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Cherwell

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Students brand SU “completely pointless” after election turnout of just 10%, as £150,000 paid to sabbs

Alexandra Hedström Blake, Ceci Catmur and Rebecca Powell report.

Student voter turnout in the Oxford University Student Union elections last week was just 10%, despite numerous pledges by past and present sabbatical officers to “improve SU engagement”. Similar to previous years, this figure amounts to just 2762 students out of a total student body of 26,000 at Oxford University. So what does the SU actually do for the average Oxford student, and why is there such a significant failure to engage with it?

In a series of polls set up by *Cherwell* to gauge SU engagement, 69% of the 122 students who responded felt that the SU’s engagement with the student body was either poor or non-existent. A mere 3% voted that it was good, and 28% that it was passable.

With six sabbatical officers, each paid £25,000 a year, pay costs the SU about

£150,000.

At present, the SU’s primary methods of communication with the student body as a whole are through weekly emails, social media, and four council meetings held each term. However, of the students who engaged with *Cherwell’s* polls, 52% said they immediately delete SU emails. While 45% said they read SU emails occasionally, only 3% of voters said that they read SU news in detail. In addition to this, of 157 voters, 138 claim never to have been to a student council meeting.

One student who participated in the survey told *Cherwell* that they find the SU “completely pointless, as JCRs fulfil all the functions an SU would in a unitary university.” They raise the question: Is a student union necessary in a collegiate university?

Given Oxford’s status as one of the few collegiate universities in the UK, its college JCRs and MCRs fulfil many of the roles that the SU would in other universities.

When asked whether people found the SU important in a collegiate University almost 10% of those polled claimed to

not know what the Student Union was, and were therefore unable to answer the question. 51% voted that they didn’t, and just 15% agreed that the SU was important in a collegiate university.

Cherwell also polled college JCR presidents, receiving responses from the presidents of Balliol, Brasenose, Exeter, Jesus, Keble, Merton, Oriel, St Catz, St John’s and St Peter’s. 60% of the JCR Presidents who responded to the survey felt they could “definitely” do their duties without SU input. The other 40% voted it was ‘likely’ they could.

One JCR president said, “systemically the SU is pretty useless when it comes to fighting colleges, or pushing the central university to control the colleges more (which in my own opinion is why we have so many of the systemic issues that we have in Oxford).”

Meanwhile, another JCR President told *Cherwell*: “I’d love for there to be more SU engagement, there’s potential for it to be a really strong student voice, but right now it’s so detached from JCRs that I don’t

> Continued on page 5



Crufts, move over...
Cherwell's college pet show, p.6

Oxford students raise funds for earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria

Anika Gupta reports.

In response to the ongoing environmental disasters caused by recent earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, Oxford’s student societies have sought to raise funds for aid and greater general awareness.

The ‘Turkey-Syria Earthquake Bake Sale’, spearheaded by the Oxford University Turkish Society and Oxford Syria Society, was an initiative with mass student participation that raised huge donations in order to help assist the relief efforts. Between the 10th and 13th of February (9 am to 5 pm), in the Radcliffe Square, over £9000 was raised by cash and card. Further funds have been raised through QR codes displayed on posters, allowing people to

directly donate to the AHBAP and White Helmets charities.

Individual colleges, too, have taken independent action to support Turkey and Syria. Initiatives such as pantry fundraising by the Balliol JCR hope to be able to make a meaningful impact for those on the ground.

For those at Oxford, issues concerning the wellbeing of affected students has been recognised by the administrative body of the university. The university’s official email of support illustrated external points of contact for help and guidance, as well as offering internal welfare and counselling services.

Mina Yücelen, an member of the Oxford University Turkish Society, told *Cherwell* that she appreciated the email from the university and the support she was getting

from tutors. Nonetheless, she wishes that more diverse, proactive and instant access to mental health professionals would be made available to all those who are adversely affected by the earthquakes.

The devastation of the earthquakes in large parts of Turkey and Syria has continued to be felt in the week following their occurrence.

The first, striking with a magnitude of at least 7.8 on the seismic magnitude scale, followed hours later by another of 7.5, are already being considered as some of the most destructive earthquakes of the modern period. The reported death toll has already far exceeded 35,000 and is expected to continue rising amid international rescue efforts.

Recent UNICEF analysis indicates that

in Syria alone, the earthquake has affected more than 10.9 million people with as many as 5.3 million people displaced and totalling an estimated 23 million people directly affected.

In an official message sent out by the University of Oxford, the university offered their ‘deepest sympathy’ and the provision of support to any students affected by recent events.

WEBSITE – cherwell.org

INSTAGRAM – [@cherwelloxford](https://www.instagram.com/cherwelloxford)

FACEBOOK – [@CherwellOnline](https://www.facebook.com/CherwellOnline)

TWITTER – [@Cherwell_Online](https://twitter.com/Cherwell_Online)

Oxford joins campaign against reopening of “cruel and harmful” Campsfield detention centre

Suzanne Antelme reports.

Following a motion passed by Student Council in its 1st Week meeting, the Oxford SU has joined the Coalition to Keep Campsfield Closed (CKCC). The CKCC is a campaign group calling for the government to scrap plans to reopen an immigration removal centre on the site of the former Campsfield House detention facility in Kidlington, about six miles outside of Oxford. The SU motion, proposed by Hajar Zainuddin and seconded by Juliet van Gyseghem, stipulates that in addition to becoming a named member of the CKCC, the SU will facilitate educational activity for students on the issue and publicise the campaign’s various protests and petitions. The motion also says the SU must push for the campaign’s demands to be added to the agenda of the National Student Union (NUS). Najar Zainuddin, the motion’s proposer, told *Cherwell*: “The attitude from student groups so far has been really positive and determined. As Oxford students, we have enormous collective power to drive change. Together, we need to tell the Government that immigration detention is not the answer until it listens.” Anna-Tina Jashpara, SU VP for Charities

and Community, has been assigned to support the campaign and will attend all of the CKCC meetings. She told *Cherwell* that the SU will launch its formal support for the campaign via social media. They plan to help promote an online petition set up by a previous Campsfield detainee, and to work with the CKCC on an open letter to the government that the campaign wants to disseminate in the coming weeks. A CKCC spokesperson told *Cherwell* that they are “delighted to have the support of the Student Union”, as “Oxford students were part of the original 1993-2018] Campaign to Close Campsfield and we are pleased and grateful that this solidarity is continuing”. This follows an announcement from the Home Office in June that it is planning the development of a new “immigration removal centre” on the site of the old Campsfield centre. Before closing in 2018, the centre had seen a riot and several hunger strikes, one of which involved over 100 detainees. There were at least two incidents where children were accidentally detained at the centre, apparently because assessments of their age had taken too long. The centre was also criticised by an independent monitoring body after it



emerged in an annual report that detainees had arrived without their possessions 150 times throughout 2017. Juliet Van Gyseghem, the motion’s seconder, told *Cherwell*: “As students, we tend to forget about the wider Oxford community that exists outside the university ‘bubble’.” It is essential for us to recognise that privilege comes with responsibility. Any student who claims to care about human rights should be appalled by the threat of reopening Campsfield.” A final inspection of the former Campsfield House in September 2018 found that 41% of detainees felt unsafe, up from 19% in 2014, although the inspection was characterised as positive overall. The Home Office’s decision to close the centre in 2018 overlapped with broader government plans to downsize detention centre provision across the UK following a 2016 report by Stephen Shaw that highlighted the link between detention and “adverse mental health outcomes”, concluding immigrant detention “ought to be reduced”. Layla Moran, Liberal Democrat MP for Abingdon and Oxford West, was campaigning against Campsfield before it closed in 2018 and gave a speech to Parliament in September 2022 in support of the current campaign. She told *Cherwell*: “Immigration detention is costly, harmful to detainees, and is not an effective tool for reducing illegal migration. Instead of re-opening Campsfield House, expanding the detention state, and continuing the inhumane practice of indefinite detention, [the Government] should be using taxpayer money to speed up the processing of asylum claims.” Moran is “delighted to see that

Oxford has joined the CKCC”, as this “demonstrates the strength of feeling across our local community” opposed to this “cruel and wasteful proposal”. She added that “[we] fought hard for 25 years to close Campsfield House, and we are ready to fight to make sure it stays that way”. The Oxford City Council has also issued a statement declaring that it is “unequivocally opposed to the re-opening of Campsfield House”, noting that the centre saw “hunger strikes, self-harm and even suicide before it closed”. According to the Home Office, the new centre planned for Campsfield will combine refurbished and newly built accommodation to provide “safe, secure and fit for purpose accommodation for people in detention”. The plans are part of the Home Office’s “ongoing review of detention capacity” and are still at an early stage. The new centre might accommodate as many as 400 male detainees, higher than the 282 beds it had in 2018, and would open in late 2023 at the earliest. A CKCC spokesperson told *Cherwell* that going forward they hope to “broaden and deepen support for the campaign in JCRs and MCRs”. They added that “[a]ll societies are welcome to join the [CKCC] and we encourage them to do so”. The campaign meets online on the first Tuesday of every month, has a booth at the Turl Street Art Fair on 18th February, and will also be hosting a panel discussion at University College at 5pm on 24th February. The petition to keep Campsfield closed can be signed at change.org/keepcampsfieldclosed.



News Shorts



Danial Hussain wins SU Presidency

Danial Hussain was elected as Student Union President-elect for the 23/24 academic year on a campaign of “an Oxford that works for everyone.”



£6.9 million Covered Market transformation announced

The package to regenerate the Grade-II listed market has been approved by council leaders.



University launches their first ever Green Action Week

From the 20-24 February, there will be nearly 50 events celebrating environmental action.



Oxford-led study finds alarming levels of PFAS compounds in Norwegian Arctic

Studies detects the toxic PFAS, used in consumer products, which threaten downstream ecosystems.

