unhelpful” (1.0) to “very helpful” (4.0). Across all colleges, the average score was 2.98, indicating that most students regarded their college’s response as generally ‘helpful’ in addressing accommodation issues. The colleges with the lowest ratings were LMH, with a score of 2.11, St Edmund Hall at 2.17, and St Catherine’s at 2.29. It is unsurprising that the survey found a strong correlation between the perceived unhelpfulness of a college in responding to accommodation problems and the proportion of rooms that encountered issues with heating, mould, or pests. A number of students reported insufficient college responses to major problems.

One student living in a St John’s owned house reported how they had no plumbing in their house for six weeks. The problem was reported on Tuesday 8th of October, and a contractor was brought in on Monday the 18th November. In the weeks between they said “we were banned from using all showers and toilets in the house” and instead had to use the house next door’s facilities. Despite this, all members of the house were still required to pay the full £264 facilities charge.

In a college house at Merton, one student’s room was “growing mushrooms out of the wall”, whilst another “had a constant stream of dripping water coming through the ceiling”. The mushrooms were growing from a patch of mould that the college only sought to deal with after the student had gone to the welfare team. The student living in the room with the leaky ceiling had to stay in hotel rooms on numerous occasions and was “offered no compensation”. The respondent went on to say they felt that the college is “far more concerned about their reputation [...] rather than the individual students’ welfare”.

Paying more for less

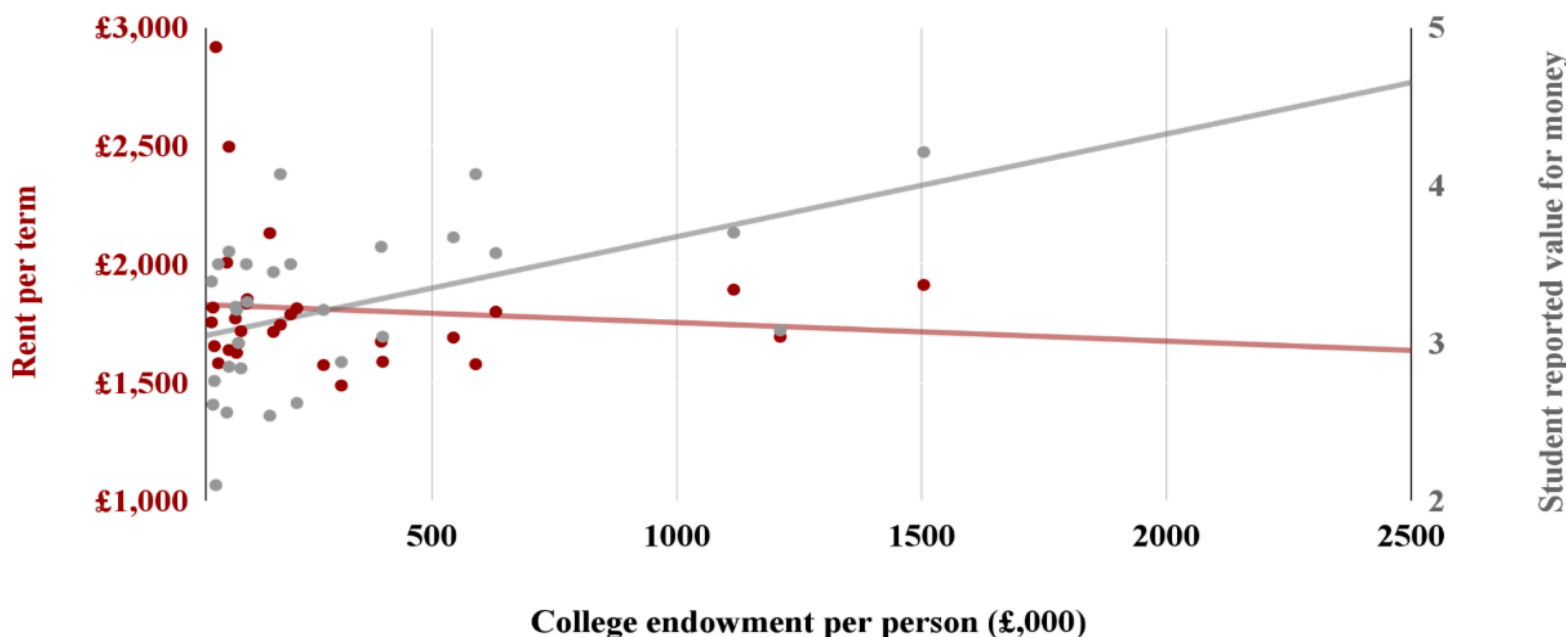
Cherwell’s survey of Oxford’s accommodation reveals a stark divide tied to college wealth. Students at colleges with smaller endowments are more likely to face persistent issues like pests, mould, and heating problems, while those at wealthier colleges enjoy significantly better living conditions. A lack of responsiveness from college administrations is another major concern, with many students feeling their complaints are ignored or dismissed. Despite higher rent prices, these problems persist, underscoring a systemic failure in Oxford’s accommodation system.

Note: While on average 23 students per college responded to the survey, not all colleges had an equal number of responses. Those colleges with significantly fewer responses were: St Peter’s (9), LMH (10), Magdalen (12), Wadham, and St Edmund Hall (13). Any responses from colleges or halls with fewer than nine responses were excluded.

Read the full investigation, including responses from colleges, at cherwell.org.

Influence of college endowment on rent per term and student-perceived value-for-money

● Cost as listed on Oxford website ● Value rating (1 = very bad, 5 = very good)



OPINION

‘Expolwed!': The Oxford Union’s use of AI

LLOYD DORÉ-GREEN

In a move which exemplifies the growing encroachment of the algorithmic into the artistic, the most recent Oxford Union term card is brimming with the soulless products of artificial intelligence. The Week 5 debate exhumes cancel culture from the graveyard of politics with the hackneyed motion ‘This House Would Cancel Cancel Culture’. Its accompanying AI-generated image depicts a man, the wretched ‘victim’ of social ostracisation, encircled by accusatory and often grotesquely deformed fingers, distorted phone screens, and signs which read “You’re canceled!”, “Exposed!”, and, finally, “Expolwed”. It is hard to decide which is more egregious: the American spelling of ‘cancelled’ or the entirely meaningless “Expolwed”. Reluctantly, I may have to opt for the latter.

There is an obvious reason why this image and the others on the term card, at which I sadiastically encourage you to take a closer

look, are manifestly absurd when given more than a moment’s glance. After all, beyond the at most half-a-dozen words used to generate them, they are entirely thoughtless; without ever having seen them, you may already have given them more attention than their ‘creator’. This leaves them with little real purpose. I would criticise the obvious heavy-handedness and lack of nuance of the cancel culture image, but I cannot do so without implying that there is some level of intentionality behind it, where in reality there is none. It is merely nonsense masquerading as art; criticising it is a waste of time. In the right hands, AI image generation is a sophisticated tool. But the Union, it seems, confuses a chisel for a sledgehammer.

“AI image generation can be a sophisticated tool. But the Union, it seems, confuses a chisel for a sledgehammer”

This is, at its core, shamefully lazy. But there is a deeper issue here, too. This term card claims that “the Union is more than a

debating society, it’s a space for free speech, for challenging orthodoxy, for sparking change.” Gratuitous use of AI-generated content makes a mockery of these lofty ideals. The images are devoid of imagination. If they are to constitute a form of expression, which I would deny, they are its most hollowed out and uninteresting kind. And yet, in the most recent term card, this meaningless nonsense has replaced the products of genuine human creativity; silence has replaced speech. The Union had the opportunity to live up to its ideals of free expression and chose to do the opposite, instead passing the platform to an AI which is both unfree and incapable of expression.

Artists matter. Most fundamentally, they keep us honest, to ourselves and to each other, and, in a dishearteningly common number of recent examples, they face censorship for doing so. AI merely rips off and regurgitates this work, providing almost no additional value and, as a result, producing works which very rarely make sense. And yet, because using it takes so little effort, artists will soon be drowned out by a jumbled tide of these hollow, AI-generated counterfeits. In many places this has unfortunately already begun to happen. The Oxford Union has, through laziness, become one of them. It undermines artists at a time when support for them and their free expression could not be more important. This is an obvious betrayal of the Union’s supposed commitment to free speech, a failure of both imagination and principle.

Letters to the Editor:

Readers of *Cherwell* respond to articles from previous weeks

It’s time for a new view on college disparities

MADAM – I didn’t contribute to the *College Disparities* report but helped promote it when it was released. After reading your opinion, I realised its key points haven’t fully resonated across Oxford.

Oxford’s collegiate structure is undeniably special, as both the report and outreach emphasised. Diverse college experiences are valuable. Over my cold, dead, JCR-president-body, would I let a Magdalenite disparage Arne Jacobsen like a Wheel might! Yet, these differences often translate into financial, academic, and opportunity disparities, which the report outlines in detail.

This isn’t just about UCL having a larger endowment than St Andrew’s. One in three students ends up at a college they didn’t apply to. So even if a prospective student chooses a college with lower accommodation costs or with aid for something crucial to them, they might still land in a college that cannot afford what they need. When the report came out, there was a £1,383 annual accommodation cost difference between LMH and St John’s. It’s like applying to non-London universities to save on accommodation but ending up in London.

The unfortunate state of the SU prevents us from properly having this conversation but it definitely still matters.

Kush Bhautik Vaidya
PPE, St Catz

Not everyone needs – or ought – to go to university

MADAM – It may be the case that “not everyone needs to go to university, and that’s not at all a bad thing”, but how do we decide who is allowed to have this need and who is not? Whilst there are career paths that do not formally require an undergraduate degree, some of these options aren’t suited for everybody, and some require levels of opportunity and nepotism many do not have access to.

Young people applying to university should not be saddled with the guilt of thinking about how their pursuit of education may upset the Treasury; I have no doubt that this country has bigger financial strains than the education system. A degree is indeed not a true indicator of ability, but an indicator of somebody’s passion for their subject. To categorise education as a “privilege” is a slippery slope, and the suggestion of raising tuition fees and ending the repayment threshold sounds like a fast-track plan to further disadvantage the most vulnerable.

Lila Robinson
English, Univ

If private schools were abolished, everyone would win

MADAM – The claim that Oxford as an experience may be more appreciated if one went to a non-private school reshapes Leibinz’s Theodicy argument on the necessity of bad in order to appreciate good. This is not necessarily true, but even if it’s conceded, it is not enough to justify heavy-handed state intervention preventing a free choice. A marginal decrease in awe for Oxford’s spires does not meet the threshold for harm as, say, fentanyl does.

On differential educational quality influencing admissions to Oxford, this isn’t a secret: both aptitude and preparation are necessary. In the abolition scenario, while there are reduced acceptance differences, it is naive and artificial, coming from banning good systems rather than building up lacking ones. Income-based disparities are deeply regrettable, but better funding, training, and organisation in state systems are the answers, not abolition. Arbitrary abolition is nothing but contemptible envy.

Siddhartha Sensharma
Experimental Psychology, Harris Manchester

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



Handwriting is a necessary skill and a dying art

KENNETH WONG

I saw the writing on the wall, incidentally, in the writing of my undergraduate friends. Was this a possible welfare concern? No, but maybe it ought to be. What I was seeing was the slow, unceremonious death of handwriting. Last autumn *The Telegraph* reported, “Children’s handwriting is now so bad that teenagers need lessons in secondary school, experts have warned.” *The Guardian* again picked up the issue a week ago, publishing an essay which observed, “We are far more likely to use our hands to type or swipe than pick up a pen. But in the process we are in danger of losing cognitive skills, sensory experience – and a connection to history.”

For many, I suspect, the death of handwriting will be hardly felt, and most younger students will scarcely know what they are missing. Indeed, in the digital age, handwriting almost seems like an antiquated affectation. Such an impression is not helped when people learn that I can actually write with both hands and use a dip pen that might have witnessed the inauguration of President William Howard Taft.

Yet for history students at Oxford, reading and writing cursive handwriting remains a profoundly important skill that often goes understated by tutors.

You can master the historiography, possess an encyclopaedic knowledge of the sources, come up with a clever, original historical argument, and write brilliant prose; but you nevertheless remain a hopeless historian if you cannot make head or tail of what your eminent historical subject has inscribed for you in the archives. As former Harvard president Drew Gilpin Faust observed a few years ago, it seems the newest generation of budding historians has recognised this. Lamentably they responded not by practising their handwriting but by pursuing research topics that only required reading published sources.

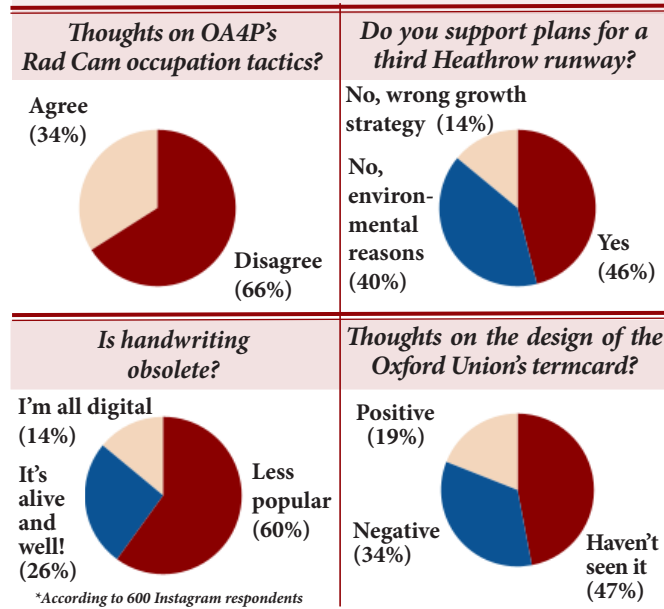
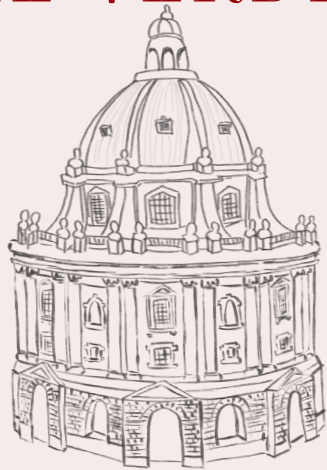
As a student reading for a DPhil in history, I have been privileged to be able to handle and read thousands of letters written by some of the most famous faces in British history. During the course of all that, I have come to see handwriting not just as a necessary skill for the historian, but also as a dying form of personal expression that is like no other. In the archives, one quickly learns to distinguish the handwriting styles of different people: everyone’s writing is uniquely theirs. You won’t mistake the distinct hand of William Gladstone for the highly legible, schoolboy scribbles of King George V. On some level, I feel these literary fingerprints also convey the writer’s emotions more viscerally than any transcription.