Survey: 92% of students think lecture recordings should be for everyone

Olivia Boyle reports.

In-person lectures were one of the casualties of the Pandemic; since Oxford’s return to the live world, they have not been the same. Complaints of quality control, incomplete lecture series, and missing key parts of teaching have pushed the campaign. But, lecture recordings have always been a point of contention for students especially among disabled students, who have been campaigning on lecture recordings for many years. Currently, Student Support Plans (SSPs) for disabled students theoretically allow them to access any lecture recordings. One student, however, spoke of their undiagnosed condition where an SSP would make a significant improvement to their learning but, like many across the university, they wouldn’t qualify for one. Moreover, the SSP’s largest caveat means that lecturers can always object to recordings. A *Cherwell* poll clarified that 92% of respondents think lectures should be recorded for all students.

On Tuesday, the SU launched a campaign to standardise lecture recording to make sure lectures can be accessed by everyone and in the ways they are needed. Cherwell has been told by the VP Access & Academic Affairs that the campaign is for “a spread of best practice on lecture accessibility and recordings policy across as many university departments as possible.”

The VP-Academic Affairs, Jade Calder, noted that “now that we know that universal lecture accessibility is possible because of the pandemic”. Students at the campaign’s launch also commented on the University of Oxford’s impressive academic creation, but decried the lack

of innovative action on standardisation of lecture recording. One of the launch’s attendees labelled the University’s lack of action “discriminatory” for those who can’t attend due to COVID-19, other illnesses, mental health conditions, and accessibility issues. To not be able to attend lectures can “end the career” of those students who frequently have no choice but to miss lectures or those who have not had access to recordings of them. This is especially problematic when degrees, STEM subjects in particular, rely on lectures to deliver the bulk of their teaching.

The campaign focusses on students but, many would be quick to think of the academic staff and lecturers. Lectures are legally the intellectual property of the academic, so to record them would risk compromising the rights of ground-breaking researchers.

Moreover, in times of mass strike action, there are concerns of lecture recordings being used to break strikes. The consideration of the data protection of students has an important role to play as well. Nevertheless, the SU launch proposed a standardised contract for students to sign to control this risk as well as training for staff to better manage recording technology. At the moment, for instance, the welfare of students and staff together has been impacted by missing parts of lecture series, poorly coordinated sound and image, and limited access to past recordings.

One Computer Science student told *Cherwell* that the department had removed access to its archive of lectures, a key part of the course, without prior warning. A poll carried out by *Cherwell* found that 60% of respondents said their welfare had been impacted by lecture access disparities.

The VP-Academic Affairs told *Cherwell* that a recent academic survey showed that lectures are among the top of student

concerns for academic experience in Oxford. Calder was keen to emphasise the University’s response has been largely cooperative; Oxford wants to see “good practice implemented across departments and effective implementation of their Educational Recordings Policy.”

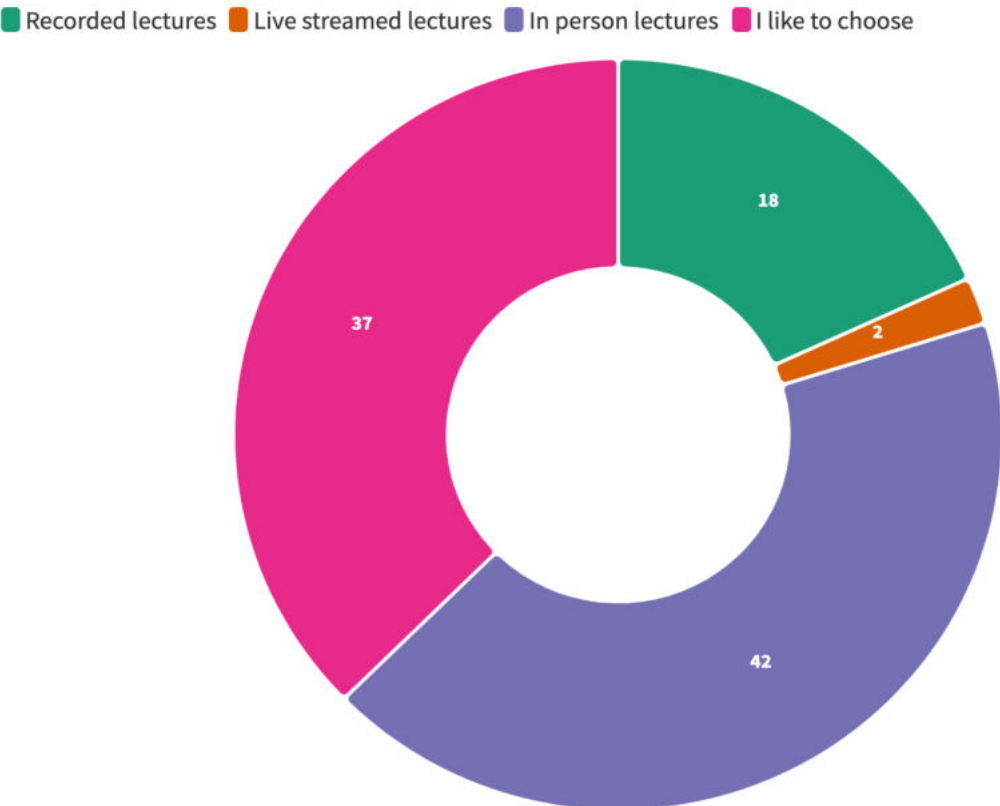
The SU’s campaign is well under way and remains in frequent contact with the relevant bodies to ensure access to lectures is equal for all. Calder told *Cherwell* that the most important thing for students to do is to speak to their tutors about added support for lecture recordings.

While *Cherwell* has found that most students prefer in-person lectures, the

figure is closely followed by those who would like to choose. It is the freedom to take control of how you learn that appeals to most. But, the SU campaign will ensure that those who don’t have a choice will still have appropriate access to a satisfactory level of educational resources.

A university spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “While the University is not aware of significant problems regarding the quality of educational recordings, we do recognise the importance of ensuring they meet a certain standard.”

Do you prefer...



Funding woes: Next year’s maintenance loans worth less

Maggie Wilcox reports.

A new report from the Department of Education estimates that the 2023-24 maintenance loan increase will not be enough to restore students’ purchasing power.

The projected 2.8% increase is well below the level of inflation. In the February 2023 Equality Impact Assessment, the DofE states this will have an overall “negative impact” for undergraduate students, as the proposed loan is effectively less valuable than in previous years. A 13.7% increase in the loan would be required to maintain the value of maintenance loans and grants given in the 2020/21 academic year.

Although the maximum loan is the highest it is has ever been, at just under £10,000 (or £11,374 for students who are “entitled to benefits”), this sum is in real terms worth £1,000 less than the loans of 2020/21. The DofE attributes this decrease in actual value to unforeseen record-high inflation, visible in metrics not used by the government to calculate the annual maintenance loan increase. The projected loan is determined the November before the academic year according to the Retail Price Index (RPI), not the commonly-used

Consumer Purchasing Index (CPI).

Most English undergraduate students receive some level of maintenance funding, and 41% received the maximum loan last academic year. University-specific financial aid and scholarships often supplement these as well. At Oxford, it is estimated that one in four UK undergraduate students receive some form of non-repayable bursary. Individual colleges also have financial assistance schemes for students in difficulty, although these vary.

Oxford “recognises that the rising cost of living is a source of anxiety for many students and [is] continuing our efforts to ensure our financial support addresses this.” The Crankstart scholarship for low-income students, which offers financial support as well as mentorship and career opportunities, received a £500 pound uplift this year. Graduate students also saw their stipends rise along the lines of inflation with a 13% increase.

The DofE concludes that the 2.8% loan increase will adversely affect low-income students in particular and students are likely to experience a “further erosion in purchasing power”

Parliament supports ban on NDAs in cases of assault, harassment or misconduct

Suzanne Antelme reports.

Both houses of Parliament have now agreed to an amendment to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill which will ban the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) by universities and their constituent colleges in cases of assault, harassment or misconduct.

On 7th February the House of Commons passed the amendment after it was proposed in December by the House of Lords. This comes in the wake of a campaign encouraging universities to sign onto a pledge promising not to deploy NDAs in cases involving misconduct. The campaign was jointly launched in January 2022 by Michelle Donelan, at the time Minister for Higher Education, and the group Can’t Buy My Silence. While 80 universities have already signed the pledge, only three Oxford colleges are among them - a point that was mentioned in the Commons debate before the anti-NDA amendment was accepted.

Oxford colleges came under particular pressure to sign the anti-NDA pledge after it was revealed in April 2022 by The Times that Lady Margaret Hall (LMH) had told a student they risked expulsion if they discussed their alleged sexual assault with the media. LMH signed the Can’t Buy My

Silence pledge in May 2022, followed by Keble and Linacre. It Happens Here Oxford, a student-led campaign group opposing sexual violence, played a key role in lobbying the three colleges and continues to call for more colleges to join the pledge.

It Happens Here Oxford told *Cherwell*: “We are overjoyed [by Parliament passing the anti-NDA amendment]. Progress like this is hard-fought and hard-won. This has been the culmination of over a year of hard work by Can’t Buy My Silence, It Happens Here and incredible MPs and student organisations across the nation.

“[We continue] to urge every college to sign Can’t Buy My Silence’s anti-NDA pledge, to show their dedication to supporting students and protecting the rights of survivors. We also encourage every remaining [JCR and MCR] to pass our anti-NDA motion, unifying the voices of students across the university in a powerful act of solidarity.”

While the anti-NDA amendment has now been agreed to by both houses of Parliament, other amendments to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill are still being negotiated, with the bill moving between the two houses in a back-and-forth process known as ‘ping pong’. It is unclear when this will end.