Often replete with underlined words and a liberal use of exclamation marks, one can almost feel the fury behind a handwritten rebuke from Queen Victoria. Equally Clementine Churchill’s handwritten letters to her husband, which sometimes included adorable doodles of cats, always radiate a fuzzy warmth to me.

Perhaps at this point, you may think I am dallying with a bit of sentimental nonsense. But what I know for sure is that on email and on the soulless Word ‘processor’, every letter and word is formed in perfect uniformity, intimating nothing at all of the writer. There are no interesting pen strokes nor ornamental flourishes, nor quirky curlicues made in the moment. The quotidian Word document looks like it could have been written today, yesterday, or tomorrow; by anyone and no one. That is why you won’t see anybody flogging an email written by some celebrity, whilst there are plenty of people who will pay hundreds of pounds for a superstar’s chicken scratch on a piece of paper.

For all these reasons and more I continue to keep a humble handwritten diary of my time in Oxford. Hopefully the future Oxon will be able to read my handwriting without first taking a palaeography class; but seeing the writing of some of my undergraduate friends, I’d rather hold my pen than hold my breath!

THE VERDICT



Why we don't care about the Student Union controversy

From JCRs to the stubbornness of faculties, the SU simply doesn't have the capacity to make meaningful change

EMILY HENSON

The Student Union (SU) is plagued most by one issue. It is not rent prices or unreasonable exams: it is the complete apathy of the student population. Conversations about JCR politics or the next rugby captain attract plenty of engagement – Oxford is hardly indifferent to who holds power.

Yet no one seems able to muster the concern to think about, let alone discuss, the SU. To most of us, it exists as an institution that makes a bit of noise online but has no real connection to our lives – its emails are deleted, its elections ignored. And why should we trouble ourselves? Nearly all problems for students in Oxford can be drawn back to the faculty and the college. Unless the SU transforms itself in a way that makes it functional in the current University set-up, I fail to see how – let alone why – we should care.

For those rare creatures engaged in the SU, you have to imagine this has been an intense few weeks with the President's resignation and the abolition of the position itself. Yet I've heard nothing of it, whereas someone has already tried to impeach our JCR committee this term over the moving of a meeting. The news coming from the SU could be interesting – if details were available, that is. Despite having an extensive social media presence and access to our inboxes, the SU seems strangely incapable of communicating what it does and why. Any information it provides is riddled with jargon, much of it reminiscent of a Soviet-style bureaucracy. The so-called 'transformation' – supposedly driven by a survey only 218 people engaged with – perhaps speaks for itself. The focus always seems to be on increasing engagement, but how can one engage when the biggest events are so steeped in internal politics that no one can make sense of them?

Perhaps we could be more inclined to care, ready to fight through the "misconceptions" published in student media recently (to quote the SU themselves) and the supposedly unbiased information from the SU, if they had any tangible impact on our lives. However, implementing any changes on a level that individual students can feel seems near impossible.

A primary cause of this is the failure of any student-representative organisation to integrate into the wider structure of the University. Much of teaching is shaped by decisions at the individual level, with the rest determined at the faculty level. The University neither controls nor seeks to implement change in how we are taught. The History Faculty, for example, stipulates that tutors should give their students seven essays a term, leaving one week open – either with or without a tutorial. In spite

of this, in practice, it is mostly adhered to by DPhil students who could do with the week off. Faculties are removed from a large amount of teaching, especially in the humanities, opting to let tutors dictate the majority of it. Colleges view teaching as something to be organised by the faculty, as does the University.

Our teaching is brilliant, with some of the best minds in the world, but functions on a system that's simply appeared over the years, not a written set of guidelines. The SU, therefore, campaigning for changes such as a reading week, does not have anywhere to implement them. My tutor, when discussing (lecturing polemically about) reading weeks over dinner, described them as "pointless and bullshit". I can't imagine him listening keenly to the suggestion of undergraduates who don't even study his subject. If the SU wanted to fight for the introduction of reading weeks, it would have to be at the individual tutor level, and that simply is not effective.

Hope for the SU on the non-academic front is equally misplaced. Housing, food, and welfare are among the most sought-after changes in Oxford, yet these are largely college-level issues. Even the SU's efforts to reduce disparities between colleges achieve little. No matter how wealthy a college may be, if it isn't inclined to solve a problem, it simply won't. SU pressure cannot change that and the University is unlikely to implement a policy that will upset the colleges. Any issues we have, therefore, go through the JCR. This is practical. I don't think the SU are going to address why Hall doesn't think vegetarians need protein, or why we can't have live music in the bar, or why the English reading list isn't in the library, but the JCR can. However, there is a paradox that these problems are too small for the SU, yet huge in student's lives. To be relevant to students, you must solve the issues that matter to students.

We don't care about the Student Union, and we have no incentive to. Its impact is negligible, its communication shoddy, its manner self-righteous. The Oxford Union may be off-putting and similarly shrouded in insular politics, but at least they have the decency to burn something now and again: it keeps things interesting.

Editors' Note: This story solely represents the view of the writer, not of Cherwell, which takes no position.

The fate of the humanities amid digital hegemony

Remember that subjects as varied as languages, geography, and philosophy have a crucial role to play in any flourishing society

CONOR WALSH

Keir Starmer recently announced bold plans for the development of artificial intelligence (AI), investing £14 billion in AI-related projects which will create an estimated 13,000 jobs. Previous commitments to build a supercomputer will be reinstated and a new National Data Library will be established. Starmer and his cabinet are right to invest in STEM, especially in light of the ever-bleak economic picture. We live in an epoch of digital transformation: not investing in generative AI, electric vehicles, and green energy would be foolish. But such substantial investments call into question the relevance, and perhaps the fate, of non-STEM disciplines, namely the humanities.

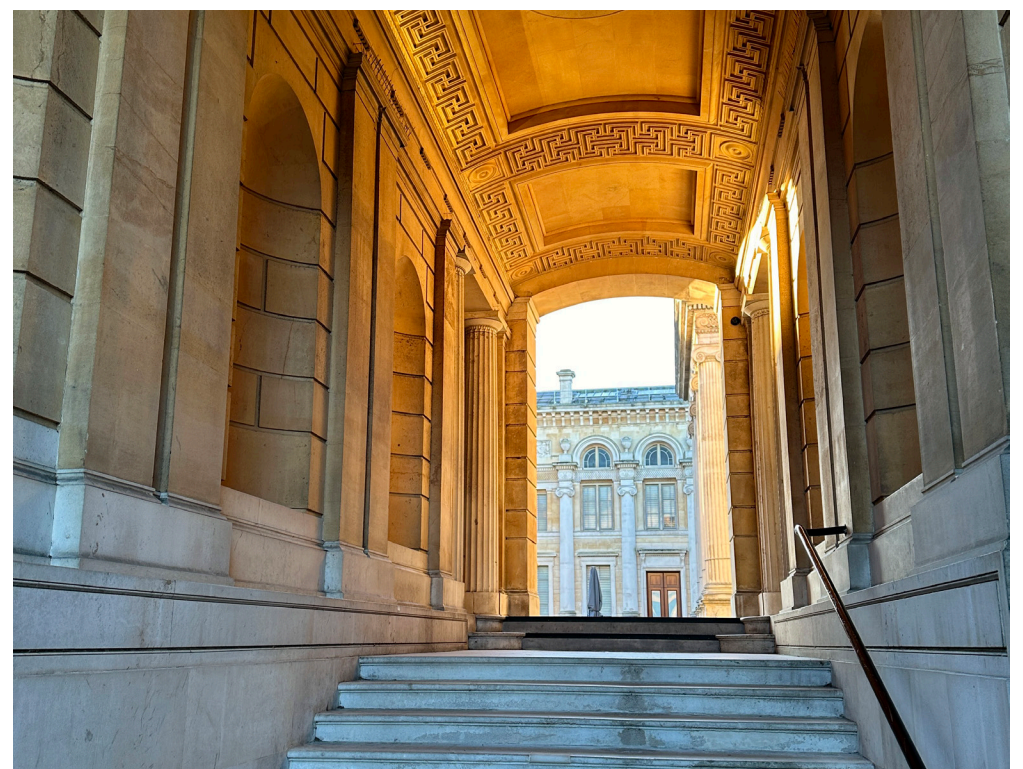
As a political theory student, I have no doubt that the humanities will always play a vital role in our society. Not only do disciplines within the humanities – such as history, literature and philosophy – provoke curiosity in their students, they also make significant contributions towards the development of digital technologies like AI. Critics are too quick to complain that humanities degrees are frivolous, arguing that they inadequately prepare students for the workforce. Under the Conservatives, previous British governments criticised humanities programmes with low employment rates and non-technical content. These governments pushed the country towards STEM-based apprenticeships. And at a time of financial pressures, struggling universities have followed the money, cutting courses with low student numbers.

Criticisms of frivolity, however, are not entirely fair. Humanities students graduate with the skillset to make a valuable contribution to the world of work. Throughout their degrees they have learned to be curious about the world – enabling them to think critically, be inquisitive, and inspire change. Learning doesn't always have to be about reciting facts, figures, or calculations. It is also about cultivating the mind. To some this *seems* frivolous, but in reality, intellectual curiosity has been at

the core of education systems for centuries. The communication, team-building, and organisational skills which students develop through cultivating academic curiosity are desirable amongst employers – especially in the media, financial, and legal sectors which humanities students enter en masse. Unlike most universities, Oxford has challenged criticisms of frivolity. The establishment of the Schwarzmann Centre, a new multi-million pound home for humanities research and teaching, clearly recognises the value that the humanities have to offer for students and employers alike.

Futility is another common criticism laid at the humanities. Just before Christmas, an unsuspecting PhD student blew up on Twitter, now known as X, for her thesis on the politics of smell in contemporary prose. Ally Louks's work initially garnered support from friends, family and kindly strangers, before it caught the attention of trolls and haters. After that she was inundated with hateful comments, criticising her value-add to society. Underlying these criticisms is the problem of the intangible. The benefits of studying smell in literature are perhaps not as obvious as the headline examples of roads, bridges, and vaccines. But despite its controversy, Louks' research is concerned with power dynamics, class hierarchies, and gender divisions – questions fundamental to the flourishing of any society.

The analytical and critical thinking skills bestowed upon humanities students are integral to our society. Experts in linguistics have been at the forefront of developing generative AI models which can accurately interpret language, understanding its cultural and contextual background. Meanwhile, philosophers have made contributions to the ethical and policy frameworks which shape the context of technological development. Research centres, such as Oxford's Institute for Ethics in AI, are a prime example of the contribution which humanities disciplines can make to the forthcoming AI revolution. It's true that these contributions can be slow to



mirror digital progress. The violence of the UK's summer riots in 2024, incited primarily by hate speech on social media, clearly demonstrates that ethics and policy experts have some catching up to do. But their slow pace does not undermine the potential of their contributions. If anything it demonstrates the strength of the humanities as a discipline – their long-term, reflective approach to societal problems which grow recklessly from rash technological advancement.

The real problem with the humanities is not the questioning of their value, but that sceptics don't understand what humanities scholars

do. Perhaps this is the fault of academics and students who need to do a better job of engaging with the public. But equally, critics of the humanities shouldn't be so quick to judge, and governments should be wiser with their rhetoric. The fate of the humanities is far from bleak. Subjects like law, anthropology, and geography are the beating heart of any successful society. But if we want the humanities, and ultimately society, to flourish, we must adopt a more human attitude towards this set of profound and socially beneficial disciplines.

Image Credit: David Hays

FEATURES

High pressure, few spots: What Careers Service data says about Oxford's internship culture



By MORIEN ROBERTSON

Internship pressure is intense in Oxford, but it's not felt uniformly – demand is concentrated in a few select sectors which have been favoured by structural economic changes. Whilst some people love their weeks in the office, for many it's just an endless stepping stone to the next thing.

With the sky outside already dark, the blue and white of the Oxford Careers Service lights up my room. I click on the box of another company's advert, the name some grand stew of corporate words, the logo a rich green background with Times New Roman overlaid. A company description packed with superlatives, words like 'dynamic' and 'delivery', and some fluff about caring for employees and the future.

Lastly, requirements. So far so good: analytic mind, strong work ethic, willingness to explore new areas – I'd flatter myself with having most of them, or at least the ability to pretend I do. But then: "This job is only for those completing a Master's in natural or computer science." Of course. Right at the end, this handy tidbit of information is easy to miss, delaying the inevitable disappointment. Or maybe it was in the job description, but my bleary eyes didn't notice.

Internships in Oxford

Not everyone is this inept at finding something to do with their free time. Thousands of students in Oxford each year take up opportunities at a huge range of different firms, bodies, and organisations. Of course, the stereotype of rich kids interning at their parents' firms still persists. Many students

describe feeling pressured to get some kind of work experience, and cite the importance of connections and networks in getting desirable jobs. One person told me that it feels like everyone "knows what they want to do" and that "if you don't know what you're doing, you feel like you're behind everyone".

One way in which Oxford students try to break into the jobs market is through the Oxford University Careers Service. They offer both micro- (a week long) and full internships exclusively to Oxford students, as well as running a range of workshops and talks throughout the year. Micro-internships are a popular way of getting experience: you're "just competing against other Oxford students, so it's easier to get in", as one put it. However, for some of the positions advertised, competition can be fierce. Findings from my Freedom of Information (FOI) request show that in the 2023-24 year, the most competitive sectors for summer internships were Media and Journalism, with over 50 applicants per place, followed by Banking with 33, and Consultancy at 25 (Figure 1).

The large majority of these applicants are undergraduates, with just over 30% of the undergraduate body applying to summer and micro-internships. The highly competitive nature of some of the positions, compared to other sectors

with virtually no applicants, suggests that lots of the applications are a segment of the student body fighting over the same few positions.

One potential reason for this is a lack of awareness amongst many students. One second-year student complained that the Careers Service "doesn't make an effort to interact with students" and suggested that if you don't know where to look it can be difficult to find opportunities. Another recurring idea is the Catch-22 of experience: lacking enough experience to get positions, which are the very positions that give you the experience you need.

This means that once you get into second year without having done anything in your first, it can feel like the world is against you. Others profit from positive feedback loops, hoovering up a whole array of impressive experiences. This is where claims of nepotism become partially pertinent – those with a foot in the door get ahead and stay ahead. However, opportunities like those provided by the Careers Service offer alternative ways of getting connections and starting these loops.

Pressure to apply

Even amongst the frenetic schedules that most of us have here during term, students still spend a lot of time thinking about and applying for these

internships. Applying for a range of different positions, with the multiple rounds of testing and interviews that this entails, is not a minor time commitment. Those who are ruthlessly focused on getting jobs will often spend every spare second trying in some way to get ahead, whether that's applying, networking, researching companies, or building skills. For others, the applications go on the back burner, allowing time for other things, but often at the expense of peace of mind: at least in applying you have the feeling of productivity. A more relaxed student admitted that: "I should put more time into it than I do."