Time for the Polls: date set for NUS membership vote

Jack Twyman reports.

The Oxford University Student Union announced this week that it will hold a referendum on NUS disaffiliation on Monday 27th February.

Polling will open at 8am on Monday 27th February and will close at 6pm on Wednesday 1st March. According to the Oxford SU, there will be at least one Open Meeting where both the proposition and opposition campaigns can be heard and questioned. Two Campaign Leaders will be announced on the Oxford SU website once selected. Anas Dayeh is likely to run the YES campaign in support of NUS affiliation, while Ciaron Tobin, proposer of the motion, and Caleb Ryneveld, NUS delegate elect and former Oxford SU Presidential candidate, will run against each other to decide the leader of the campaign to disaffiliate. The two successful chairs will both be given £50 by the SU to run their respective campaigns.

The results of the binding referendum will be announced at 7 pm on Wednesday 1st March.

This is the second attempt to call a referendum after the first such motion was withdrawn by the proposer Ciaron Tobin, and the seconder Mundher Ba-Shammakh, both elected NUS delegates from Oxford SU.

The first attempt was dropped in the Hilary Term 2023 Week 1 meeting after members debating the proposal reached a consensus that withdrawing the motion would allow for consultation with students likely to be affected. The 3-hour debate in Week 1 brought to the fore the lack of communication between the proposers and Jewish Society (JSoc) representatives.

At the Hilary Term 2023 Week 3 meeting, Ciaron Tobin and Mundher Ba-Shammakh again proposed a motion to hold a referendum and this time it passed, with amendments, 26 votes for, 3 against and 2 abstaining. The motion acknowledged that “the report of the independent investigation led by Rebecca Tuck KC into allegations of antisemitism in the NUS found that it had failed to sufficiently challenge antisemitism and hostility to Jewish students within its organisation.”

Asked whether he thought the new motion had addressed concerns of a lack of communication with JSoc from Week 1, the motion’s seconder Mundher Ba-Shammakh told *Cherwell*: “The motion as it stands is outlining a broad range of important concerns and putting forth a motion to disaffiliate. The subsequent campaigning is where I feel the wider consultation must now take place, the work done by Ciaron and I was to bring the disaffiliation motion to Oxford students and we have achieved that goal. It’s now the work of the campaign leaders to ensure a diverse range of opinions and concerns are addressed in the lead up to the vote to ensure all student voices are heard and voters can make more informed decisions.”

Jojo Sugarman, President of the Oxford Jewish Society, speaking after the referendum’s announcement, told

Cherwell: “Antisemitism within the National Union of Students has been a deep concern to members of Jsoc, with very many feeling unrepresented.”

He said there had been a consultation on the Week 3 motion, which was appreciated.

Discussion at the meeting focused on presenting the referendum “in a way that allows neutrality” and “reiterates the importance of purely stating facts and leaving the judgement to the votes”. One member expressed concern on antisemitism being used as a “driving force for the disaffiliation of the SU to NUS” while another stated that “there are many reasons to leave NUS”. The motion passed in Week 3 uses the neutral phrasing “The SU should disaffiliate with the SU”, removing the word ‘Believes’ after members cited that “it may affect and add unfair bias to the voters of the referendum”.

Anas Dayeh, an Oxford SU NUS delegate, told *Cherwell*: “The SU should be impartial to each side in order to allow the fair campaigning of both sides.”

However, Dayeh himself is emphatic that the SU should remain affiliated with the NUS. He told *Cherwell*: “It campaigns for the issues we care about, connects us with other students who share our values, and provides us with resources, training, support, and opportunities. It has achieved some big wins for students in the last two years alone, such as securing more hardship funds, rent relief, grade fairness for A-level and BTEC students, and ending NDAs in sexual misconduct cases in 54 institutions so far!”

“The NUS is our union, and we can make it better by staying engaged and involved. If we leave the NUS, we will lose our voice, our power, and our impact. It is the best way to ensure that we have a strong, united, and unstoppable student movement that can make a difference for ourselves and students across the UK.”

The motion passed in Week 3 makes clear that “[SU] Members have the right to be properly informed in any referendum by the campaigns as to the advantages and disadvantages of affiliation, and the consequences of disaffiliation”.

The selected campaign heads will have to identify “alternate arrangements, to the extent they exist, for representation of students at a national level; the extent to which it is politically feasible to address the concerns above both within and without the NUS; how resources could be used within the SU after disaffiliation; and the extent to which historical problems in the report continue”.

Ba-Shammakh told *Cherwell* he will not be participating in the campaigning as he is “currently rusticated and working a very demanding full time role”, and feels he could not “give this task the dedication it deserves”.

The motion that passed also noted that “Oxford SU contributes £4,095.60 to NUS Charity and £20,478 to NUS UK in membership fees”. While debating the first motion in Week 1, some members of the council meeting spoke with frustration of limited SU budgets, especially for the Disabilities Campaign and the LGBTQ+ Campaign. However, others expressed concern that disaffiliation would dilute

the SU’s influence on student issues that extend beyond Oxford.

Asked what he would suggest as a new way forward for national representation of the SU, Ba-Shammakh told *Cherwell*: “This is a question that I feel must be asked of all students first and foremost and of the new wonderful team we have just elected to the SU. But on a personal level I feel there needs to be a greater focus paid to issues concerning financing for students, rent reductions on a more organised basis and increasing in lobbying for student support. There’s too much time and effort currently dedicated to national issues concerning social campaigns and general

divisive matters, which while important in their own right, they often aren’t directly related to students which is what the SU ought to be concerned about.”

Joe Bell, Oxford SU Returning Officer, commented on the announcement: “It is my sincere hope that all debate remains respectful at all times, and I look forward to the passionate, sensitive and reasoned discussions which will doubtlessly play out in the next few weeks”.

He noted that “if the student body vote not to remain affiliated with the NUS, Oxford SU’s membership would likely only cease at the end of this calendar year, for contractual reasons.



Oxford food support provider struggles with shortages

Olivia Boyle reports.

Local food poverty has reached new heights with an “unprecedented demand for support” due to severe shortages of fresh food. Now, the OX4 Food Crew, a coalition of nine grassroots organisations that united during the pandemic to tackle food inequality in Oxford, is launching a fundraiser to support bulk food purchases for local support centres after an “explosion of requests” over the last six months.

OX4 Food Crew works by pooling resources to try to manage shortage-hampered food distribution in the area. The postcode area OX4 is home to “four of the 10-20% most deprived wards across the country” so many rely on the support of Oxford Community Action (OCA), Oxford Mutual Aid (OMA) and local food banks. But the charities who use the food parcels to provide for those in need are no longer able to fully maintain elements of their services. One OCA volunteer said, “We are getting fewer and fewer things that we can cook with”, noting that the absence of fruit and vegetables is stark.

The impact of Brexit, the pandemic, and the current cost of living crisis has led to a substantial rise in food inequality in Oxford, with the OX4 Food Crew confirming that “over 30% of children in Rose Hill, Blackbird Leys, and Iffley are living in food poverty”. Furthermore, they say it is now unmanageably costly to

provide bulk parcels of fresh food. Oxford Mutual Aid stated that the “situation is far worse than it ever was at the height of the Covid crisis.” One member of Oxford Community Action has had to reduce fresh food parcel distribution from 320 a week to 220 leaving many without a key source of food.

Cherwell has been told that between August 2022 and December 2022, unique beneficiaries of Oxford food banks increased by 12.3%, the demand for food parcels increased by 24.4% and there was a 38% increase in people turning to OMA for support for the first time. These figures don’t include the growing number of people getting turned away by food support organisations due to the insurmountable demand. A spokesperson for OX4 Food Crew told Cherwell that the Oxford City Council has funded some bulk food purchases but the demand is so great that the Council alone cannot provide sufficient support. The spokesperson emphasised the shift towards mass community action, calling for aid from the University of Oxford. It was said that although OMA receives some aid and surplus food from certain colleges, it is not enough for bulk food distribution and the university-wide action is minimal.

Food distribution organisations are turning to community action to try to combat food shortages. A fundraiser is in full swing to call on residents of Oxford, students and academics included, to do what they can to help tackle the food shortages.

“**Antisemitism within the NUS has been a deep concern to members of Jsoc**”

Continued from front page > think it's representative or useful for most students."

80% of the JCR President respondents said that the SU engagement with their JCR is 'poor'.

One JCR president told *Cherwell*, "The Oxford SU clearly has a massive engagement issue... If all the SU can provide is occasional workshops for JCR Committee members, it's hard to see how this benefits the whole of the Oxford student body, and justifies paying the sabbs wages."

JCR presidents, when asked what support they received from the SU, mentioned rent negotiation training, college comparisons, and the option to access more general policy and procedure advice. Yet some JCR presidents told *Cherwell* that even the rent negotiation workshops were poorly organized. One claimed they were given only 2 hours notice before the workshop took place, characterising this as "negligent organisation". Some colleges missed the workshop. Another JCR President told *Cherwell* the rent negotiation training came "a little late" for them as they had already negotiated with college and come to an agreement just as the help had been advertised.

60% of JCR presidents who responded voted that they did not find SU services and communications efficient. The SU writes on its website that they "work closely with JCRs and MCRs across the

colleges with lobbying support, training, wellbeing products, and more," with eight student-led campaigns "fighting to improve [the] student experience and build communities along the way."

However, when asked how supported they felt by the SU, 98% of the students surveyed by *Cherwell* said they felt unsupported. The reaining 2% felt somewhat supported.

Despite student dissatisfaction with current SU-JCR relations, 70% of the JCR Presidents who responded voted that they would still prefer to 'support initiatives for greater SU engagement' as opposed to the options of disaffiliating the JCR from the SU, or keeping the relationship as is.