Ratio of applications to positions, most popular sectors

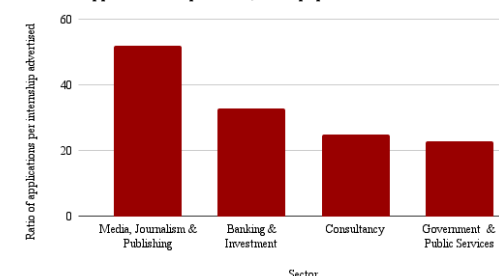


Figure 1

Is it Oxford in particular that induces stressful feelings about the need to apply? Despite being one of the best universities in the world (and obviously the best in the country), some students felt ill-prepared to go outside the ivory tower: “we don’t even cook our own food and we barely work in groups”, argued one. Oxford’s reputation as a centre of elites and old boys clubs doesn’t help: virtually everyone I spoke to mentioned worries about internships being doled out to family friends, rather than being judged on merit. One person worried about “the amount of nepotism and networking involved in many private-sector jobs”, and saw work experience as a way to enhance their own connections.

“Virtually everyone I spoke to mentioned worries about internships being doled out to family friends, rather than being judged on merit”

The degree that you’re studying also seems to make a difference. Whilst some subjects, like Law and Engineering, have clear job paths, others suffer from worse reputations. An English student told me that work experience “feels especially important for the humanities and degrees that are generally valued less in the jobs market” and saw their internships as a way to “stand out”. The data on Careers Service summer internships shows that Social Science students are overrepresented in their number of applicants, whilst most other divisions apply proportionately (Figure 3). Many people – myself included – are yet to figure out what they actually want to do with themselves in a few years time. This makes choosing where to apply even harder – but even more pressing, as it’s the best way to explore possibilities.

Time well spent?

According to the Careers Service website, everyone loves their internships. But in reality experiences are more mixed. A few people found micro-internships really enjoyable, working on exciting programs and meeting engaging people. More often, reality failed to live up to expectations. One suffered from “a lack of guidance” and found the workload “a bit overwhelming at times”. Others

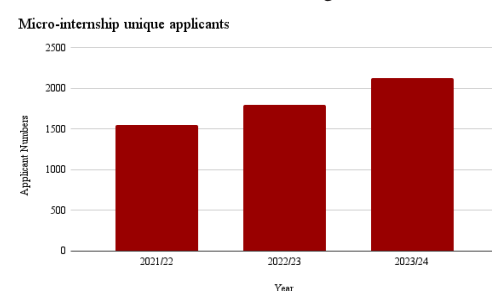


Figure 2

had almost nothing to do, working only an hour or two a day. Even where this happened, though, many reapplied for more the next term, suggesting that the gain in ostensible work experience is more important than actually improving skills or learning.

Whilst formal programs in big corporations are often highly structured and planned, lots of the organisations that hire micro-interns are small and lack the resources or knowledge to keep a student busy for a week. Sometimes, however, it’s the students who make the experiences differ from expectations. One admitted that during their micro-internship she was “travelling quite a lot” and ended up doing the work “on the plane and on the bus up and down mountains”. This ended in an online presentation being done in a noisy cafe where the audience couldn’t hear what she was saying. To complicate things further, due an organising mistake she was advertised as being a DPhil student, despite being a poor second-year.

Another person told me that being an international student can make the work much harder, as a result of incompatible time zones and different expectations. That students are willing to disrupt carefully-planned holidays and important sleep schedules to do their internship speaks to the



intensity of pressure to get ahead.

Working preferences

It’s not that students will take absolutely anything, though. The most popular sectors for students applying for summer internships show how dominant skilled service jobs are in the UK economy. Especially for students at elite universities, highly specialised and technical jobs are hoped to offer both intellectual stimulation and graduate premiums. They include tech, development, think tanks, academia, science, consultancy, and marketing. Government & public services and tech are also very over-subscribed. There are relatively few applicants for law and insurance, suggesting that companies in these areas have well-established programs which students apply to outside of the Careers Service.

Location also matters, however. The great majority of applications for internships through the Careers Service are for those in the UK, with Europe and North America next most popular, despite many placements also being offered in Asia, as well as Africa, South America and the Middle East.

Internship programmes come with a range of different provisions and support, ranging from virtually everything paid for to nothing. The most competitive region is North America, with 24 applications per internship offered, reflecting a relative lack of supply; Asia has the lowest ratio of applications to internships offered, despite boasting the greatest number of places advertised out of all regions.

Structural changes

Oxford is not unique in the kinds of work which its students want to do, and the intensity of job competition. Changes in the destinations of graduates from elite educational institutions show a marked shift towards particular industries and occupations over the last 50 years. This can largely be explained by structural economic changes, including the growing specialisation and digitalisation of economies, the dominance of services in the West, and increased costs of living.

To take an extreme case, consider the US. An article in *The Economist* highlights that whilst in the 1970s one in 20 Harvard graduates went into finance or consulting jobs, by the 1990s that figure had increased to one in four. Today an astounding half of Harvard graduates take jobs in finance, consulting, or technology. Given the prevalence and popularity of finance and consulting societies in Oxford, it seems that we’re not far behind.

One important change is the ‘hollowing out’ of traditionally middle-class jobs: employment in jobs with middle-of-the-road salaries has fallen significantly in the UK, whilst low- and high-paying jobs have both seen significant increases. Graduates from top universities have profited from technological changes which suit their skill sets, giving them access to very well-paid professional jobs. Yet those without degrees or with

qualifications from less prestigious institutions have been forced into low-paying service jobs, due to offshoring of traditional sources of decent wages.

Starting salaries in investment banking and other finance jobs easily get into six figures, more than most can hope to get to in a lifetime. Desire for these high wages explains the vast number of people wanting to get into these sectors, and the brutal competition for work in places like Jane Street. And pay in the UK is practically nothing compared to what you can hope to get in the US: big companies on the other side of the Atlantic effortlessly Hoover up Oxbridge graduates, with the differences in earnings between US and UK graduates now estimated to be 27%.

Furthermore, the number of adults with degrees has increased by 30 percentage points since the 90s, amplifying trends of job polarisation, where jobs become concentrated in high- and low-paying areas. The decline in sources of employment that don’t require a high degree of specialisation or prior experience, combined with large increases in the proportion of graduates, has made the need to get that internship all the more urgent.

The UK has been particularly affected by this

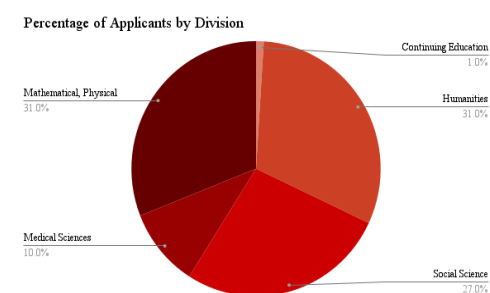


Figure 3

expansion: only in London has the number of high-wage jobs kept up with the increase of highly-skilled workers, and the graduate premium (earnings relative to non-graduates) has fallen nationwide. In contrast, in the US the graduate premium has increased even more, as a huge supply of skilled jobs meets the demand. This, combined with other factors, such as astronomical housing prices, means that students face a dizzying set of challenges in living and working after graduation.

Where do we go from here?

Reflections on the future can focus the mind about what you’re doing now and drive the discovery of opportunities that might otherwise be missed. But anxiety and worries about not doing enough can be unproductive and immobilising. As one person I spoke to put it, there’s a lot of “unnecessary fear” and every moment is “not make or break”.

Another mentioned the “guilt of missing out”: a perennial FOMO and unflattering comparisons with others. There’s a balance to be struck between future consideration and current enjoyment, but for too many people this balance is impossible to find. This is understandable, of course: changes in student demand reflects deep worries about the future of many industries, especially given developments in Artificial Intelligence and other technologies.

Many young people are starting to think about their futures earlier than ever, sometimes absurdly so. The amount of LinkedIn requests I’ve had from students in their first year of sixth form (or before) who proudly proclaim that they are ‘looking to be insurers’ or already have work experience at all of the Big Four is astounding, and in many ways admirable.

Planning ahead is sensible, important – even exciting. And thinking about choosing jobs in which one can stay financially afloat is a privilege that many cannot even access, and for which we should be grateful. But it shouldn’t come at the expense of everything else: friends, family, projects, academic study all matter – and are the things which give you reason to keep going.

Image Credits: *The wub*, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons [Left] and *Ninara*, CC BY 2.0 via Flickr [Right]

“That students are willing to disrupt carefully-planned holidays and important sleep schedules to do their internship speaks to the intensity of pressure to get ahead... Many young people are starting to think about their futures earlier than ever, sometimes absurdly so.”

My music doesn't break tradition. It is traditional

When I tried to play my ethnic instrument for a Lunar New Year formal, I found that only certain traditions were deemed acceptable by Oxford's venerable institutions

By SELINA CHEN

When my college denied me permission to perform Chinese music at its Lunar New Year-themed formal dinner last year, I initially accepted the decision. I was a wide-eyed fresher, awestruck by Oxford's tradition of formals, where fellows strode through our 500-year-old hall to sit at the High Table. Their dark gowns billowed, and their Latin grace sounded impeccable.

Music could not 'affect' the High Table, I was told by the college's email. Who was I to challenge a blanket ban on music?

Days later, my college hosted a Burns Night formal where a bagpipe brightened the hall. A student recited 'Address to a Haggis' and stabbed the titular dish at the High Table. It clicked, then, that the ban on music was rather a ban on non-traditional music. Under the hallowed spires of Oxford, that meant non-white music.

It hardly mattered that the instrument I'd played for over a decade, Guzheng, had 2,500 years of history. Its very name meant 'ancient zither'.

New York City, 1834

Afong Moy was the first known Chinese woman in the US, imported to the East Coast as a teenager in 1834. Traders exhibited her in a box of Chinese artefacts, and curious Americans paid to see the spectacle advertised as 'The Chinese Lady'. Wearing ethnic garments, she demonstrated speaking Cantonese, using chopsticks, and walking on her four-inch bound feet.

As Afong grew out of her teens, one of her replacements was Pwan Ye-Koo, a 17-year-old girl who played Pipa, the Chinese lute. In a pamphlet advertising her exhibit, Pwan gazed forlornly, hugging her instrument to her chest.

Thus the history of ethnic Chinese instruments in the Western world began as specimens of an exotic race.

In my imagination, Afong and Pwan were fiercely curious about the world. They learned English and devoured books backstage in between shows. When they grew too old for the exhibit, they travelled the country by railroad, making American friends and seeking out their countrymen.

But it is unclear what really became of the Chinese ladies. All I know is history and Hollywood remember their owner, PT Barnum, as *The Greatest Showman*.

San Francisco, 2014

When eleven-year-old me stood before

the immigration officer at San Francisco International Airport, fresh off a one-way flight from China, I carried a half-size Guzheng on my back. I practiced and performed over my middle school and high school years in the US, everywhere from street corners to theatres that sat thousands.

I learned that being a musician of an ethnic instrument in the Western world means shifting between positionalities: either an echo of the familiar to co-ethnics, or an overture to the unfamiliar for others. To an audience of co-ethnics, I bring the melodies of home – and I will always recall the hunchback Chinese immigrant whose wrinkles stretched into a smile when he heard Guzheng for the first time in decades. But to an audience who never knew of Guzheng's existence before, I'm an ambassador with only one shot.

In a position to shape their perception of ethnic Chinese music, I wondered whether I was perceived like Afong and Pwan. I've been told that every song I play sounds like Disney's 'Mulan' soundtrack, or that Guzheng is cool but not an 'actual instrument'. I learned it's pointless to look for an 'other' category in prestigious music competitions the way I can find my foodstuff in the 'world' aisle of a supermarket.

I suspected that whenever I performed, I was not judged the way piano or violin players are judged for their skills. Rather, my pentatonic tunes were an exotic curiosity for ears acclimatised to Western scales. I was a breathing museum audio guide.

But unlike an artefact in a box, I was learning English, so I began speaking alongside my performance to put my music

"My college's decision was one of many instances of institutional inertia in Oxford, where no specific person holds malice, but that the general reverence of tradition implicitly excludes students from non-traditional backgrounds."



into context. From delivering a guest lecture at my local university, to national public speaking competitions, to TEDx, I presented the rich heritage of Guzheng and told stories of the Chinese ladies.

Oxford, 2023

At age 19 I carried my Guzheng through the immigration point at Heathrow International Airport en route to Oxford University. Here, I had no intention to stop my multi-year tradition of putting on Lunar New Year performances – until I learned that my music was deemed unsuitable for the High Table I so revered.

I cried in my room when I learned of the differential treatment between white and non-white music, for a formal meant to celebrate my most important holiday. It came as a shock in a college I'd found welcoming in every way.

I'd never felt excluded until then, but I guess that's because I'd been the perfect image of an assimilated immigrant. I received high marks in PPE, edited the newspaper, rowed, and

held office in student democracy. I spoke and thought in English, quadruple-underlining the American half of my Chinese-American identity.

But I also teach friends to fold dumplings and decorate my room with red paper cuttings, drink hot water and wear slippers at home. I've been expressing myself through Guzheng longer than I've been expressing myself through the English language.

My college's decision was one of many instances of institutional inertia in Oxford, where no specific person holds malice, but that the general reverence of tradition implicitly excludes students from non-traditional backgrounds.

Yet when I wanted to give up, my peers rallied behind me. They told me to speak up and supported me along the way. The JCR President met with the college registrar, and I sent emails to the don who represented the High Table – it turned out he was delighted to see a Guzheng performance, contrary to what the college told me.

We won. At last year's Lunar New Year formal, I performed 'Ode to Spring Breeze' – my own solo arrangement of my favourite musician's composition for a Guzheng and piano duet. Portraits of all the college's presidents gazed upon the hall that night. In my imagination, Afong and Pwan were watching too – they watch over all the Chinese ladies, the first ones who forge a tradition in a new place.

I'd set a precedent so that another year, for another cultural holiday, another ethnic instrument may grace our 500-year-old hall.

Turning the (high) tables

Now halfway through my time at this historic university, I never cease to be awestruck by all the traditions – the sub fusc, the punting, the academic enquiries. I adore this year's Burns Night formal, where I cheered for the bagpipe player and the Haggis addressor. I've been asked to reprise my Lunar New Year formal performance too, and so I will, in addition to performing at the Oxford Union and the Town Hall.

My music doesn't break tradition. It is traditional. Precisely because I love Oxford's traditions, I'm inviting my culture to be part of it.

Image Credits: OUCS [Left], Library of Congress [Right]



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With warmest thanks to Oxford Student Publications Limited

John Evelyn

Interesting is truly the only word you can always apply to the Union, not good, not bad, not evil, certainly not good – interesting remains the only true descriptor.