Responses among the JCR Presidents about what the SU could do to improve engagement included ideas about improving convenience of the student council; in its current form, it is "too long and feels too ineffective to motivate people to attend."

Further thoughts focused on "making their presence better known with students," with one President saying there needs to be "more outreach and visibility on

what the SU actually is." They suggested hosting an introduction to the SU in freshers' week. However, they added "the JCR communications channel selectively, by picking projects for which engagement is essential. This gives the SU a means of getting to students more efficiently, but only works if it is not overloaded."

One JCR president feels the SU would benefit from having "a more unified goal each year" as, whilst they recognize that the sabbs and SU are working hard, they feel they may be doing "too many things," so "it feels like none of them are truly meaningful."

This "creates an environment where students are unsure of what they even do, which drives engagement down." Another mentions the idea of "more involvement towards common goals that are set out as a whole" to improve SU engagement, and "for them to be more proactive in fighting colleges than the central university."

When asked for comment on how they could improve engagement, the Sabbatical Officers told *Cherwell* they would "encourage any student to come along and see first-hand the work that we as a team are doing." During these student council meetings "student members can come along and ask questions, pass motions and hold sabbatical officers to account."

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SU emails

89%
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98%
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SU

69%

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“
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Braverman meets pushback on plans to limit overseas students

Rufus Hall reports.

The education secretary, Gillian Keegan, is openly resisting the Home Office's plans to restrict the number of international students that attend UK universities.

In an interview with the *Financial Times*, the education secretary described the economic contribution of international students as "hugely valuable". She also said that the UK's university sector is "something that we should be very proud of". She wants to increase the higher education sector's export revenue from £26bn to £35bn through the establishment of further international campuses and partnerships with overseas institutions, clashing with the Home Office's plans to reduce immigration numbers by targeting international students. In a conversation with *The Sun*, Suella Braverman suggested that overseas students were exploiting student visas in order to bring dependants who are "not contributing to growing our economy."

At Oxford, just over a third of students are from overseas. The university has the 13th highest proportion of international students in the Russell Group. Oxford considers international students to be an invaluable part of life at the university. One student told *Cherwell* that the opportunity to be part of a global community "must really broaden our perception of the world and different cultures, and I think that university is

fundamentally a place where that should happen."

Financial Times reported that Braverman and Keegan met this week, and discussion topics included Braverman's proposed reduction of the time period over which an overseas student can stay in the UK after their degree. The current graduate visa allows international students to stay for 2 years, or for 3 years following the completion of a doctoral or equivalent qualification. It was suggested that this could be reduced to 6 months. The ministers also discussed the current possibility for students on "low-value" courses, or those with lower graduate salaries, to bring dependants to the UK.

Three years ago, the government aimed to increase the number of international students enrolled at UK universities to 600,000 by 2021/22. According to the Higher Education Student Statistics for 2021/22, the figure reached was 680,000, which amounts to just under a quarter of all students at UK universities. But, currently, the number of international students is falling. Part of the reason is the rise in tensions between the UK and China, whose student applications at UK universities have fallen for the first time in a decade.

Moreover, the Higher Education sector relies on the higher fees paid by international students to provide a better experience for all students. To many, including Gillian Keegan, the Home Office's proposition is ludicrous both financially and culturally.

Street food with less street litter: vendors react to new plastic ban

Andy Wei reports.

Walking around Gloucester Green market, plastic is everywhere to be found. It's littered across the ground, and nearly all of the twenty or so food vendors visibly distribute plastic of some form. Following a recent decision by the Oxford City Council, however, all that plastic will have to go by April.

After a year-long campaign by Green and Liberal Democrat Councillors, the licensing committee voted to ban street traders from using single-use plastics. The city will rely on monitoring officers, public reporting, and fines to enforce the new rule. At the end of 2022, a public consultation found that 79% of respondents were in favour of the ban.

At The Catchy Greek, a stall at Gloucester Green market, all packaging is made of paper, though plastic forks are available. They told *Cherwell* that they "don't mind" the new policy, as they have almost completely abandoned single-use plastics already, and they usually have wooden cutlery available.

According to Nick from The Java Laksa Co., an Indonesian & Malaysian joint at the market, this is a welcome but difficult change. The stall currently uses containers made of hard plastic, which he says are easier and cheaper to source than quality biodegradable products. Nick told *Cherwell* that supply shocks have caused a reduction in the available options from wholesalers while also increasing the prices of eco-friendly packaging by multiple times, as most of it is shipped from China. The switch would also be extra costly for Java Laksa because paper packaging for offerings such as soup would

need to be thick and high quality. He does not want to be forced to pass on these increased costs to customers.

Nick says that he is "strongly against" the cheap and low quality polystyrene popular with kebab vans and many of his competitors. However, he believes that the hard plastic used by Java Laksa is easy to re-use and recycle, so it shouldn't be considered single-use. Java Laksa has a sign encouraging customers to "please return plastic containers back to us for recycling... or re-use them yourself." Nick told *Cherwell* that he would also appreciate it if the government helped ease the transition by subsidising the cost of biodegradable packaging for street traders.

Hassan from Hassan's kebab van on Turl Street told *Cherwell*, "It's a good idea but it's bad for me." He currently uses orange styrofoam containers; he previously used eco-friendly ones but they were just too expensive. An eco-friendly container costs around 90p, so a hundred containers is equivalent to as much as a night's salary. The extra cost will need to be somehow compensated. Hassan is also wary about the environmental benefits of the switch, as he believes most containers will still end up in the trash anyway rather than be properly composted or recycled.

After the decision, Green Councillor Lois Muddiman said, "We know that single-use plastics have a massive environmental impact - both in their production and their contribution to problems of littering." According to the other Green Councillor, Rosie Rawle, "Independent, small traders are the beating heart of Oxford's economy" and accordingly "have an important role to play in addressing our city's environmental impact."

These pets are the cat’s meow! Cherwell Pet Show 2023

Maggie Wilcox awards the very best college pets

The pets of Oxford colleges do so much for their stressed students. A friendly tail wag, a lively game of fetch between tutes or even an unexpected rodent present at your accommodation door can bring joy or at least a distraction to our days. It’s time the best and the brightest among these loyal animals get the recognition they deserve. So, in the great Oxford tradition of awards and rankings, *Cherwell* has created this college pet show to decide once



Oldest

First up is the oldest. As with colleges, the title of ‘oldest’ is not without controversy. Toby from Trinity, officially the oldest at about 100 years old, comes from a college accused of tortoise fraud and theft. In 2004, Balliol’s tortoise, Rosa Luxemburg, disappeared one day, and rumour has it Trinity is to blame! Not only is Toby the Oldest Pet, he and his partner in crime Plum (a spritely 90 year old tortoise) also claim the title of No1 Reptile Rascals!



Most Vengeful

The Trinity-Balliol controversy is not the sole pet-related college feud. As those who were at Oxford last year will remember, Walter from Exeter and Simpkin IV from Hertford began invading eachothers’ colleges. Prompting Oxfess outrage and a library ban, this event, dubbed ‘the Battle for Radcliffe Square’ has put these two archen-



emies in the (military) history books. So as not to upset either ferocious feline, Cherwell has jointly award-

Most Inspiring

Fortunately, some Oxonian animals inspire emotions other than anger and over zealous college pride. Some are inspiring, full stop. None more so than St Hilda’s cat, Teabag. She turned up at Hilda’s one cold, rainy night, so small and bedraggled that she looked like a used teabag. After the diligent care of several porters, she began to thrive and has grown into a fine college cat. She reminds students and staff that in a loving community they can overcome any difficulty.

Biggest influencer

Other college pets influence the humans surrounding them in different, perhaps more superficial ways. This is the case of our Biggest Influencer, Tortilla. Star of the University insta and boasting 715 followers on his own insta, the Lincoln College tortoise is truly the Kim Kardashian of colleg pets. Follow him @tortilla_la_tortuga!



Worst Name

The key to celebrity is a catchy name. Unfortunately the next pet’s name is neither catchy, minor even accurate to its species. Fox from Corpus is not a quick, red mammal, but instead a slow, green reptile. Although the name is likely an allusion to the famous theological author college founder Robert Fox, the name still leads to some confusion.



Hungriest

Professor Biscuit is rather aptly named, as this rotund cat from St Hughs has been named the Hungriest Pet. Known for eating rats, tuna, Dreamies and a whole host of other treats, Biscuit’s ravenous appetite even prompted the college disciplinary team to send out a warning email to students last Michaelmas.

Uni Mascot

Like his owner, Vice Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey, Geoffrey Biscuit, received a promotion this year. Rising from Merton college pet to the University office, this 3 year-old golden retriever is a young and lively representative of the ancient university. It should be noted that this category was nearly won by an LMH cat named Benny D after “benedictus benedicat”. Not only does his name allude to the Oxford tradition of formal hall graces, but he is also always sporting subfusc!.



Cutest

The cutest pet was voted online by hundreds of Oxford students. Although an honourable mention goes to Mansfield cat Ziggy and his adorable missing teeth, in the end the Johns triplet cats won out. At under a year old, Laud, Baylie and Case are true kittens, with the floof and flair to match.

Best in Show

Finally, the premier award of the show. Although many pets are cute, talented, charismatic and popular, only one can truly be the Best in Show. The only pet to submit a CV (and what a stacked one!) and the winner of a vast majority on our online poll, Aristurtle from Peters stands head and shoulders above the rest, even though she is just a small tortoise. She can jump “really high” for an animal of such short limbs, placed second in the college tortoise race last year as a relative rookie of only thirteen years, has a voracious appetite for lettuce and has had an intimate rendez-vous with Timothée Chalamet.



Wags in the Rag

Spreading the joy of Professor Biscuit and Admiral Flapjack.

Ciara Ruston

All across Oxford, there are college pets playing important roles in student welfare day to day. Whether it is simply providing an escape from the stresses of academic work or representing their college, these pets are vital for their communities.