I must first relay some truly tragic news about the Presidential race as 007 has dropped out. The Spectre that has haunted the race has finally dissipated, and Jevelyn is sure the people will weep. Fly the flag at half mast, the Union has lost one of its all-time

greats. Weep for the Michaelmas term card, pour out a drink - no doubt straight into the glass of 007 himself. Shaken, not stirred of course. His Licence to Hack has been revoked, but Never Say Never Again, ladies and gentleman; I'm sure when he sobers up, from what substance I'll leave up to you, he may decide that Tomorrow Never Dies and his time as President could still come...



The Presidential race heats up even further, as Lady Macbeth has succumbed to her reason, rather than her usual madness, and decided to pull out of the race. Jevelyn wishes her the best of luck and happiness in her retirement, with rumours going around that she's going to be enjoying it under some Mediterranean sun in not-so-fair Verona. Take that with a grain of salt however, as she appears to be hesitant to head off, much to the confusion and fear of those remaining.

A final turn, going full circle to a year ago this term, is our newest competitor for the throne. The Old Guard himself has decided to go toe to toe with the Lieutenant, in a battle that will set out the Old Union elite against the new. Inheriting the slate of Lady Macbeth, and following an awkward conversation with Banquo's Ghost, he appears to have established himself back in the swing

of things. With Grandpa Joe and the NEWbie both staying loyal, it remains to be seen who will fill out the final Officer spot. Rumours circulate of the Corpus Pope deciding to finally read some books, struggling in his awkward position caught between two slates. Renowned for his loyalty and word, it is yet to be seen which side he will take; Jevelyn will soon be able to report if blood is thicker than lining.

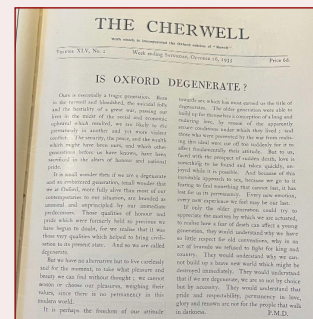
On more important news, the Town vs Gown event went spectacularly well, although Jevelyn was immensely disappointed to see none of the current committee step into the ring; Regent's Ruler surely would have excelled at conflict, although being in white tie rather than on horseback may have had him at a disadvantage.

Who's to say what will happen next, ladies and gentlemen, all we can say is that come 8th week, we should have a president decided. By the people or an appellate board? Only time will tell...

Some more to come,
Jezza x

Cherwell Archives

1935: 'We're degenerate not by choice, but by necessity'



In 1935, the writers of *Cherwell* were born in the Great War and grew up in its shadow, being the first generation to inhabit the 'modern world' as we know it. The ideals of king and country were destroyed in the most psychologically damaging conflict Europe has ever seen. It is not hard to have both sympathy and empathy with this generation, coming of age in a world which had lost its very core, and to read this piece without an overwhelming dread of what will face the young men and women behind the paper.

by Emily Henson

Editorials



David Hays

Head Photographer

are top of mind. In this mindset, however, it's easy for me to overlook the abundant good that can arise from immortalising moments in history.

During the trial which would ultimately condemn him to death, Socrates famously uttered, "the unexamined life is not worth living". Two thousand years later, we citizens of the post-iPhone world have seemingly adapted this dictum as such: the uncaptured life is not worth living.

From omnipotent DPhil influencers – you know who they are – to common undergraduates like myself, the students of Oxford are no exception. Some prefer their curated carousels on Instagram, while others escape through anonymous musings on Facebook's Oxfess; sinners guiltily indulge in whatever the hell is going on over at LinkedIn. Whichever of these vices we choose for ourselves, these platforms keep a digital record of our lives amongst the spires, but they also change our brains and behaviour. What effect will leaving no moment uncaptured have as we forge into the future?

Seeing my abseiling police photos recently featured in *The Times*, for instance, I am reminded of the power that photos have to be a force for good in storytelling. Maybe leaving no moment uncaptured isn't all bad. Maybe it would be prudent for me to acknowledge that the things we may initially be inclined to villainise – whether social media or AI – are just items in humanity's toolkit; it's up to us how we use them.

Euan Elliott

Head of Investigations

My biggest takeaway from the Rad Cam occupation? Always dress for lectures ready to stand outside for six hours, because you never know what you might find on your cycle back to college.

I arrived at the library two hours after OA4P had entered and given readers a minute to leave. Besides the remnant chairs and tables from the barricade stacked outside the front door, the six people sitting on the roof, and the police officer making a point of getting everyone's face on camera, the slowly gathering crowd of spectators hardly rivalled that of any other Thursday morning. The prevailing sentiment seemed to be, "so, do you think anything's going to happen soon?"

Only after four hours, as all but three protesters disappeared inside the library, it became apparent that there was only one way out for the remaining few: down. Lost in anticipation watching the officers outside All Soul's file out of the fire engine in climbing gear, it was only upon remarking at the sudden absence of OA4P's chanting that we realised we were missing the clash on Catte Street which paralleled Wellington Square, Trinity 2024. Frantic to be the first to



cover it, we realised we were hindered once more as our website had crashed due to quadrupled traffic.

By this time, the police had secured their rig on the dome of the library and were preparing to descend. Our cameras were only a few of the hundreds that had amassed to record the event, underscored by the now fervent chorus of OA4P (whose repertoire I had become somewhat of an expert in throughout the course of the day). Determined not to be distracted and caught off guard a second time, we rallied the troops: an editor outside St Mary's, another in Clarendon Quad, our legal counsel in Brasenose Library, and an ex-editor at the head of Brasenose Lane. Our efforts were not in vain as we caught the police leaving via the Sheldonian, though we may have almost lost an editor to a particularly determined police van in the process.

I am contractually obliged to note that *Cherwell* cares deeply about the welfare of their staff, and that at the end of the affair I was provided with hot chocolate, courtesy of our Editor-in-Chief.

PROFILES

“It’s our duty to this extraordinary world that we sample as much as we can.”

Cherwell spoke to actor, writer, and visiting professor Sir Stephen Fry

By BILLY JEFFS

Cherwell: *I thought I’d start off by mentioning that you’re now Sir Stephen Fry. Has life been different since the New Year Honours? Have people started asking what they should call you?*

Fry: Some people, I wouldn’t say treat you differently exactly, but there is a sort of sense of it. One’s first response as a British person, therefore trained in the art of modesty, is to say “Oh no, don’t bother with any of that.” And then you realise that actually some people really enjoy calling you by your title and they’re a bit disappointed if you tell them not to. So you just sort of let it happen.

But also, I suppose there is a sense in which people feel that you are somehow slightly less of a person and more of an institution than you were before. And maybe that means that they can call upon your time a bit more and call upon your good nature for causes. This is not a complaint, I hasten to add. It’s a charming and extraordinary thing. If you’re going to accept it, enjoy it and use it, I suppose.

Cherwell: *Your book, *Odyssey*, recently came out. You’ve always managed to stay relevant with subsequent generations; obviously the Harry Potter audiobooks you narrated were a huge thing for people of my generation, but now with *Mythos* and *Odyssey* and retelling the Greek myths in that way. Is that a conscious decision or is that a desire always to educate and to explain?*

Fry: When retelling the stories of Greek myths, I did have in my head myself, I thought, what would I like to have read? There were books that I’d read when I was ten, which were just for children, books about myth that were very good, but they were definitely for children. Or there was Robert Graves who wrote his Greek myths for adults that were very, very adult, full of footnotes of great scholarly learning, though he did a children’s version of them as well. But I thought

you really want to write them for teenagers, young people, who are bright and who can take a bit of violence and ambiguity and doubt and all the things that the proper stories have.

One of the beauties of writing in myth is that you are stripped of ‘the discourse’. You can write about honour, revenge, love, incest, power, all the different and difficult things that are primal to human interaction, but they’re stripped of today’s discourse. They are kind of about these eternal things. If I show the cupidity and caprice and unfairness and lust of Zeus, no one’s going to say “How dare you! How dare you do that!” But instead one is writing something very powerful from the collective unconscious of our ancestors about the unfairness and capriciousness of the world, and it frees one, I suppose is what I’m saying.

When I wrote the first one, *Mythos*, not long afterwards suddenly there was Madeline Miller, an American novelist who retold the story of Achilles and Patroclus in a novel called *The Song of Achilles*. And then *Cersei*, the enchantress who turns Odysseus’ men into swine and so on. And then Natalie Haynes, and Bettany Hughes, and Emily Wilson come up with a new translation of the *Odyssey*, and Pat Barker writes *The Silence of the Girls* from the point of view of the women in the Trojan War story. Suddenly it’s become a whole genre again. I’m getting a lot of letters from girls and boys and young men and young women who are really interested in the classics. And some of them say I have helped them to that, but a lot of them have found their own way there. It is a liberating world to step into, that allows you the full access to all human feeling without being strangled or caught in the weeds of what is just something that affects us now.

Because morals have to do with manners, with customs. Morals are not eternal verities. They’re what we think of as right now. Whereas there are eternal truths about how humans behave, which we can play with and examine and be enchanted



by and terrified by and feel the truth of. And myth provides those. And I suppose, as I say, I wasn’t aware of it at the time that there was this sense of it, but I guess I did feel free. I did enjoy the fact that one could explore the horror of gods, the unfairness of the universe, the implacable nature of doom and fate, the arrogance of heroes and how short they fall and so on.

Cherwell: *To take a retrospective view on your career, you’ve obviously worn many hats, I’d say famously so. Do you ever wish you tried to focus your energies on one thing? I get the sense that even at an early point, you knew you would be a diverse and spread person.*

Fry: A jack of all trades and master of none, you were too polite to say it. I’ve often thought I’m a jack of all trades and master of none, and I think about the alternative life I could have led, in the way that all people do the older they get.

The one I picture most, I would’ve had a house in the country, not necessarily a grand house, certainly not Downton Abbey or anything, but enough to have hens who laid eggs. Every year I would have made pickles and jams and my only career would have been a writer. And I would write a book a year. Of course it’s total fantasy.

I’m not like that at all, but it is one that’s appealing, when I’m in the middle of the city and I’m in the middle of “Oh God, it’s six in the morning and I’m standing in a field with a camera doing a documentary or a film or something” and I could be in this nice cosy world.

Occasionally I’m on a film set and I’m with an actor who’s a brilliant film actor, and I think “That’s all they do.” It’s a bit like the thing that we’ve all had, which is when you wake up in the morning and remember you owe money somewhere, that feeling is essentially from the same part of the brain. This owing money, which is one of the worst feelings a human can have, I think to wake up in the morning saying “I don’t know how I’m going to pay it.” It’s like that with the work, “How am I going to write, if I tell them now it’s going to be late they’re going hate me and I’ve got to deliver it, but I don’t know where to start.” That’s what a writer lives with all their lives. An actor lives with other anxieties and terrors, of course, not getting cast and not feeling good enough, being afraid, stage fright, all kinds of different things. But it isn’t quite that same thing as that nagging, nagging, nagging that writing has.



Why didn't I only do that? It's a very long answer, I'm sorry, I could have said it much more compactly, but it's an incredible privilege to do lots of things in a life because it's a small thing, a life. It doesn't last long. And you might as well cram, as Oscar [Wilde] put it in various ways, you should taste the fruit of every orchard in the world and some will be bitter and sour and some will be so sweet that you become addicted to them and so on. But nonetheless, it's our duty to this bountiful and extraordinary world that we sample as much as we can.

Cherwell: *What do you look back most fondly on in your career, if you could have taken one role, one book, one documentary.*

Fry: Well, I think naturally the thing I think of most fondly, is my work with Hugh [Laurie] and Emma [Thompson] when we were at university and we were having fun but also terrified and uncertain and we were convinced the door had slammed shut on student comedy ever getting anywhere. My friendship with Hugh is one of the most valuable things that ever happened to me, and I still speak to him all the time, we text each other all the time. So I look fondly back on the days in which we were in the Footlights Club

room at Cambridge thinking "Can we get away with this? If we did this, would it work?" And trying it out on Emma or Tony Slattery, some of the other people there and them going "I just don't get it." I'm thinking "Oh God, okay, it's just us then." And then someone going "Yeah, but still we'll try it. We'll try it with an audience."

We would write, sometimes one of us, it would be our sketch and the other would help with it. Sometimes we would really genuinely write together. And that's a feeling of such warmth and excitement and it's just amazing that we met. Really, that's the miracle of it. And I hope your readers will have relationships like that at university. It's one of the most marvellous things about university, is meeting someone with whom you can collaborate, with whom it works, with whom you fit. Hugh had so many qualities that I absolutely don't. So that's what I look back on most fondly.

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

Image Credit: Marco Raaphorst from The Hague/ CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Student spotlight: Diana Volpe and Lina Osman on student activism, campaigning, and divestment

Student activists from Divest Borders and Student Action for Refugees talked to Faye Chang about what confronting the University really involves

With an increased focus on divestment over the past year, *Cherwell* sat down with two student activists involved in this work, Diana Volpe and Lina Osman. They are the presidents of Divest Borders and Student Action for Refugee (STAR) respectively – Lina serves as co-president of STAR with Tala Al-Chikh Ahmad.

We started with a conversation about what these groups do. Part of STAR's work centres around direct volunteering: "Students go out to volunteer either on casework, which is on-the-ground stuff of helping clients sign up for universal credit, GPs, and so on; or they volunteer with the Youth Club, which is really great as well – you just get to hang out with young people and help out." On the campaigning side, Divest Borders and STAR are closely linked. Lina told *Cherwell*: "[We aim to] make sure that as a University, we divest from the border industry.

There's also the Keep Campsfield Closed Coalition that we're a part of. Campsfield is a detention centre in the north of Oxford. It was previously closed, the government is trying to reopen it, and so we're campaigning with the coalition to try and keep it closed."

The concept of divestment, particularly border divestment, has been something that's only recently come into focus. With Divest Borders Oxford being launched in 2021, Diana talked about the initial difficulties: "For absolutely horrible reasons, divestment has [now] become a lot more known by people, but when I started, it was really hard to even explain the point of divestment and why it works. I spent most of my time explaining to people what the border industry even is, and it's something people have never really thought about or talked about." For Diana, this activism was closely linked with their academic work: "My PhD in particular is about the ways in which these types of outsourcing operations of migration control

get legitimised in the public sphere – it's something that feels so insane to me, yet it's so normalised that it's not even controversial on a public level. So that's the main question of my PhD: how do situations like these, that include a lot of human rights abuses, get completely normalised?"

Both Lina and Diana talked about a kind of disconnect they felt between their academic work and the real-life issues occurring in their field. Diana described it as "the 'ivory tower' feeling of it all", while Lina talked about struggling with her degree conceptually, "... especially during Trinity, when the encampment was going on, and yet I'd spend the majority of my day studying stuff that I felt was so useless, so baseless." For her, the volunteering she got to do through STAR at Asylum Welcome "was the only time when I kind of got the chance to touch down with the world... When I applied to be president [of STAR], it was kind of like trying to counteract my degree in some ways, and base it in the world."

Diana had a similar basis for starting Divest Borders: "I decided to act locally because it's a place in which I had the power to do something. I found this new campaign that was started by People and Planet called Divest Borders, and it seemed like a great way of raising awareness using my research and my expertise, but also using the power that I had as a student in Oxford."

STAR and Divest Borders are ingrained in the work of the wider Oxford community as well. Diana talks about connecting with the Campaign to Keep Campsfield Closed: "I wanted to make sure [Divest Borders] wasn't just something I kept within the University, but also had to do with local issues and populations, and the community that lives here, and has been doing this type of abolitionist work for decades. They can really bring a lot of incredible knowledge. It's something that I really appreciate, because they are really open to hearing new ways of doing things and passing on the generational knowledge of organising and activism."

When asked about what students could do to help, more dialogue and conversation about refugees and the border industry was high up on both their lists. "Militarised borders are not a very old phenomenon at all," Diana explained, "but it's become so entrenched in the way that we organise, and people really struggle to break away from it."

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

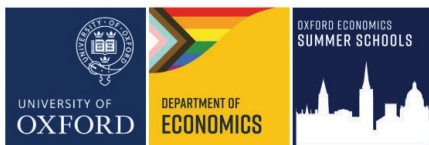
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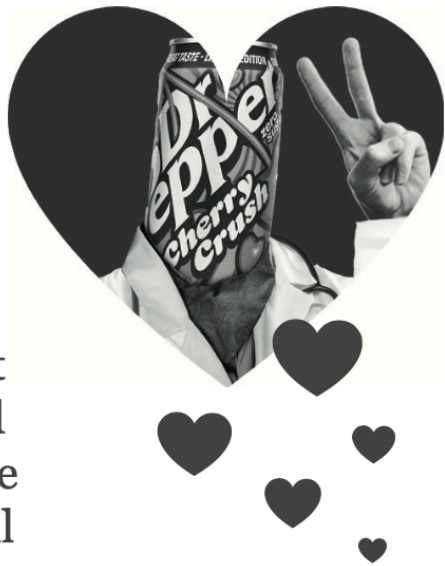


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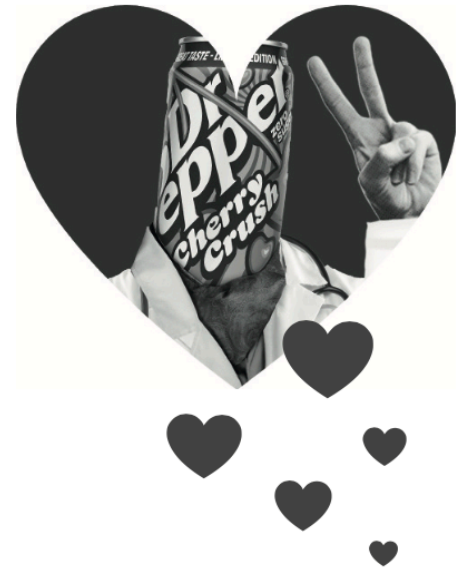
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Sharing the spotlight: Diversity in theatre

Cherwell's Stage Editors recommend plays celebrating underrepresented voices and cultural heritage

STAGE

Now that the winter months are almost over, and we have settled into Hilary term, *Cherwell's* Stage Section Editors present a selection of their favourite shows of the season, focusing on pieces that amplify underrepresented voices.

Olivia Sloan: William Finn's *Falsettos*

To celebrate LGBTQ+ History Month, we have *Falsettos* (2016), one of the most poignant musicals of recent years. Investigating the intersections between religion and sexuality, the characters navigate the roles prescribed to them by the culture surrounding them. Set in the 1980s, Trina's life gets turned around when her husband Marvin cheats on her with another man, Whizzer. She spirals as she works out what this means for her son Jason and for herself as she reevaluates her role as a wife and mother. Meanwhile her ex-husband enjoys a tumultuous relationship with his affair partner, examining the 'Thrill of First Love' in an explicitly queer context.

The musical depicts the AIDS epidemic through the gradual deterioration of Whizzer. Whizzer's close friends, Charlotte and Cordelia, are an homage to the work of lesbian communities during the crisis; providing critical support while Whizzer is in the hospital.

It is both comedic and satirical yet deeply moving – and I have to admit I've never finished a rewatch of this show without a good cry.

Michelle Jiang: Helen Edmundson's *Small Island*

In tandem with US celebrations of Black History Month, *Small Island* (2019) is a novel by Andrea Levy that was adapted for the stage by Helen Edmundson, which I saw in a digital screening by The National Theatre. *Small Island* focuses on the interconnecting stories of two couples from vastly different backgrounds: Hortense and Gilbert, immigrants from Jamaica during the Windrush generation, and Queenie and Bernard, a white, English couple in whose house they find lodgings. Despite the disparity between their backgrounds, their lives mirror one another throughout the play: clumsily, painfully, begrudgingly at times, and yet always with meaning.

Integral to the play is the portrayal of how a series of flimsy events can build up to something beautiful or tragic, and that both sequence and consequence



are often beyond our control. It was the first time I had seen the story of an immigrant couple captured this way. *Small Island* perfectly conveyed the frustration and struggle of racial hostility through its storytelling, visual direction and character parallels. *Small Island* is simultaneously arresting and moving; it carries the weight of an entire generation.

Maddie Gillett: Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*

With International Women's Month approaching in March, *Top Girls* (pictured above) is a must-see. It is a thought-provoking exploration of feminism in Thatcherite Britain, exploring the interplay between

class and womanhood. In her quest of becoming a 'top girl', protagonist Marlene becomes a symbol for the problems of second-wave feminism - it is an essentially capitalistic mode of social mobility, leading her to make remarks such as "I hate the working class".

This action, however, is mostly contained to the second act of the play. Churchill's first act is a masterful experimentation in theatrical absurdism. Marlene hosts a dinner party to celebrate her promotion, but the guests are female figures from various points in history. As laughter and intoxication leads to moments of sombre realisation, it becomes

harder for each woman to ignore the gut-wrenching trauma that underlies her nostalgia. Though historically and geographically disparate, the women's circumstances seem strikingly similar. All have suffered at the hands of male power. Churchill thus masterfully encapsulates the complexities of feminist victories: Marlene has more opportunity than her historical counterparts, but at the cost of herself and her family.

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

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Review: *The Busy Body* – 'Theatre of the Real...both hilarious and biting'



By LARA MACHADO

The Oxford Creation Theatre's latest production brings the irresistible charm of Centlivre's eighteenth-century comedy to the heart of St Hugh's

The *Busy Body* (1709) is one of the many plays written by Susanna Centlivre. Centlivre is often referred to by critics and historians as the most successful female writer on the 18th century English stage and yet, to most of us, her name means nothing. The times that *The Busy Body* has been performed in the past hundred years can be counted with one hand.

The team at Oxford's Creation Theatre, in partnership with Orange Tree Theatre, are here to revive Centlivre's play for 21st century audiences. With only four days of rehearsal, little-to-no staging and performing script-in-hand at a non-theatrical venue (St Hugh's Mordan Hall), the cast and crew of *The Busy Body* had no easy

task and yet, there was hardly one person in the room not taken by the irresistible charm of both the text and the performance.

Centlivre's play is both hilarious and biting. Following two young women and their attempts at escaping controlling and abusive guardians, *The Busy Body* has a lot to say not only about the lack of female freedom but also about the contractual nature of personal relationships when everything from marriage to guardianship revolves around money and legal documents. Introducing an element of chaos to the plot, is the character of Marplot – the titular "busy body" – whose sole aim is to find out his friends' secrets in order to participate in their plots. Unfortunately, Marplot is a walking disaster and the more he

tries to help, the more problems he causes.

When I found out this was going to be a script-in-hand performance I was sceptical of the barrier that that would potentially rise between actors and audience. However, the performance thrived off of audience interaction. Zak Ghazi-Tobarti's hilarious Marplot, jogs through the audience in quest for secrets and at one moment makes to turn into one of the audience rows, chiding the elderly couple sitting at the end for blocking his path: "This is a path!" At another point, the actor loses his place in the script and turns it into one of the funniest moments in the performance by announcing: "I am going to... I am going to read the script!"

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

FILM AND TV

Editors' Picks

IN THEATRES



A REAL PAIN

A twist on the classical road movie, Jesse Eisenberg's second film, *A Real Pain*, follows two Jewish cousins tracing their family roots in Poland

TO STREAM



MISS AUSTEN

Adapted from Andrea Gibb's novel, Aisling Walsh's new four-part BBC drama explores why Cassandra Austen, sister of Jane, burned the great novelist's letters

Image Credits:
Harald Krichel/CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons
Unknown/ Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

By RUBY TIPPLE THE MANY LIVES OF NOSFERATU, 1922-2024

Over 100 years since its first screening, F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922) is not as terrifying as it once was, yet it retains a timeless eeriness. Max Schreck's career-defining performance as Nosferatu inspired remakes, heightened public interest in the Dracula/Nosferatu story, and cemented itself as a pivotal film of German Expressionism. As The Count rises from his coffin, he ascends into a new genre – horror – with all its repulsive, inhuman promise.

Werner Herzog's remake, *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979), continues to innovate. Klaus Kinski's performance is a perfect subversion of the Nosferatu character – pathetic, depressed, and driven by a genuine desire for human connection. He is chilling not because he represents that lurking 'other', but because he feels familiar, relatable even.

Herzog also adds material in the third act illustrating Nosferatu's devastating impact on the town of Wisborg, accentuating the macabre horror for modern audiences. Rats swarm the town in silent, one-shot tableaux as townspeople form makeshift communities in full knowledge of the impending plague. Although Eggers' version borrows some of these scenes from Herzog, there is never the sense that the town is real and facing an apocalyptic force.

The classic tragedy of Nosferatu/Dracula's conclusion is navigated perfectly by Isabelle Adjani's Mina, who, in her final moments, is

completely and utterly alone. In a subversion of the common damsel-in-distress trope, Adjani cements herself as the determined hero of the film.

Robert Eggers' 2024 remake treads a line between tradition and imagination. Considering Eggers' reputation as one of the most innovative filmmakers working today, behind works like *The Witch*, *The Lighthouse* and *The Northman*, there was great potential here for a special kind of heightened storytelling. He tries to foreground genuine horror and grit, and thereby, like Herzog in 1979, provide something original and exciting – a fresh take on an old story.

But what might have been cutting edge never rose above the conventional. The cinematography was disappointingly uniform, every shot as foggy, dark, and glacial as the next, leaving little space for the beautiful mise-en-scène of other Eggers films.

There are also grounds to critique the film for over-stylising. Eggers' signature close-up shots in particular are overused. In such a gloomy film, obvious stylisation undermines the realism so essential to horror's chill. It takes audiences out of the film's element of realism and makes the horror, therefore, much less effective.

The performances, too, are flawed. Lily Rose-Depp gives a good physical performance, but in sum appears wooden and miscast. Characters claim that her connection to the supernatural comes from her passionate nature but in every scene she appears distant and cold.

The other actors are also forgettable: an especial shame given the calibre of the cast which included veteran performers such as Willem Defoe. Arguably, the problem is not with the actors but with the script, which provides characters with little motivation and hardly any depth. Simon McBurney's performance as Knock, although small, was an exception. His transformation from polite, although slightly weird, office clerk to crazed cultist is extremely convincing.

But these issues of casting and cinematography are not the main cause for disappointment with *Nosferatu*. Its greatest problem is the lack of innovation of a classic tale.

While the desire to remake classic films for modern audiences is understandable, the Nosferatu story is too well-worn to justify an identical remake. Like Herzog's version, remakes need to say something new. And, sadly, Eggers' film feels like something we've seen before. The minor changes that are made (like a naked Nosferatu – the real horror of the film?) do little to reimagine the conventional narrative.

Watching the three films in close succession highlights just how one-dimensional the 2024 *Nosferatu* is. Compared to the impact of Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), or the dark twists of Herzog's *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979), Eggers' timid approach made for a frustrating cinematic experience.

Close-up on The Ultimate Picture Palace

By NANCY GITTUS

The Ultimate Picture Palace has been at the forefront of Oxford's cinema scene for over a century. First opening in 1911, under the enthusiastic guidance of local actor and businessman Frank Stuart, it was the city's first purpose-built cinema. Showing newsreels, comedies, melodramas and of course most importantly the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race. The cinema has since then had a somewhat tumultuous history. Closed for decades after the First World War, the cinema was rediscovered in 1974 by Oxford alumni Bill Heine and Pablo Butcher, being, at the time, used to store furniture. The cinema, in true 70s style, turned its attention to rebelling against the norm. The Penultimate Picture Palace, as it was then called, pushed back against the censorship of the time. It showed obscure, rare and even illegal film. A clandestine showing of the then-banned film, *A Clockwork Orange*, went even so far as to put Bill Heine in court.

During the 90s this rebellious attitude took more of a communal turn. Squatters took over the cinema, renaming it Section 6, and although it was all rather unofficial, with films projected onto bedsheets and audiences sat on the ground, the muck in and make do atmosphere really built a sense of community amongst the cinema-goers, so much so that the cinema was also adapted into a broader-use community space, hosting live music events and giving families free tickets to film showings.

These two themes, off-beat and community,

are the essence of the Ultimate Picture Palace today. After the death of the UPP's last owner Becky Hallsmith in 2018, a managing committee of Becky's close friends and longstanding UPP supporters was formed. They decided it was time for the cinema to shed its skin, to fulfill Becky's dream of a community-owned cinema. Consequently, the major decision was made to launch the Ultimate Picture Palace for sale through community shares. Thanks to over 1300 cinephiles around the city and beyond, buying between £30 to £5000 worth of shares each, UPP reached its target of £312,575 shares sold. Therefore, The Ultimate Picture Palace Community Cinema Ltd. bought The Ultimate Picture Palace, not only giving those in the community who are strongly invested in the cinema a chance to have a say in how the UPP is run, but ensuring the cinema can maintain its autonomy, as the last independent cinema left in Oxford. This means the UPP can stay focused on its own aims and visions for cinema within the community. Although the cinema does of course show mainstream films, it prides itself on maintaining a connection to classic, foreign language and independent films – anything that's a little whacky and out there. For example, the cinema has recently screened the French film, *Honouring Jean-Luc Godard*, the director of almost-mythic status in France, famous for his work in bringing about French New Wave cinema.

Foreign language films have been a big draw for students since the 1970s. The UPP is well aware of this and keen to encourage the city's termly residents to get down there, offering a

free subscription for students giving them £5 tickets during the week and £6.50 tickets at the weekend. Another recent showing, *The Last Days of Disco*, is another great example of the unique side to the UPP, as this 1998 film forms part of their "classic season".

Today, the UPP is still heavily focused on getting out into the community, demonstrating the wonderful opportunities provided by their unique cinema. Consequently, the UPP sets up many special events throughout the year. By working in collaborations with groups such as Oxford Pride and Asylum Welcome, the UPP is able to organise relevant film showings, with pre-film talks conducted by members of their

partner organisation. It also participates in Into Film which gives schools free screenings every November.