St Hugh’s College is no exception to this. Four year old Flapjack and Biscuit, tabby and ginger cats respectively, are perhaps some of Oxford’s lesser known furry friends, but they are nonetheless some of its most adorable. The college had originally wanted to get a ginger cat, finding one available in Banbury called “Biscuit”. Upon finding out he would be going to Oxford, he was given the further title of “Professor Biscuit”. The tabby girl, Flapjack, was not initially planned however, and did not have a name before the college was polled for ideas. To match Professor Biscuit, her full title became Admiral Flapjack.

Professor Biscuit, described in three words as “relaxed, bold, chonky”, is known for sleeping all day and loving his food, but is also an expert at sneaking through doors, including kitchen cupboards. Flapjack, described as “independent, affectionate, mischievous”, is shy at first but incredibly loving once she gets

to know you. She’s described as being the boss of the two despite being smaller than Biscuit, and has been known to catch live birds and bring them into the college, though Biscuit is said to be too well fed to go hunting. Full of personality, the two also enjoy a more chilled out nap in the library.

The cats have free roam of the college, staying mostly within the grounds of St Hugh’s but being based within the College Office. Much like my cats at home, they often choose to ignore the many cat flaps placed around the college for them and wait for people to open the doors for them instead. They also roam up to students’ rooms, a great help during a late night essay crisis, where they know they will be pampered.

Like all of Oxford’s college pets, they also play an important welfare role. Many seek out the cats to pet them when feeling stressed, and they are often around the college library to help when work gets too much. College group chats are full of photos of sightings of the cats, and they significantly improve the mental health of the student body simply by being around as a non-judgmental friendly presence. Although, their welfare role is noted to be fulfilled much better than their job in deterring pests.

Not only are Professor Biscuit and Admiral Flapjack some of Oxford’s most adorable college pets in my opinion, they also clearly play an important role in promoting student wellbeing, as all college pets I have covered throughout this column do. Whether it is just to remind you of your pets at home, or to help relax after a long, stressful day of essays or problem sheets, it is always helpful for our mental health to be able to spend time with furry friends whilst at university.

Image Credit: Bethan Wallace.



Sound and vision

Why does science fiction love classical music so much?

Albert Genower

When you think of sci-fi, what images are conjured in your head? Spaceships, aliens, lasers, parallel universes? Whatever you think of – it’s probably not Europe in the 19th century. But why would you? The worlds seem diametrically opposed, and in most ways they are. But tell that to the directors of 9 of the American Film Institute’s (AFI) Top 10 Science Fiction Films, all of which have soundtracks of pre-existing classical music, an original, classical score, or, in the case of *A Clockwork Orange*, classical music on electronic instruments. Only *Blade Runner* has a score that truly differs from this. Why do these directors choose music that seems so unfitting to soundtrack space?

Where better to start, than No. 1 on this American Film Institute list, and,

doubtlessly, No. 1 on the lists of many a film aficionado worldwide - *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It’s noteworthy for its inclusion of pre-existing classical pieces instead of Alex North’s originally composed score, the “temp tracks” that would normally be discarded instead remaining in place. Richard Strauss’ *Also Sprach Zarathustra* is used in the opening and, later, Johann Strauss II’s *Blue Danube* are the most famous examples of this in the film. Music theorists including F. F. Mormanni, Philip Hayward and Tanya Brown have all speculated on this choice, and they fundamentally conclude that the majesty that we associate with Western classical - with a small C - is a majesty comparable to that of intergalactic travel, in a way no other music is.

So why is classical music perceived like this? Martin Keary (better known as Tantacrul) offers a possible explanation in classical music’s image problem, being seen as stuffy, antiquated and “elitist” from the outside, but also “grand”, “important” and “high culture”. These stereotypes are certainly perpetuated from the inside too (the Royal Academy of Music and Royal College of Music both have higher percentages of private school students than Oxbridge, Keary points out). But this comes in spite of the fact that most composers of classical music were far from wealthy, it’s all reified into excellence, prestige and “high culture”.

2001 was the exception to trends in sci-fi music in the late 1960s, with the counterculture movement seeing sci-fi

merge with influences from all manner of genres (look at David Bowie, Sun Ra and early Pink Floyd for examples of this). The music of sci-fi has gone through a number of trends across the decades, for example 1927’s *Metropolis*, the pinnacle of pre-WW2 sci-fi has a score done by an orchestral ensemble. For such a forward-looking film, it’s remarkably conservative, and this continued throughout the 1930s. Despite classical music’s experimentation in the 1930s (look at Erik Satie using typewriters and dynamos in his works, or the early producers of electronic music), sci-fi stayed largely 19th-century, Wagnerian and conservative. The Truman-Eisenhower years saw more experimentation, such as in 1956’s *Forbidden Planet*, a 23-rd century adaptation of *The Tempest* and the first film to have a fully electronic score, composed by husband-wife duo Bebe and Louis Barron. *Forbidden Planet* brought experimental electronic music away from being exclusive to classical composers and into a popular realm.

A brief look into the niche and complex world of musical semiotics takes this deeper. Arnie Cox has a theory he calls the “mimetic hypothesis”, saying that our musical understanding comes from unconscious imitation of observed action; we understand sounds in comparison to sounds we ourselves have made. Even if we can’t play a violin, we all know what physical action is needed to play one, something that is not so clear with the synthesised sounds of

electronic music. Composer Denis Smalley has taken this further, arguing that without, sound can become “cold, difficult, even sterile”. If you agree with their hypotheses, this culturally conditioned understanding of electronic music as non-human, alien music, especially in contrast to the familiar, Western classical music, electronic music is perfect for making a film more alien, and classical music perfect for tethering an otherworldly film to Earth.

This mid-century experimentation, continuing in films like *Destination Moon* and TV shows like *Doctor Who*, was stopped in its tracks in 1977 when *Star Wars* was released. John Williams set out to create music that would put us in touch with “familiar and remembered emotions”, and “all Western experiences”, hence the 19th-century Wagnerian score. This makes total sense, Williams borrows from culturally ubiquitous classical music to create a familiar score, George Lucas said that *Star Wars* was meant to a “simple hero’s journey” and a “fantasy for young people”, and the aforementioned theory of classical music tethering a film to Earth firmly applies here. Of course, there’s financial aspects too, big-budget studios not wanting to take a chance on composers like the Barron’s anymore, but not all science fiction conforms to this, even if big-budget studios and “Greatest Sci-Fi Films” lists are peppered with 19th-century inspired scores, films like *Forbidden Planet* and *Blade Runner* feature creative and original electronic scores.

“When you think of science fiction, what images are conjured up?”

“The worlds of classical music and science fiction seem diametrically opposed”



Image credit: Matt Crockett

“There’s a lot of men out there that should’ve been hugged more by their dads”: In conversation with Maisie Adam

Discussing touring, Twitter, and the state of UK comedy with the British comedian.

Charlotte Perry

If you’d told me a couple of years ago that I’d get the chance to sit down with a comedic hero of mine, I would’ve laughed. Not quite as loudly as I do when watching *Mock the Week* or *Have I Got News for You*, but quite loud nonetheless. Yet, on a sunny Saturday afternoon, I found myself frantically rereading through my notes, considering each of the prepared questions, and anxiously tapping the side of my mug; preparing more for what was about to happen than I do for most of my tutorials. Almost simultaneously,

“**Writing the material? I’m grand. But trying to sum up the show in one title, in a way that sounds enticing but not wanky, but not so enigmatic that nobody knows what it is; that’s quite stressful.**”

I hear a happy, lively greeting - “Hello!” - inflected with a recognisable Yorkshire twang that puts me at ease. I’m used to seeing the face before me today on televisions and billboards, but never would I have thought that I’d get to talk to her in person. Well, as in-person as you can get on Zoom.

The first stop of our interview seems an almost inevitable starting place; that of her current tour, *Buzzed*. Initially starting in August 2022, the tour enjoyed such levels of sold-out success that a second leg of the tour has been added. I’m curious as to how

she came up with such a name, was it an easy endeavour? “Writing the material? I’m grand. But trying to sum up the show in one title, in a way that sounds enticing but not wanky, but not so enigmatic that nobody knows what it is; that’s quite stressful. It’s the hardest part of any show sometimes.

“I guess a little bit of me went for the name because of the haircut I’ve been rocking for two, almost three years. Another aspect, I don’t know if it’s a Northern thing, is that I always say that I’m buzzing—or buzzed—when I talk about being excited, and off the back of the pandemic I just was desperate to get back on tour and get back doing live stand up that I am buzzing to be back.

“I kind of craved looking ahead at that point in lockdown. I think all of us were sick of the situation, of talking about Covid. I know I, for one, was.” I’m smiling along at this stage, nodding politely, trying to not make it blatantly obvious I was frantically scribbling through line-upon-line of pandemic-based questions I’d prepared. As a comedian who’s spent almost half of her career battling against

the curtailing of comedy by successive national lockdowns, I could understand why she might feel ambivalent towards the topic.

So, what sort of stand-up routine does one create on the back of what was, for many, some of the loneliest, most isolating times in recent memory? “I ended up writing what I thought would be a very uplifting show, very positive, very optimistic, and the whole process has been really fun. I went and did Edinburgh with it, then went on tour straight away through September and October. It was originally just 33 dates, but it went so well and so many were sold-out that we’re back for another 30! We’re doing round two!”

One of the most special elements of the show is the first act of Maisie’s performance. Alongside performing a traditional stand-up routine, Maisie tells me how she goes to great lengths to personalise the show for the place she’s performing in. “Oxford is somewhere that I think I’ve only ever gigged in perhaps two, three times since starting comedy. I’ve never played at the Old Fire Station before.