Overall, The Ultimate Picture Palace is, and always has been, about giving the community the opportunity to access not just the mainstream blockbusters of today, but also a chance to experience unique, off-beat, daring cinema that challenges, reveals and rewards. As Tom Jowett, the programming manager at the Ultimate Picture Palace told *Cherwell*: "it really does have a special place in people's hearts".

Image Credit: Motacilla/CC BY SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons



Stop pretending Banksy is God's gift to the Left

Ruby Doran Meira explains her gripe with one of the UK's most notorious street artists

ART

It seems that for the current generation of students at Oxford and elsewhere, a pervasive entity has weaved in and out of art discourse in our lifetimes. This formless spectre has ignited inspiration in some, vitriolic disdain in others, and even provoked full-blown exasperation in those most inclined to disillusionment. Yet there's no denying that if you were to ask anyone between the ages of 15 and 40 to name one currently active artist with mainstream notoriety, their likely response would still be "Banksy".

What is so enticing – and infuriating – about this mystery man's slapdash approach to political commentary? What is it about his chosen medium, and the restrictions he negotiates to be able to use it, which generates so much talk? This self-proclaimed art critic argues that it's all in the nuance – oh no, not the nuance Banksy thinks he's mastering: he wouldn't know subtlety if it slapped him in the face, the nuance engendered by public opinion in all its extremes, as it grapples to ascertain a message of any worth behind the *Skins*-esque, surreal and nihilistic aesthetic of Banksy's work.

Banksy started out in the early 1990s, but it wasn't until the 2000s that he had honed his signature style of stencilling and began to refine his strain of epigrammatic satire. Though there was a time where he resold prints of his pieces that had been sprayed on public surfaces, nowadays the Banksy money-machine operates primarily through private art dealerships which collectively represent the driving force behind Banksy's



net worth (reportedly over £37 million). This is a fact Banksy seems to be keen for you to forget; famously, his public reaction to the astronomical going rates of his work at auction is complete disbelief. In fact, one of his pieces, 'Morons', depicts an auction coupled with the framed text: "I can't believe you morons actually buy this shit". But as per the standards of any reputable auction house, a proportion of that profit is usually returned to the contributor, in this case through Banksy's own official agency, which he named 'Pest Control' – oh, how scathing! Questions around the ethics of reselling art for extortionate prices and

the often scant financial security of the artist are valid concerns in a world with an ever-widening gap between the consumption habits of the upper class and the global daily survival concerns of workers. Yet it seems that beneath the anti-establishment appearances, Banksy stumbles at the first hurdle: addressing this issue in a moral and transparent way.

Another article entirely could be spent chronicling the long and near hysterical financial history of Banksy's repertoire. But frankly, the origin of my quarrel with Banksy lies beyond the money: I believe we should stop letting

people away with the tired notions that "the establishment doesn't want me to tell you that" or "if you don't get it you're part of the problem". I especially think that we should stop taking Banksy in good faith, assuming he's some sort of puppeteer, sardonically hovering over our pitifully incomplete analysis of his art – sometimes he just makes really bad stuff. To be clear, it is a fundamental belief of mine that styles deviating from the classic (and often eurocentric) norms of fine art often have the most profound potential to create something genuinely arresting and intelligent – you only have to consider the work of Keith Haring or Basquiat to find truly pertinent examples. But that's really what irks me about such a platform being wasted on Banksy: simple or easy aside, art shouldn't be as lazy as finding a wall and slapping on an over-produced, Warhol-esque print stencil with something about trees written underneath and calling it a day. And what's worse Banksy still carries on as if he's God's gift to the Left. You only need to browse his websites for a moment to see how his whole persona exudes someone at odds with his circumstance, a riled-up contrarian fed up with artifice and dreaming of untethered expression. This worked well in his formative years when he was a genuine nobody, but the facts of his refusal to update the act while his fame and fortune have eclipsed those of the wildest dreams of the people he purports to represent, have left a sour taste in my mouth, and inspired eye rolls from millions of spectators of his latest stunts.

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ARTS CALENDAR

What's On.

STAGE

THE GOAT

(Michael Pilch Studio, 12-15 Feb.)

Clarendon Productions tackles Edward Albee's thought-provoking play which poses the question of how best to react upon discovering that your partner's mistress Sylvia is, in fact, a goat.

WHEN YOU PASS OVER MY TOMB

(BT Studio 18-22 Feb.)

"What difference is there between donating my body to science and donating it to someone who might find pleasure in it when I'm dead?" In his visionary new work, playwright Sergio Blanco journeys through friendship, desire, and eroticism and reconstructs the walls between writer, character, actor, and audience.

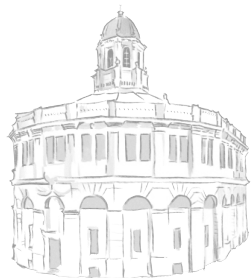
THE SECRET

(Oxford Playhouse, 11-15 Feb.)

A missing student leads three detectives to a secret university department tasked with handling controversial circumstances. As they uncover a web of intrigue, the university's fear of a public scandal becomes clear.

ANGEL (Michael Pilch Studio, 19-22 Feb.)

This is a dark comedy following Sara's 15 minute tube journey to receive her cancer test results. This poignant play immerses the audience in Sara's memory, and reminds us that while stories may linger, every journey has an end.



The Secret History characters as Oxford tropes

By Christina Scote

Satire is at its best when it combines humour with an ability to razor the very real flaws of the world. Donna Tartt mastered this formula in *The Secret History* (1992). There's a sense in which the novel has a connection to Oxford: both settings are cloistered, academic, moody, moneyed. Oxford is known for its Classics department and *The Secret History* features a class of (very rich) Greek students. If art mirrors life, then we should expect similarities in other areas. Turn to look at the cast of characters.

First is Henry, the super-scholar, a cold and calculated mastermind. Like every character in the book, he is a total self-parody, best summarised through a series of satirical vignettes. He loves Gucci out of lofty fascination: "I think they make it ugly on purpose. And yet people buy it out of sheer perversity." Another time he quips a helpful historical backlog to flesh out his brainstorming ("The Persians were master poisoners", he explains, while strategising ways to murder his friend.) He is so engrossed in his own academic world that he has never even heard of the moon landing. ("The others had somehow managed to pick this up along the way," adds Tartt pithily.) Brainy and commanding, he's the one who leads the central murder plot.

This is what Tartt has to say about Henry: "Henry's fatal flaw is that he's tried so hard to make himself perfect [...] he's tried to hard to root out things in himself which he finds unpleasant or distasteful that he's really managed to tear out a lot of what makes him human as well."

Since Oxford has a lot of nerds who have been told all their life that they're much cleverer than the people around them, it would probably feature quite highly on a global ranking of places with the most Henrys. Of course, by "most Henrys", I don't just mean sociopathic murderers. There are traces of Henry in every academic genius who lacks even one particle of warmth, in every involuntarily blunt tutor

who speaks with a smug twist in their voice, in every disciplined scholar who has spent so long in the Radcliffe Camera that they've lost touch with what they have in common with others. I absolutely feel for people whose commitment to efficiency and pragmatism can unintentionally appear to others as lovelessness. Less so for those whose efficiency and pragmatism has turned into actual lovelessness.

Second is Bunny, the archetypal dumb jock. Bunny is the source of more than half of the comedy; even in death his ironic stamp never leaves the pages. If your college has a "gap yah" crowd and a big sports team, then it probably has its own local Bunny. The narrative is a stream of constant subtle digs at him. It is specified the Greek class play *Go Fish* because it is the only card game Bunny knows. Early on in the book he steals a cheesecake with a taped note that says "Please do not steal this. I am on financial aid." Chapters later, we hear him "explaining vigorously and quite unselfconsciously what he thought ought to be done to people who stole from house refrigerators." He writes a spirited paper on "Metahemeralism", which is not a word. With self-confidence that far exceeds his intelligence, Bunny is the college rugby player who gets into a lot of arguments and turns up to his tutorials with an out-of-charge laptop.

Finally, there's Richard, the narrator. Like a lot of young people – and this is not specific to Oxford – he is anxious to fit in. But beyond that, he exemplifies a very specific Oxonian social dynamic: a desire to join the elite, Classics friend group. These people lament that they are misunderstood; Richard is all too happy to agree. He is mostly blind to their flaws, partly willfully, partly because he has something in common with them. By the time he realises that they are not brilliant, he has effectively cut himself off from everyone else in his college. Freshers: avoid this mistake, pick solid friends over shiny ones, and steer well clear of his "morbid longing for the picturesque."

BOOKS

FASHION

Five tips for a toasty and trendy winter

By Shaan Sidhu

As frosty winter winds sweep through Oxford, here are some top tips to stay toasty and trendy in spite of the cold.

1. Layer under, then over: Investing in a set of thermals is probably the easiest way to combat the cold. The Uniqlo Heattech range or the Intimissimi Ultralight Cashmere tops keep you warm without you breaking a sweat or looking too bulky. For those on a budget, H&M and M&S have reasonably priced long-sleeve cotton tops that cost under £15, but it's easy to find even cheaper alternatives without supporting fast-fashion on sites like Vinted or Depop.

2. Funky Tights and more: Not everyone enjoys wearing tights. The thickest 'nude' tights options can fail to match most skin tones and black high-denier ones bring back scratchy sub-fusc and school uniform. M&S can equip you with comfortable staples. If you like to dress more maximalist, experiment with colourful hosiery. Try Calzedonia, which offers great stylish tights options! A simple all-black outfit can become more vibrant by wearing coloured or even patterned tights. Woollen tights also come in a range of colours with patterns, and are more durable than ordinary ones.

“Wool, cashmere, or even mohair, are perfect for keeping you warm”

3. Boots: Usually made from leather or a vegan-friendly alternative, knee-length boots can help to keep your legs warm too, especially if they've got thick lining on the inside. If toddling over Radcliffe Square doesn't tickle your fancy, go for lower heel options like a western or biker boot to add a bit of flair to your outfits without risking a fashion slip-up. Faux leather is a cheaper alternative that is just as water resistant as leather, but not as warm. Have a look at second-hand leather options online or in charity shops, and you might find higher quality boots at a lower price.

4. Coats: For those who wish to upgrade your College Puffer without compromising on warmth, then a dark wool coat might be a shout. For those who prefer a more glamorous stride to the pub, then a long fur coat might be a lavish alternative. The versatility of fur coats in particular makes them a great asset to one's wardrobe, as they can be dressed up for formals and styled down for everyday wear.

5. Accessories: A scarf is an essential accessory to the Oxford wardrobe and is the perfect layer for adding a personal touch to any outfit. Although this synthetic fibre might be excellent thermal insulation and dries faster than wool, it is less breathable, which might cause you to overheat. Natural alternatives, like wool, cashmere, or even mohair, are just as good at keeping you warm, are biodegradable thus better for the environment, and more resistant to wear or tear. Hunt for scarves on Vinted or eBay. If you prefer to shop first-hand, have a look at UNIQLO, Eldon Cashmere, or Scottish brands that specialise in lambswool.

‘The best is yet to come’: Mac Miller’s posthumous *Baloonerism*

By Ferdy Al-Qassab

When the D-note rings out from the organ on the dream-like second track of Mac Miller’s *Baloonerism*, it feels like the beginning of an ascent into open heavens. It’s ironic but fitting that the artist’s latest posthumous release is one so outwardly concerned with his own mortality. Mac first speaks over five minutes into the LP, immediately grappling with the inevitability of his own death. He treats his rise to fame as the opening of a Pandora’s Box that solidified his fate as a doomed star, musing: “I gave my life to this shit, already killed myself.”

Miller spoke openly about his drug use during his life, and *Baloonerism* is no different from the rest of his catalogue in tackling the subject of addiction. Speaking on his ‘Faces’ mixtape – recorded around the same time as ‘Baloonerism’ in 2014 – Mac remarked: “Every song is about coke and drugs.” Whilst ‘Faces’ feels like the work of an artist in a downward spiral, ‘Baloonerism’ sounds as if it were recorded in a state of purgatory. On the track ‘Excelsior’, Miller reminisces about his early life amidst the sounds of playing children: “Me I used to want to be a wizard, when did life get so serious? Whatever happened to apple juice and cartwheels.” This makes for haunting listening knowing the eventual outcome of Mac’s life – an outcome that Miller himself seemed already aware of – but also acts as commentary on his musical progression from the care-free to the introspective.

Sonically and stylistically, ‘Baloonerism’ fills a gap in the Miller canon between the playful frat-rap of his early mixtapes and the sincerity

of his later work. This is the work of a maturing musician, and an early instance of Mac using his craft as an outlet for his anxieties about mortality. No track exemplifies this better than ‘Funny Papers’, in which Mac jokes about seeing reports of a suicide in the ‘funny papers’ – a Second World War term for the cartoon section of a newspaper. There’s an effortlessness in the way he juxtaposes the joyful with the somber. Even in the wake of a first verse tackling a subject as heavy as suicide, it’s hard not to smile hearing Mac’s playful tone on the refrain: “The moon’s wide awake with a smile on his face as he smuggles constellations in a suitcase.”

Just as his lyrics tackle existential questions with almost childlike metaphor, Mac’s delivery glides between languid and upbeat throughout the album. The more upbeat ‘Stoned’ sees Mac rapping over a hallucinatory beat that fuses psychedelic chirps with a head-bopping guitar riff, but despite its hooks it is still clear

this is not a grab for commercial success, but another fragment of an album that Mac is making for himself and his most devoted fans. This undeniable honesty persists in the final two tracks, with the hopeful refrain of “the best is yet to come” on album-highlight ‘Rick’s Piano’ bearing truth regarding the exceptional quality of Miller’s later work. It is after all impossible to listen to *Baloonerism* without lamenting not only the loss of the man, but of the music he was yet to produce.

The twelve-minute closer feels like the end of the ascent that began at the start of the album, with Mac’s words inevitably lingering on the mind: “Living and dying are one and the same.”

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



The Source

By FLAVIUS COVACI

In the Beginning

I was alone with the earth and the sun before you
came along: there was no life, no song, not even words.
My hope had been lost to the breeze, reveries strung up
on imagined poplar trees. Before war, before Ramses. You
were still nebular then, too embryonic to be captured by
the tip of my fountain pen. Before fear, before rain,
before prose or pain.
I was left to despair,
to beat hard ground until it yielded
love somewhere. This was before the Lord’s prayer,
before Lord—and I swear I cried gold on the day the moon
broke its mould and released you. Out of the strata of
the rock and the bacteria of yet uninvented livestock,
you came forth. My new sun.



The purgatory between Oxford and the Midlands

Esme Thomson reflects on how Oxford has shaped her identity.