With my first tour, I see it as an opportunity to get to know all these places, but also get to know my audience. Most of my comedy career so far has been doing tour support for other comedians or being in a line-up show’ so not really being the main reason why someone’s bought a ticket. This is the first time where I’m doing a tour where everybody in the audience has bought a ticket because it’s me, so I think the least you can do is make their night unique. I come out for about 20, 30 minutes and basically use the time to get to know the crowd that night. It’s really nice, because it brings everyone in the room together, and that feeling can’t be replicated anywhere else in quite the same way.

“I think the show itself, which happens after the interval, also goes much better when you and the audience have had that very unique interaction, it can’t happen anywhere else. Each place has been different too; one evening can feel more like a parish meeting, almost something out of the Vicar of Dibley, and then the next night it’s raucous, lairy, and fast-paced.”

Does she have any favourite memories or moments from backstage in her tour so far? “I think, when people think about what it’s like backstage at a comedy gig, they think that it must be quite rock and roll. I’m actually on my own for a lot of it. A lot of it is turning up, soundchecking, sitting around, ironing your outfit, maybe having a cup of tea and watching Pointless, before it’s time to head out on stage.

“My fiancé came to a few of the dates towards the end of the first leg of the tour, and he thought it was lovely and a great environment but overall he was surprised at what it was like.”

More sausage rolls than rock and roll, if you will.

There is one moment that stands out to Maisie, however, and that’s a rather comical, local story told by an audience member; “It was when we were in Chesterfield and I asked the audience to tell me about their town... they have a famous church, and the couldnt wait to tell me. Apparently it goes back to the time a devil sat on the Spire, and that’s why it’s crooked. Now, they’re waiting for a virgin to sit on it and that will make it straight again. I thought ‘this is the weirdest town I’ve ever been in’, but I think that it sums up UK culture quite well.”

Changing track slightly, I ask if she has any favourite jokes from her set. “There’s definitely routines that I look forward to getting to, because I know that they’re going to get a good reaction. I tend to vary my routine so that they ebb and flow if you like, as I’ve watched stand-up that’s had the same energy joke after joke and it’s really hard to keep your attention all the way through. There is a story about me and my fiancé getting engaged that I always look forward to telling because it’s nice and steady, but builds up really well. It’s one of those jokes where you can

do it 20 minutes into a routine, and then have a callback to it 25 minutes later, and people really enjoy it. Without giving too much away, I really do love the ending of my show though. It’s really, really, fun. I love it!

“It’s important to remember that not every audience will react to jokes the same way though; every night is different, and the momentum of the audience is different. Some audiences will go for one bit, and others will go for a different but; it’s all about pacing myself really.”

Selling out almost every date in both the original tour and the extended dates isn’t something that happens overnight. Initially starting out at the Ilkley Fringe in 2016, Adam found success in So You Think You’re Funny at the Edinburgh Fringe, before returning with a solo show, Vague, in 2018. “We started this conversation talking about how you never know where things are going to go, and I think the same can be said now. Not for a second did I plan any of this; I didn’t think at the time that anything could happen from it. I don’t think in comedy, or anything, that you have the foresight to tell the direction things will go in. “I just thought it would be nice to perform again; I still think that now. There isn’t a finish line in my head. I’m trying to avoid a cliché metaphor here, but I would say it’s like driving a car down a motorway; I’m not thinking about how I’m going to pull into the driveway when I get there, I’m thinking about when I can switch lanes right now. I’m only focussing on what’s just ahead of me. I quite like it that way because it means you’re surprised by your own achievements and own success; you can’t also plan too far ahead either, the industry is changing that quickly.

Despite a pandemic, Maisie’s career has skyrocketed, her first solo tour coming fresh from appearances on big-name shows such as Live At The Apollo, Mock the Week, The Last Leg, and A League of Their Own. One particular show on the list stands out to me; that of Mock the Week. I’m of an age where I can’t remember the show beginning, but I’m old enough to remember the times when comedians such as Frankie Boyle, Russell Howard, and Andy Parsons were comedic staples. It seems very much that Maisie shared such fond memories, but understands why it came to an end; “I had mixed emotions about

it ending. It’s this massive show that has been a stalwart of comedy for a long time now, and it was one of the shows I used to watch as a kid. It was a dream to get booked on that, and a dream to become a staple of the last few series. But you’ve got to keep changing, we’ve got to keep fresh, and that stands for TV as much as it does with comedians and their material. I just hope that what replaces it is something that also platforms stand-up in the same way; that was what it did so well, platforming new stand-up, and that’s what I think TV should focus on doing when it makes comedy.”

It struck me, even as a young child, how male-dominated the comedic sphere was; at best, they would have two women per series in the earlier shows. Angela Barnes summed up the situation well, when in the last episode ever recorded, she pays tribute to “all the female comics that came before me on this show... thank you, both of you.” Whilst this is undoubtedly comedic hyperbole, it’s nonetheless a valid point: Maisie’s entry into the world of comedy is coming at a critical moment of change in the industry, but Britain’s best-loved shows are still consistently populated by a cast of white men.

“When I think about when I used to watch it as a kid, it was all blokes and not a variety of blokes; and not a variety in terms of the acts. It would just be six middle-aged blokes coming from a very similar angle on things. Thankfully, I feel like by the time I started making appearances on it they had made a conscious decision to feature more women. I still don’t think perhaps enough; it had at least changed in a way that if I’d have been on 10 years earlier, it would have been me or Angela on our lineup. I came at a time where it could have been me and Angela, but I still think there should have been times where it was me and Angela and - heaven forbid! - a third woman. Sometimes I think it let itself down and other times it listened and got better. There’s certainly lots of TV shows that weren’t doing that and still aren’t. So it can be tricky. I feel lucky that I’m at a time where if they’re not doing that it gets called out, which it should. It’s a different age.”

There is one element of being a woman in

the public eye that doesn’t seem to change, however. Although getting many positive responses about her shows and stand-up—with *The Evening Standard* calling her performances “wonderfully witty”—being a woman in the world of comedy does have its pitfalls. “Facebook, I never really read the comments - why go looking for it? - Instagram is nice as you can delete comments and limit things in DMs, but Twitter is the one that can feel like an absolute minefield. It’s not really so much after live shows as only fans come to the shows, but with pre-recorded telly shows you’ll be scrolling through Twitter and suddenly realise that something you recorded a while back is on TV. 99% of people will be lovely, but then there will always be that 1% that will stick in your head. It’s hard, and it’s something that I’m still trying to get used to.

“It’s mad, and it’s so easier said than done. I do talk to my mum or my fiancé about them, but I try not to let them get to me. They are just jealous or unhappy, and I know that when I read through things; but it still doesn’t take away from the fact that someone said a really horrible thing about you on a public platform. I think that wherever you are, however well-known you are, that’s always going to stick.

“I do think being a woman means you get more flack, and I don’t want to say it makes it easier to push it off, but you can’t help but think that they’re just saying this because I’m a woman. You’d say it if I was a female politician, or a female expert being interviewed, or if I was a female sportsperson. It’s nothing to do with what I’m doing; it’s just sexism. It’s not personal to me, it’s just personal to what I am as opposed to who I am or what I’m doing. Sometimes when I get messages from these people, you’ll go on their Twitter and see that they’ve trolled 99 other people that day. Then you realise, it’s not me. It’s just a person who is deeply unhappy and gets a kick out of going for other people.

“There’s a lot of men out there that should’ve been hugged more by their dads, that’s what I’ll say.”

Joking aside, I wholeheartedly agree; albeit sadly. I would love to sit and ponder the complexity of the world in which we live in, but the time on Zoom is running against us. After we’ve recovered from laughing, I only have time for one more question. I ask if she could describe her show in three words; something she did with a smile; “Uplifting, energetic, a hoot, I think.”

I sat there, nodding and smiling. It appears that her summary of the show played in perfectly to how I would describe my experience interviewing her.

For more information about Maisie’s upcoming tour dates, and to book tickets, please go to www.maisieadam.com.

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When people think about what it’s like backstage at a comedy gig, they think that it must be quite rock and roll... [but a lot of it is] having a cup of tea and watching Pointless before it’s time to head out on stage

“
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Hanging in there: The “Myrkl” pill that might change the way Oxford drinks

Cherwell’s editors trial miracle hangover pills so you don’t have to!

Phin Hubbard

Hangover anecdotes tend to interest their teller more than their audience. So, I’ll let you read some triumphant exceptions to the rule written by P. G. Wodehouse and Tom Wolfe while I go get a Coca Cola and wait for my fingers to stop jittering all over the keys.

This comes from *The Mating Season* and is brilliant for Wodehouse’s unwillingness to divulge exactly what he means when he identifies his six types of hangover: “the Broken Compass, the Sewing Machine, the Comet, the Atomic, the Cement Mixer and the Gremlin Boogie”. I can’t tell you what “the Sewing Machine” explicitly refers to, but I understood it immediately as the way I felt on New Year’s Day.

And here’s Tom Wolfe’s washed-out journalist Peter Fallow in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* waking up after a big one: “The telephone blasted Peter Fallow awake inside an egg with the shell peeled away and only the membranous sac holding intact. Ah!

The membranous sac was his head, and the right side of his head was on the pillow, and the yolk was as heavy as mercury, and it rolled like mercury, and it was pressing down on his right temple... If he tried to get up to answer the telephone, the yolk, the mercury, the poisoned mass, would shift

and roll and rupture the sac, and his brains would fall out”. Substitute the telephone for an 8:30 alarm and Wolfe has dissected a good proportion of our Friday mornings with yucky accuracy.

I have never discussed hangxiety, occult pick-me-ups and hungover horror-stories more often than since I got to Oxford. Luminous signature cocktails and cheap college wine might be to blame but every morning this town is suffering. The tell-tale sunglasses on overcast days, that odd rum-pickled-garlic-pork odour you secrete and the shaky handshakes with wild-eyed panic upon introductions in the AM say more than

your stuttering description of the night does.

So, I thought it worth trialling Myrkl, a Swedish “hangover pill” at Cherwell’s expense. It is classed as a supplement and not a medicated product and so cannot (obeying MHRA regulations) explicitly describe itself as a hangover stopper. Their suggestive ads playing on a hammy stereotyping of the Swedish: nonsensically

umlauting consonants and authenticating wobbly science with recourse to a perception that the Scandinavians are in some way just more sensible than the British. It launched in the UK and Ireland in the summer of 2022 and differentiates itself from its competition: British brand

Upswing which launched a year earlier and the American start-up No Days Wasted. But its USP is its patented bacterial cocktail, AB001™. It was apparently formulated thirty years ago when the owner of Myrkl’s parent company, De Faire Medical, Johan De Faire observed that pigs which ate bacteria-inoculated rice bran (called koji in hipster cookbooks) were rarely sick and so he isolated the strains to observe their effects on metabolic and digestive processes in non-human mammals. De Faire claims that AB001™ breaks down alcohol into water and carbon dioxide in your small intestine before it can reach your liver, where typically alcohol is broken down into acetaldehyde and acetic acid: the chemical often held responsible for the full-body, brain-eating festival of pain that is a hangover.

The two clinical trials “proving” AB001™’s ability to break booze down were funded by De Faire themselves and their authority has been slated by medical journals like the *New Atlas* who wrote: “if you take Myrkl every day for a week, without drinking, and then have two to three standard drinks” worth of strong alcohol, you might only feel the effect of one to two standard drinks, and the effect may not scale up if you drink more

than that”. Flying in the face of Myrkl’s suggestive advertising which hints that the physical and mental debt for a week of big Christmas parties can be written off by popping two little cream pills, I was not hopeful that Myrkl was about to remedy the particularly virulent strains of wine flu undergraduates infect themselves with by freaky speedy pint chopping and shot shooting.

My section editor sourced me the drugs and at this point I relinquished any real claim to a scientifically unimpeachable trialling of Myrkl in the wild, asking only that my guinea pigs drink as they normally would when they want to get trollied and write a report. Here is what the

first guinea pig (GP1) pinged back verbatim, “Magdalen” and all.

I took the pills about two hours before I started drinking. I had volunteered quite willingly, as I would be doing a college bar crawl that night. A pint in Univ and Pembroke was all we had managed by about 9 PM and it wasn’t looking good as most of the bars were closed. This was until we infiltrated the Magdalen “Wild West” bop.

“

The two clinical trials “proving” AB001™’s ability to break booze down were funded by De Faire themselves

“

I have matched every January raindrop with a lager-y sud

4 pints in quick succession meant that I was well on the way. Indeed I quickly succumbed to the alcohol as DJ Dipper’s tunes thundered around the medieval room. At one point or another we continued our Grand Tour and ended up at the enormous haven of the St Catz bar. Having scanned the beer available, I chose a pint of Corona and proceeded to play the worst drunk Pool I have ever played in my life. It was truly embarrassing. We stumbled through the city, ending up at Balliol. From the outside, it just didn’t seem seem worth it and I can’t actually remember

why we didn’t go in, but a second later I had a kebab wrap from Hassan’s in my hand. At this point we must have gone back to college, because we continued by doing a centurion in my friend’s room. About an hour later, I was apparently asleep on my friend’s sofa, though confusingly I woke up in my own room. At some point during the night I must have completed the final leg of this Odyssey and somehow made it back to my own room. Needless to say, I remember none of it. I woke up in a terrible state. I was disorientated, dizzy and struggled even to speak when greeted with a visitation from my friends at about 11 AM.

About an hour later, an editor messaged me as to the results of this experiment. All I could manage was “I don’t have a headache but I’m definitely still drunk”. Absolutely nothing helped, and for the rest of the day I was both exhausted and violently ill. I think I probably far exceeded the amount of alcohol the this pill is designed to combat, and so in my experience it simply didn’t work.

By the time that account came in I had rid myself of any hope for an all-caps declaration of their Myrkl-ous hangover deletion in the wake of a big, massive bender. I had gone out the same night, popped Myrkl’s and drank with hubris. At 11AM next day I was also still drunk but unwilling to recognize the fact and so had gone around knocking on people’s doors to preach the good news that I was feeling Myrkl-ously chipper. By 2PM I was in the familiar mental and physical wasteland, so poisoned it was as if someone had hooked me up to dialysis in the night and replaced all my blood with bin water and battery acid.

But then came what the second guinea pig said.

Having decided at the very last minute to indulge myself in a Bridge Thursday, I popped two hangover pills just minutes before I started drinking at about 9pm. With the aim of getting hammered as quickly as possible—the only way to avoid a violent case of the ick within seconds of entering Bridge—this was followed by a quick succession of three double (maybe triple) gin mixers. Potentially it was a placebo effect, or maybe it was a result of my unintentionally dry January, but I felt drunk much faster than usual. By 10:30 I was skipping down Jowett Walk in the direction of the most sacred pre-Bridge venue: Four Candles. I ordered an unimaginative double vodka lemonade and set to work having many conversations that invariably merged together in my memory, and half of which seemed to occur in a single toilet cubicle. At the point when time had begun to lose any significance and the Spoons bouncers were herding students downstairs, someone made

the brave decision to lead a campaign to the Bridge Spirit entrance. The queue was much too short for it to have been later than 12pm when we stepped inside, but true to form, I was wandering back down Broad Street in search of drunk munch at the unimpressive hour of 1:45. After a post-party, pre-parting DMC with my mates, it was lights out at 2:30. Whilst this was an admittedly tame night, I would still expect to get out of bed in the morning and feel the room swirl around me. When I leapt out of bed to see not a single black spot in my vision, I realised that these

hangover pills had the potential to be a game-changer (disclaimer: this might have also been the result of a decent night’s sleep, since I woke up at 10am). In fact, I genuinely felt like I hadn’t drunk anything at all the night before. Pros: they were so good that I was able to have morning sex. Cons: this turned into a net negative when I forgot I had an 11am class and staggered in red-faced a whole 45 minutes late.

Looking past the indulgent outro (you proud sex-haver you!), the common amnesiac journey from club to kebab in both guinea pig accounts points to a similar if not equivalent level of inebriation. This makes their testimony of rabbit-like chipperness incredibly interesting but some details in the story perhaps tarnish its trustworthiness. Importantly, their narrative ends at 11:45am, just as GP1 and I began slipping into the icky abyss in our trials and where scientifically a hangover technically should be said to begin (when blood alcohol shrinks back down to zero again). Secondly, an ungenerous arbiter of fun might accuse an eight-shot evening replete with a responsibly timed Hasan’s and sensible afters behaviour like talking about one’s feelings as a B+ drinking effort. Compare it with GP1’s impromptu centurion on return to college and successful descent into an alcoholic oblivion where sofas resemble beds and then disturbingly become beds on contact with sunlight. It was also contradicted again by GP3’s glib precise of their experience.

It is slightly hard to judge the true effects of the hangover pills as I did not follow the packet instructions exactly when I took them. I only took the pill 5 minutes before my first drink despite the instructions recommending 2 hours. Throughout the night I had around 7/8 shots so did not drink loads. The next morning I didn’t feel hungover as such, but extreme tiredness made this slightly hard to judge. This possibly wasn’t the best test of the pills but based on this I would say they did reduce the effect of the hangover the next day. Unfortunately I had not drunk really heavily though, so am not sure what their limit is. And they certainly do nothing for exhaustion levels!

Though their decision to “not drink loads” was essentially unhelpful, GP3’s account does back up the discrediting of GP2 because they knew that eight shots isn’t really trying and says as much. One salient glob of information GP3 offers the study is that the B12 and Vitamin C (the same stuff in a plain old Berocca that can hold back

a full-blown “Gremlin Boogie”) isn’t very concentrated or long-diffusing in Myrkl so that they didn’t even feel pepped from a baseline sobriety. But GP3 illuminates a key dimension of Myrkl with that choice officialese: “exhaustion levels”. I can imagine consultants writing it in big blue sharpie on a flipchart at the Myrkl office’s weekly brainstorming board meeting. Its target market is thirty-to-forty-year-old corporate hacks who must show face at work drinks three times a week and prove to colleagues in conventional fashion that they aren’t at all conventional and buttoned-up.

Although no guinea pig reported this, I had shared an experience that Nick Connellan’s reported on Myrkl when conducting a similar bit of brilliant gonzo journalism for Australian culture mag Broadsheet :

Feeling a bit impervious,” I wrote in a group chat soon after [taking the pills]. After 3.7 drinks I wasn’t even tipsy. While I never had any doubts Myrkl would do what it claimed, feeling it de-alcoholising each drink was disconcerting, then remarkable. My precise tolerance to alcohol, my body’s exact response to it—these things are as familiar to me as my own face. Myrkl is like looking in the mirror and seeing a different you.

Imagine feeling what Conellan describes but you’re in Merton’s college bar. Imagine alcohol suddenly doesn’t work and you’re trapped where fun goes to die. If I had been anywhere else, I might not have remembered my uncanny new alcohol tolerance. I had lifted the three pints of Heineken to my lips, glugged it down the oesophagus and burped proportionately. Why was I then sitting there sober as a judge in the most injudicious space for the teetotal in Oxford. From left and right came “I mean, mate, Posh Nosh really puts Hasan’s to shame to be fair” level chat. Situationally traumatizing in Merton’s dungeon-like bar where the jukebox only plays *Come on Eileen*, maybe Myrkl’s buffering effect has its uses for an enterprising, reptilian undergraduate like myself. They could help when we need to cosplay corporate hacks ourselves so to speak.