When my “yahs” replaced my “yows” I knew I was in trouble. Last year, I wrote a poem about my Black Country accent. I started it before Oxford was even on my horizon, a distant fever-dream, meant for smarter people than me. A year later, I scribbled the end of it while hunched over in my uncomfortable office chair, trying to imitate the language of my mother because I couldn’t rely on my own accent for the words anymore. After it was published, I realised something. I was trying to immortalise my background, make it permanent in words, just in case this Oxford thing sweeps me astray. It was a silent fear, but it was poignant, and it stuck.

I came to Oxford as a working-class, state-school student, thoroughly unprepared for everything. I didn’t know what pesto was, let alone what a formal was and what order to use the cutlery.

When I first drove through the gates of Keble College, I was terrified. I would stick out like a sore thumb – the girl on bursaries, terrified of the Rad Cam (it didn’t help my bod card wouldn’t even let me in the place). To my disbelief, I wasn’t singled out for saying “yow” instead of “you”.

All the sudden, the home streets I’d known all my life became unfamiliar and unwelcoming. Going from concrete to cobbles changed me at every level. At work, a girl who clearly detested me just three months earlier leaned in and smiled knowingly, and said “you’ve really changed, Es.” At first I laughed and asked why. She said “I don’t know, you’re just...different.” It was amazing.

My accent shifted. I bought linen trousers off Vinted. I started to shop at Urban – although my frugality only lets me go as far as the sale section. I put away my false eyelashes, my cheap makeup, and my cheap perfumes. I started to understand the differences between wines. And then, after the

most life-changing few months of my life, I came back home.

Oxford launches you into a completely other world. You go from being the second-smartest girl in your English class to an unremarkable student in a sea of intelligence. Amongst such smart people, intelligence becomes mediocre. To everyone from home, I’m a bit of a miracle. To everyone in Oxford, I’m not the sharpest tool in the shed. Despite this, I wasn’t quite ready to be launched back to Earth so violently.

Last week, I invited my best mate from high school to visit me. He protested: “I wouldn’t fit in.” I asked, “How do you think I feel, babe?” He said, “Yeah, but you blend in now. You talk posh.” I went bright-red and scowled. For someone who loves her stash puffer jacket, being told I am what I so wanted to be absolutely breaks my heart. I’m liked, I’m accepted, I’m an Oxford girlie, but how much of my old self was abandoned?

I’m strung between two different ways of life. I can never truly go back home and exist as my parents did. But I’ll never properly be a part of the ‘Oxford class’ either. No matter how hard I scrub, I can never fully rinse away my accent and all the baggage that comes with it. I’ll hold on desperately to each part until I give in or I fall. I’m planning on neither.

Image Credit: David Hays



A manifesto on self-care: going back to basics

Sophie Lyne revisits the concept of ‘self-care’ in the age of TikTok.

Searching “self-care” on TikTok will inevitably leave you a little confused about how best to spend your ‘me time’. Some videos take a wellness angle – emphasising green juice, pilates, and hot girl walks. Some promote beautification – biweekly hair masks, exfoliating, and taking coconut oil baths. Others suggest we should prioritise simple pleasures like comfort foods, favourite TV shows, a cosy bed, and candles. Which is correct?

The TikTok model of self-care is somewhat problematic. Firstly, it’s highly commercial – often suggested videos are actually adverts for sponsored products. While I understand the benefits of retail therapy, it’s a depressing and out of touch notion that the only way to show yourself love is by buying an expensive moisturiser.

Another issue is that self-care on TikTok is primarily aimed towards women. A search for “self-care for men” yields basic hygiene and appearance related videos. But surely caring for both your physical and mental health should transcend gender barriers?

I have long held a rather different view of self-care, focusing on small-scale, intentionally self-indulgent acts instead

of a three-hour bath routine. For me, self-care is as simple as going beyond what is necessary in order to make yourself that extra bit happier. It can be done little and often, in basically any context.

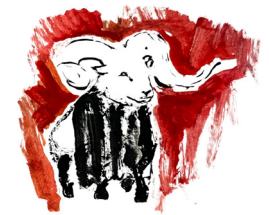
I think we should care for ourselves in the same way that others show us care. My dad, one of the kindest people I know, is big on the little, whimsical gestures of love. When I was younger, he liked to arrange my food in shapes: flowers of cucumber sticks, towers of toast squares. Once, my mum asked for half of his wagon wheel, and rather than breaking one down the middle, my dad cut a heart shape out of the centre. These acts are not necessary and don’t require much extra effort, but go a long way in cheering someone up.

A friend recently sent me a picture of the chicken wrap she made for dinner, and I noticed she had toasted the outside of the wrap. This, I told her, is self-care. It’s not necessary: it doesn’t add nutritional value, and the dinner would have been fine without it. It takes time and adds an extra pan to your washing up. But it made her happy.

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

Image Credit: Paul Cézanne, Rawpixel, via Flickr CC-BY-2.0

HOROSCOPES



Aries

Lean on your network. Everything will be okay.



Taurus

Don’t pass under the Bridge of Sighs. Trust me.



Gemini

Stop procrastinating and get back to the library.



Cancer

Support a local Oxford business today.



Leo

You’ll get that McKinsey offer if you work for it. Grind.



Virgo

Clear your head with a walk someplace new.

Galentine’s: The real love story

By Anita Okunde

My first proper Galentine’s Day was my first year of university, and honestly? It was one of the most wholesome nights of my life. After a chaotic shopping trip including an obscene amount of fairy lights, the joy of transforming a random college room into a pink-and-red paradise was unmatched. Of course, the price tag was less joyful, but what is financial responsibility when you are making memories? My Galentine’s memories will always be that of pure happiness and community, but I definitely believe the aesthetics should match.

Valentine’s Day? Cute. But Galentine’s? Revolutionary. There is something wildly powerful about a group of girls coming together to celebrate each other, proving that love is not reserved for candlelit dinners and cheesy couple posts. It is also the late-night venting sessions, the emergency snack runs, and the friends who make life a little less terrifying.

There is also something so refreshing about putting real energy into friendships the way people do for romantic relationships. The matching pyjamas and coordinated Instagram posts are fun, but the real magic of Galentine’s is in the way it makes friendships feel valued as relationships. Society loves to push the

idea that romantic love is the ultimate goal, but have you ever experienced the sheer power of a room full of women hyping each other up?

Of course, capitalism has caught on. The world was quick to monetise a day dedicated to single girls, because nothing escapes the marketing machine. There are targeted sales, themed gifts, and more pink-themed everything than you could ever imagine. And yes, I did contribute to the economy with my impulse purchases. But you know what? If I am going to be spending money, I would rather it be on a night that makes my friends feel loved and celebrated rather than overpriced roses and underwhelming chocolates.

Still, the real beauty of Galentine’s is that it flips the narrative. It is a reminder that love is not only for romance. It celebrates community, support, and, frankly, girl power. In a world that constantly pits women against each other, choosing to uplift your friends is a radical act. So here’s to the platonic soulmates, the 2am crisis responders, the girls who will listen to you cry about the same situationship 50 times, and the girls who will scream “SLAY” at you across the dancefloor.

Love is love, and there is no greater love than girls supporting girls. Happy Galentine’s to all the amazing women at this university. May we know them, may we be them, may we celebrate them!

HOROSCOPES



Libra

This is your week. Don't squander it.



Scorpio

Check on your friends at those faraway colleges.



Sagittarius

Check your partner's phone...



Capricorn

They're not the one.



Aquarius

You and me. Sheldonian. Midnight. Scared?



Pisces

Keep calm and carry on.

My diary: self-reflection or self-sabotage?

By *Carolina Julius*

Writing a diary is never a neutral act. Whether we aim for truth or “something sensational”, a diary is its own form of fiction – and it shapes our thoughts as much as it records them. The effect of this is often overlooked. We are told that keeping a diary does wonders for your mental well-being. In my case, it only made things worse. Three years ago, I started keeping a diary. I intended to use it as a record of everyday life – it was my A-level summer, and I was sure my newfound freedom would lead to experiences worth recording. But before long, my diary became something else entirely. It was no longer about events – it was all about emotion. I quickly became addicted.

It's an easy trap to fall into: a diary encourages introspection in a way that conversation rarely can. A diary invites self-reflection, but without knowing it, I began to over-analyse. It was the literary equivalent of doom-scrolling – only, instead of refreshing a digital feed, I was trawling through the most uncomfortable spaces in my own mind.

I don't think that my diary changed my perception of everyday life, but it did change the way I reacted to it. A bad day became worse as I sat down to write – to dwell in the possible problems – thinking I was helping myself. My diary became a breeding ground for negativity, inflating the importance of trivial problems. We've all had moments when a miserable day is lifted by a change of scenery – what seemed like a crisis solved simply by sunlight and fresh air. The way I was using my diary was akin to keeping myself locked inside – left to ruminate on feelings I unknowingly fuelled with each new entry.

Yet keeping a diary can be a beautiful thing. It is a space for reflection, a quiet sanctuary away from the constant noise of the outside world. When I write about moments of happiness, I find that I am able to extend them – reliving and savouring them in the slowed time of

the page. Of course, limiting a diary to positive moments is equally unhelpful, undermining the very point of having a space where you can be completely honest.

Used properly, a diary can be a tool: a form of silent therapy, a way to work through unresolved feelings and untangle emotional knots. It can be cathartic, too – sometimes, the need to unload is urgent, and the only place that feels safe to do so is within the pages of a book. And, often, as in the case of a child who scribbles down, in rage, a plot to kill their sibling, some thoughts are best kept private.

I used to think of my diary as a place where thoughts might spread freely across the page – a wild garden of ideas. But I have come to realise that by dwelling on what is negative, I had allowed the weeds to spread, crowding out space for growth. Self-awareness is important, but if untended, it can turn into hyper-awareness – a tangled, dark place to be.

A diary is the story we tell ourselves about ourselves. We shouldn't ignore what is difficult, but we should be mindful of how we engage with it.

“A diary can soothe and create joy, but it can also intensify self-analysis. The key, perhaps, is to make sure we are balanced in the story we tell ourselves.”

Our thoughts work like algorithms: the more you think about something, the more it appears. In my early diary entries, I supercharged a cycle of negativity without even knowing. I'm not suggesting that we stop keeping diaries, far from it. Over the years, I have gifted many to a friend in need. But like all relationships, the one we have with our diaries should be conscious. A diary can soothe and create joy, but it can also intensify self-analysis. The key, perhaps, is to make sure we are balanced in the story we tell ourselves.

So, if you're thinking of keeping a diary, give it a shot – only, make sure you know what you're getting yourself into.

CHERWELL-FED

Decent Thai-me, decent company: Chiang Mai review



By *AMANDA LI*

With Valentine's Day coming up, I decided to go to a place that wasn't just your typical Gino's or tapas. I had a decent date at Chiang Mai, then dragged my friends out for dinner to make sure that it was the food that made it decent. At 6pm on a Saturday, we miraculously got a table – book ahead if you're going here next week.

My friends got lost trying to find the right alleyway, which helps keep out the crowds of tourists from the High Street. Chiang Mai opened in the '90s in a building built in the 1630s. The dining area is split into two cozy rooms upstairs, though the proximity to other tables is not ideal for a more private dining experience.

The menu is large, with different varieties of basic dishes based on the protein and spice level. We started with £9.50 mixed starters – chicken satay, shrimp tempura, siu mai, chicken wings, and spring rolls. The fried foods weren't oily, and the duck sauce (some with chili and vegetables) paired well with the shrimp tempura, which was well-filled and crunchy. I personally favored the peanut sauce and chicken satay. The spring rolls with vermicelli were less boring than expected. The chicken wings and siu

mai could be better, but as a whole, was nice.

Out of over 70 options, we ordered prawn and chicken pad Thai, mixed pad see ew, sweet and sour chicken with fried rice, and the mixed Chiang Mai house fried rice. All were under £14 and completely worth it. My house fried rice was served in a pineapple to the delight of all. The umami of the rice and the beef paired well with the sweetness of the onion and pineapple. The one downside is the constant tingling from the bromelain. Even on Valentine's, I don't like my rice eating me. My friend's “boring” pad Thai was a bit heavy, but the large shrimp and mix of ingredients still made it better than most. The pad see ew was well-balanced, with tender ho fun noodles. My friend was especially happy about the vegetables.

We had mixed feelings about the overall cost of the meal, £25 including starters and service charge. Some dishes were not worth it, but others (like mine) are a good deal. It's definitely on your order – come with an idea of what you want before you get overwhelmed. The place is nice for a date, but not the most romantic option. Come with friends – the company will always make the food worth it.

Image Credit: Amanda Li

Agony Aunt:

Dear Cherwell,

I accidentally called my tute partner our tutor's name while in bed – he's now not speaking to me. What to do?

Lots of love,

Oxf*cked up at Queen's



Dear Oxf*cked up,

For most people, sleeping with a tute partner is messy enough, let alone bringing the tutor into it! But it is certainly not a disaster.

Before anything, you should assess how much you value this relationship. Was it just a one time thing or are they partner material? In most cases, I am sure that having an honest chat with them will help smooth things out. You can't stay angry forever, especially if you're in need of borrowing someone's notes to meet an essay deadline!

But there is also a deeper question to unpack here: why was your tutor in your head at this moment? Was it just a slip of the tongue? I imagine not. But don't worry – many people have had sexual thoughts about their tutor. Despite a few rumors (and the occasional Oxfess), for the majority of students, these fantasies never become reality. So my best advice is to try and keep your tutor out of your head in your actual sex life.

As for your tute partner, don't stress too much. They might be jealous and angry or just feel awkward. Maybe all they need is a bit of distance and time.

Lots of love,
Your Agony Aunt

BOOZY BULLETIN

Best (cheap) Tesco Wine

1. La Vieille Ferme

Otherwise fondly known as 'Chicken Wine', this is the pinnacle of budget wine. Slightly pricier than others on the list, but always the best option.

2. La P'tite Pierre

This French delight is as crisp as it is easy on the wallet. Our editors appreciate the elegant bottle.

3. Juicy

Far less acidic than its white wine counterpart and brilliantly priced, this rosé is perfect for a crew-date.

4. Echo Falls

Though it takes our editors back to high school, this fruity blend is a summer classic. With its low alcohol content, it's the perfect choice for a mid-day picnic—or pretending you're classy at a BBQ.

5. Zesty

A student classic. Slightly acidic and, unsurprisingly, zesty.

SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT OUNRS X OUJS



The New Russia Society + Japanese Society came together to mix two of the best alcohols – vodka and sake. It was a suave affair with cocktail glasses, garnishes, and only a few too-strong drinks. Many cross-country friendships were formed!

Dating across the Oxford-Cambridge divide

Laurence Cooke discusses what life is like dating someone from 'The Other Place'.

A sunny day at the Boat Race, and the air is thick with shouts of "God damn bloody Oxford" – Cambridge's rather lame equivalent of "shoe the tabs". I'm with my girlfriend's friends from the other place, and Oxford's dismal performance on the Thames has caused much mirth, most of it at my expense.

A long-distance relationship, which started after UCAS but before uni, set me and my girlfriend on firmly different sides of the Oxbridge divide. Should a similar thing ever happen to you (or if you're just curious), consider this your survival guide to making the most of the situation, with all its perks and pitfalls.

Firstly, prepare for the fact that despite being very similar, the two universities and their respective towns don't like having much to do with one another. No direct train or bus – except four hours long one that goes via Bedford – means a whistle-stop tour of London's major terminals and an unhealthy dose of the Hammersmith and City line. Add to this the journey being inexplicably 15 quid cheaper in one direction, coupled with the mighty institution that is the rail replacement bus, and you have a perfect transport storm.

Of course, it's all worth it once you've completed the odyssey. Having a partner at Cambridge means double the pretty quads, double the formal dinner opportunities, and double the self-righteousness. Given we're both worked into the ground by our tutors (sorry, supervisors), it's easy to be on the same page about work-life balance. 'Library dates' become a fixture as their libraries are far more lax about entry than ours – admittedly because they're quite ugly. I've also managed to ask a question in a Cambridge anthropology lecture despite having no knowledge of the discipline, nor actually the right to be in the building. An Oxbridge relationship offers extra academic motivation, as they give Cantab freshers something that resembles our scholar's gowns



without even needing a first.

Socially, it's probably a dead heat as to which city has the worst clubbing scene, and whether 'entz' beats 'ents' (the tabs' less snappy abbreviation). Exploring both cities at least gives you a wider sample to choose from, although Oxford post-club food is far superior to Cambridge's. Where Cambridge does win is with the 'backs', as the river flows through more of the colleges than at Oxford. They do their best to ruin this though by somehow being even snottier about guests than the Christ Church porters.

A big advantage as an Oxbridge couple is that the term dates generally coincide, barring the fact that Cambridge terms bizarrely start on a Tuesday. This is helpful for planning ahead, especially if you're also long-distance outside of term like we are.

Given the trials of the work and social calendar at both universities, planning and clear communication become a cornerstone. As

does an overfamiliarity with Jack's (an ice cream parlour every Cambridge student is obsessed with), alternating Valentine's and anniversary formals, and constant teasing that every street in Cambridge looks like Cornmarket.

The points of comparison are endless, and my life is so much richer for dating across the divide. You can, of course, even see her version of this article featured in *Cherwell's* rival, the Cambridge paper *Varsity*. My only qualm is that everyone thinks we're hopelessly privileged as an 'Oxbridge couple', that this was always going to happen, when in fact we've somehow fallen into this strange, lovely world that I have to sometimes blink several times to check is real. I can't claim that we've eliminated the Oxbridge rivalry, because quite the opposite is true: the differences have been absorbed into our relationship.

If that sounds like fun, do date across the divide – I'd highly recommend.

Image Credit: Laurence Cooke

Cherpse.

Oxford blind dating.

[A Thursday afternoon sipping coffee in Missing Bean, will this couple find love, or will their search continue...]

Miss Fashionista :

First impression?

We had a bit of a hard time finding each other but once we did, he seemed nice.

Highlight?

I would say that the conversation was pretty good, especially once we got the awkward small talk out the way.

Most embarrassing moment?

Probably the introductions, especially as we didn't see or introduce each other immediately.

Describe the date in 3 words

Awkward but nice.

Did it meet your expectations?

Honestly my expectations were very low so I would say they were exceeded.

Will there be a second date?

Probably not, I am just not sure we really clicked.

Mr Forgetful :

First impression?

She was well dressed, sharp and sweet.

Highlight?

Having a laugh at the stupid BOP themes in our colleges.

Most embarrassing moment?

At the start of the date when she told me her name, I kind of just didn't catch it and I was too afraid to ask again so even now I don't know what she's called.

Describe the date in 3 words

Funny, chilled, interesting.

Did it meet your expectations?

Yeah, it was fun to meet someone new!

Will there be a second date?

Think it was more of a friend vibe but really fun!



SPORT

Town bests Gown in Union boxing showdown

Fighters scrap tooth and nail amidst electric atmosphere in the chamber

By JACK DANSON

There are few places on Earth as synonymous with disputes as the Oxford Union. Since its inception just over two centuries ago, the society has played host to numerous hotly-contested debates, originally in the present-day library, before the construction of the famous chamber in 1879. For all the verbal sparring that has come to define the Union over its long, illustrious history, this year's edition of the annual 'Town vs Gown' boxing proved that some arguments can only be solved when people let their fists do the talking.

Over four hundred people piled into the chamber, but the entirety of the Union faculty was closed off and in use for the event. Only the members' bar stayed open for incoming guests to enjoy before the spectacle, and during the well-earned half hour interval that followed the sixth gripping bout. All of the other rooms were repurposed for the home and 'away' fighters (perhaps a slightly loose term when they likely live in OX1).

This year's Town vs. Gown marked the event's return to the Union's site for the first time since 2022, after having taken a brief hiatus at Iffley Road. While Gown may have been staying on home turf, it seemed not to deliver them much of an advantage. Of the fights between Oxford University fighters and external competition, only men's light heavyweight Michael Cheng emerged victorious in a gut-wrenching final contest that would have sent even the most hard-nailed hacks packing from St. Michael's Street.

In spite of the circumstances being vastly different from the usual debating scene, the Union's typical patrons turned up in droves on Saturday. Indeed, the dress code seemed to be even more formal than usual, as spectators clad in black tie piled into their seats and lined the balconies in anticipation of a mouth-watering card. Newly-anointed Union President Israr Khan watched on from a reliable distance



befitting for an academic rather than an athlete.

Both Town and Gown put forward a strong and diverse group of fighters, including OUABC's (former hitman) Giles Moon, the long-lost third Klitschko brother (see OUABC fighter profile photos for proof) and two women fighters who both battled valiantly despite falling to their opponents. Israr said the second of Oxford's female fighters, Eilish Farrelly, as a particular highlight as her fight culminated in a stunning final round where neither

"Some arguments can only be solved when people let their fists do the talking."

fighter left an ounce of effort on the table. Most of Town's diversity came from the various university-based and regional backgrounds, with some hailing from boxing clubs as far flung as Bristol and the bright lights of Slough.

The visitors were remorseless in putting their opposition to the sword, with towels flying in from the red corner before the allotted three rounds of two minutes were up. Nevertheless, the Gown faithful remained undeterred and continued to cheer their fighters on until the final bell. The hallowed chamber was like a lion's den for the four short hours, with every jab, hook, and uppercut from an Oxford boxer soliciting another tidal wave of noise.

While the chamber is a fantastic venue for such an occasion, it only made me wonder - who would come out on top in a battle of the Unions? This calls for a set of two of semi-finals: a battle for the north between St. Andrews University and Durham University, and a good old-fashioned varsity bout between the Oxford and Cambridge Unions. The winners box for the title of toughest Union in the country.

For those who were not satisfied by the extravaganza put on show by OUABC's finest, another boxing event looms on the horizon. The sensation that is 'Fight Night' will be held in Oxford for the very first time next term, having already swept the nation's various other universities in support of Oddballs.

Winners:

Jayden Walsh (West Herts ABC) bt James Somper
Will Fahie (Oxford) bt Giles Moon (Oxford)
Holly White (UWE) bt Jasmine Guo (Oxford)
Taylor Cordery (Kayani Camp) bt Rory Mitchell
Ife Isaacs (Bristol) bt Theo Anderson (Oxford)
Dylan Wilson (Oxford) bt Iain Pless (Oxford)
Tom Wise (Oxford) bt Madoc Wade (Oxford)
Ciaran Oloan (Oxford) bt Joseph Muckle (Oxford)
Katie-Jayne Patek (Borehamwood) bt Eilish Farrelly
Thomas Ivory (Borehamwood) bt Alex Hjorthol
Michael Cheng (Oxford) bt Arran Morton (Brookes)

Image Credit: Eleanor Guha and Ted Aplin



UPCOMING

Netball

Saturday and Sunday, 22nd & 23rd
February @Cambridge
Captain: Katinka
Mitchell-Thompson

Handball

Saturday, 22nd February
@Cambridge
President: Aaron Leu

Korfball

Saturday, 22nd February
@University Sport Centre, Cam-
bridge
Captain: Gracie Lewis

MATCH OF THE WEEK

Keble 2s' Cuppers defence falls at early hurdle

Reserves' Football Cuppers have brought us plenty of good, bad, and ugly play. One such medley was Sunday's Keble v Regent's Park.

Keble, the highly esteemed 'football college' took on underdogs, RPC, notorious for often failing to scrape even 11 players together.

Yet, against all odds, RPC wiped the floor with Keble, thrashing them by a score of 6-1.

So, Keble have been sufficiently humbled, and RPC have gained some long-awaited air-time. But how long will either of these last?

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Ageing like a fine wine: Sam Freeman thriving in advanced role for Jesus

Tom Brady, LeBron James, Chris Wood ... some of the greatest athletes of our time only seem to get better with age, or even experience a full-blown resurgence as they enter the twilight years of their careers. Add Sam Freeman, JCFC full-back by trade, to that illustrious list of names. Freed from the shackles of marking College football's best and brightest wingers at 1st XI level, he has flourished in a more advanced role for the second team.

After netting four goals (despite winning and missing a penalty) in the Green 2s' 6-0 rout of Trinity earlier in the week, Freeman bagged a hat-trick against Magdalen on Saturday. But Freeman is staying humble: "I'm excited that we've found a system that works and that I can bring in some publicity for the Green 2s".

HALL OF SHAME

OUBC launch sinks mid-race

Boats were already racing down the Isis on the 26th of January when high winds and 'tideway conditions' caused a marshal's launch to begin to sink.

All parties managed to return safely to the bank. Nonetheless, the IWL race was called off and the river's flag was changed to red.

We only hope this isn't prophesising the same fate that befell the 1859 and 1978 Cambridge or 1925 and 1951 Oxford crews...

SHOE THE TABS

Women's rugby annihilate Cambridge a combined 110-0

There's not much to say about the Women's Blues and Panthers wins over Cambridge in BUCS last Wednesday that doesn't get covered by the title. 68-0 to the Blues, 42-0 to the Panthers.

This is surely about as embarrassing as it gets for the Tabs. You wonder whether we should be putting out our Women's Blues for both games at the StoneX this year...

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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

Coffee break with Cherwell

CLASSIC SUDOKU

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

by Joe Dunn

Cryptic Crossword by Alessandra Edwards

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

Across:

- 6) Confidence displayed by dog after his tail (7)
- 7) River separates wife's rodent catchers (7)
- 9) Those sort of beliefs (5)
- 10) Neckwear is part of machine bill according to Spooner (3,6)
- 11) Retracted section of post is OP editing payment (7)
- 13) Colour in circle, between bounds (6)
- 15) Company, as it happens, is acquiring elaborate centre created by many (13)
- 19) Hot rowers receive suit for stash (6)

- 20) Apart from the first season, I'm acting (7)
- 23) Cooperates with Portugal and places all over Britain (5,4)
- 24) Party backtracking about a point that's fundamental (5)
- 26) Guilt-ridden grin wiped away otherwise opposed to its advancement (7)
- 27) A similar word sounds wrong, concerning that man (7)

Down:

- 1) Was his opening clean? (4)
- 2) He jokes for the York-

- shireman, and does it in the gents? (6)
- 3) Cheese sliced by Ted, upset with ring boy and soon to be wife (5-2-2)
- 4) At a court corrupted by a tyrant (8)
- 5) Orwell in every extract, are you serious! (4,2,5)
- 6) Firm's head of sales, gossip every other day (6)
- 7) Faces in police photographs, not attractive (4)
- 8) View new "Limiting Carbon Forever" trailer its big in the cinema? (6)
- 12) Take a good look, broadcast news that may be

- biased (10)
- 14) Without 13A for example its futile (9)
- 16) How to politely address a woman or man unknown on boat (9)
- 17) Phone call disturbed when line cut off and lost on place to go for service (6)
- 18) I return half blue; I return again as a sign (6)
- 21) "Piping hot bottom" you put on search engine (6)
- 22) Sugar tot (4)
- 25) Drink and where on might come from? (4)

A Terrible Zoo by Zoë McGuire

1		2			3	4		5
				6				
7								
	8					9		
10								11
12		13						
14					15			

Across:

- 1) Knickers in a twist with pest (7)
- 3) Whoops! Loft one time is messy (7)
- 7) Grows closer to profit with nurse, perhaps (5,4)
- 8) *What the animals in the zoo have done!* (3,4)
- 12) Fuzzy, odd coins found within lost empire (9)
- 14) Creator returned and left - damn! (7)
- 15) Injured, he'd go after jazz vocal performance (7)

Down:

- 1) Channel power into anger for total destruction! (7)
- 2) Queen Beth lost Miss Doolittle (5)
- 4) Tear up at solemn words (1. 1. 1.)
- 5) Tin of raw peas makes for good party food (7)
- 6) *What the animals in the zoo have done!* (7)
- 9) French Friends had first been technophobic, perhaps (5)
- 10) "Yippee!", linguist discovers banana opening method (7)
- 11) One in financial deficit, Miliband argued (7)
- 13) Fountain enclosure (3)

Tone Rows by Julian Xiao

	C	A	B	B	A	G	E		
								D	
B								A	
A				G				D	
D					A				
	F					G			
		E						B	
F			D					E	
A								D	
B									
	B	E	A		D	E	C	A	F

Here are the rules:
Each row and column in the 9x9 grid must contain each letter from A to G exactly once. There will be some blank spaces left over. The letters outside the grid tell you the first letter you would find closest to that side of the grid in that row or column.
There is a unique solution.

Week 1 Underwater Star Battle Answer

			★					
	★							
							★	
★								
				★				
		★						

Solve our weekly mini crosswords on cherwell.org
Follow us on Instagram @cherwelloxford

WEEK 1 ANSWERS:

Cryptic:
Across: 1) Smash and grab, 9) Sensual, 10) Squalid, 11) Arise, 12) Envelope, 14) Sanctioned, 15) Anti, 17) Arch, 19) Inside

joke, 21) Groupies, 23) Theta, 25) Eternal, 26) Tactile, 27) Anthropology
Down: 2) Mansion, 3) Students, 4) Ally, 5) Disinherit, 6) Route, 7) Balloon, 8) Adhesive tape, 9)

Star-spangled, 13) Counsellor, 16) Vertical, 18) Cholera, 20) Opening, 22) Pinot, 24) Stop

Eddies:
Rows: 1) Timesaver, 2) Combat-

ive, 3) Passanger, 4) Lactation, 5) Trainstop, 6) Amusement,
Eddies: 1) Sesame, 2) Commit, 3) Revive, 4) Absent, 5) Pascal, 6) Region, 7) Statin, 8) Trauma, 9) Potent