For example, it could keep your tongue sharp whilst you are seen to do the done thing at a society social or another thinly veiled networking event and drink the drinks. Perhaps, though, this potential style of popping myrkl’s is a little farfetched. Especially when a box of fifteen “doses” set *Cherwell* back £30.00 whilst having the spine to withstand drink-pressure costs you nothing. Lots of people are teetotal, lots of people drink low-or-no alcohol drinks and who am I kidding when I valorise a sharpened tongue? When we drink, we drink to loosen our language and soften our protective shells, opening us up to the vulnerability of real interpersonal connection.

Moreover, myrkl is just one snake oil in the modern food and drink industry’s arsenal of spurious products promoting “wellness” whatever that is to commodify non-commercial decisions. For example, if you didn’t drink alcohol you tended to drink water—the IWSR reported that “no-alcohol beer [is] projected to drive growth at more than +11% CAGR over the study’s 2021-2025 forecast period”. Granted I

use terms like “snake oil” and “spurious”, I’m not cantankerous enough at my big age of 20 to lament the dwindling of a destructive binge-drinking culture the “BIG JOHN BOSHPIRATION” which my algorithm spewed up this morning is the hilarious by-product of. I don’t think the allure of Bella Hadid’s “karmic collision” aka multi-million dollar drink brand deal with Kin Euphorics which promises to get you a little bit high legally with a mocktail of “adaptogens”, “nootropics” and “spirit-centering botanics”. I think the pandemic catalysed a profound change in the way that drinkers have been drinking drink. Without its pub, its landlord, its branded glass or its fellow drinks to clink against, a pint of beer no longer held any romance in all its 568.261 millilitres of sloshing suds. What had lubricated the social machinery of the Big Night Out, infecting legs with the sense that they can do anything (the splits, clearing four-foot fences in one hop, skanking etc.), was reduced to a chemical buffer against feeling too much reality for one bored, lonely evening which resembled the one before it and had no prospect of being different from the next. The decision to reach for a drink could no longer be justified with any appeal to the appropriateness of a scenario, instead the gesture had been simplified into signifying only that we wanted a numbing, dopamine-boosting chemical.

Around 150, 000 British adults officially participated in Dry January this winter according to Alcohol Change UK, a figure swollen from the 100, 000 pre-pandemic. Yet if you drink at Oxford, I doubt you could count yourself among that number. But I’m not browbeating from up on my pious little horse, I had no intention of keeping off the sauce for any longer than 48 hours at a time and I have not. I have matched every January raindrop with a lager-y sud because it has been miserable.

Plus, story-time! I pretended cocktail connoisseurship when this truth brushed a little too close to home and I could then see all its ugly bits, descending to what my cousins in County Down would term “pure chancer talk” where I could seriously convince myself that drinking five different Bloody Marys in an evening wasn’t about drinking ten shots of Russian Standard but to decide which infused vodka tasted best: jalapeno or horseradish. It’s horseradish, but did

I actually have to get slaughtered to know? I believe alcohol’s mythology was ruptured for so many in the UK because of the elucidating but unwelcome simplification of our relationship with it the pandemic enforced.

But that’s my belief, *Cherwell* offers you the verdict that Myrkl is a load of bollocks and totally unequipped to assist the standard student drinking lifestyle with a sliver more objective authority. Upswing, Myrkl’s competition I mentioned earlier, explicitly targets students with infantilizing pastel colour-schemes and dude language promising relief with the same lack of any scientific basis for its claims. Its ingredients read just the same as Myrkl’s and so until Cherwell proxies me drugs again, I’d echo Reagan rhetoric and counsel against entrusting our happiness to big pills. Stick to the powders! They work! Carpe diem!

“
Cherwell offers you the verdict that Myrkl is a load of bollocks and totally unequipped to assist the standard student drinking lifestyle

CHERBADLY

Everyone in Oxford is having sex except for you

After the release of the annual Cherwell sex survey a few weeks ago it appears that every single person affiliated with the University of Oxford is having great, satisfying sex all the time except for you. That's right you, the reader.

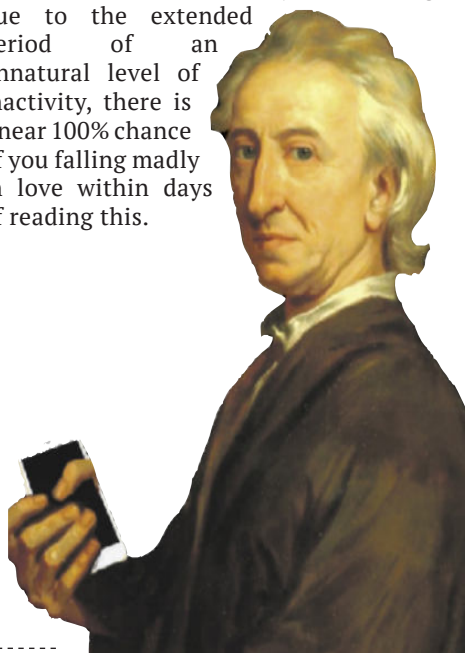
St. Peter's folks came out on top of the rankings with an average of 13.5 sexual partners, a statistic which probably made you feel pretty bad considering you aren't having any sex at all. Sorry to hear that, by the way.

After the methodical review of the sexual behavior of Oxford students, it appears every single other person has a great relationship with their bodies and their desires, and are able to pursue and receive physical intimacy on command.

Except for exactly one individual, a statistical anomaly really, you the reader.

Yes it seems everybody else is not only having sex but is really really good at it. I mean absolute knock outs. Luckily the survey could not accurately assess your sexual skill level due to a lack of data.

Do not be concerned, however, your anomalous level of loneliness is helping the sex researchers here at the Cherwell to learn about variations in human sexual behavior. Also, scientifically speaking, due to the extended period of an unnatural level of inactivity, there is a near 100% chance of you falling madly in love within days of reading this.



John Evelyn

As an outbreak of gonorrhoea cases are reported across the university, an infection of a different kind has been reported at the Union, with Legohead an increasingly prevalent presence needing restraining at speaker events (what is it with weird men only ever wearing one type of jacket?) Separately, with Valentine's Day just behind us, it is surely only a matter of time before scarf-wearing becomes a trend, and not just the distinctive mark of our most recent ex-seccie.

Last week, the Belt and Road initiative reached the chamber, with the Indian Representative temporarily disabled and her seat of power replaced by China's nobility. A battle of the balls followed after the debate, with both the chair (#verb) and Mr Gregg being certified ball lovers. The opposition, desperate to prevent his own electoral castration, demanded a poll. However, the Illiterate appears also to be Innumerate, after #verb x exero (who are exactly as neeky as they sound) deemed his requisition was invalid because he cannot count to 150. Such wonderful "signature" skills will serve him well at the bar.

Someone less sure of his intent to serve is the Gym Bro (not finance bro, as has been repeatedly pointed out by the Pedantic Economist) who reportedly told members of staff that he was no longer running. Why they would be remotely interested in this information, JE has no idea. Apparently this extends to running

his own socials too, with the Master Debater covering the wine & cheese event after he made himself as scarce as the members at any event involving a YouTuber (or singers with one hit from 10 years ago). The man really does fail upwards. Indeed, the Master Debater has developed a far stronger work ethic as of late - given she was open to attending an Emergency Meeting of Finance Committee on Valentine's Day. She certainly shows long term thinking in the electoral sense, recently being notably softer to the first elected seccie in encouraging an independent run rather than aiming to flip her. It is almost as if she wishes to slate her as an officer next term (pending election, naturally)...

Back to finance, one shudders to think how much renting out Freud must have cost Regretting Flipping. Who knew he had so many friends? It couldn't possibly be his entire hack list. No self-respecting candidate would publish their target electorate so publicly...oh, wait. As for the Scouse Shark, it has been noted by several that he has perhaps a little too much self-respect. Maybe he is keeping all the pride that (technically) ought to be awkwardly hanging out of the Gladstone window this month. He's certainly not hoarding things of substance, like seccies. Reportedly, his entire slate has managed to muster 2 thus far. That's less seccies than half of committee's body counts. For shame. Go to Bridge more often.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

THE OXFORD STUDENT PAPER SINCE 1920

Cherwell

CW: THE PLEASURE ISSUE
Victorian vibrators, drinking societies, Eddie Jordan and Jamie Oliver. **PLUS: FREE FRESHERS' GUIDE INSIDE**

Girls just wanna have fun...

VICTORIA CAULFIELD & GEORGINA TURNER seek sensual pleasure in Greece

Clutching our factor 30 in true Brit style and looking for a change of scenery from the dreaming spires, we set off this summer to the land of sensual pleasures - Greece. Later, falling off the plane at a time when even Hussein's is closed, collapsing under the weight of our rucksacks, and with a bus door slamming in our face, we were wondering when the holiday was going to begin.

First stop was the medieval island of Rhodes - better known for its 18-30's resort of Faliraki - where sex is as readily available as Retsina. After a year in the Oxford desert we couldn't resist a stop. Sadly, fate became our contraceptive. Several hours later we woke up, blurry eyed having slept through the neon lights and the cries of Nelly's, "its getting hot in here, so take off all of your clothes".

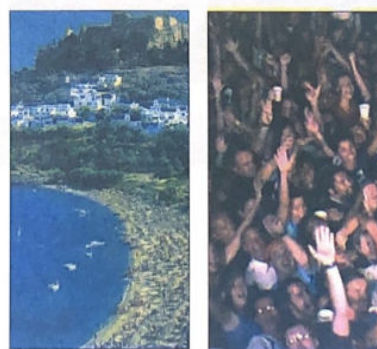
Lindos appeared to be our new destination. A rather more cultural one than had been intended but at least the rape alarm could be tucked away in the handbag. Tor, horrified at the thought of another "monument day", decided it was an appropriate time to email the parents and impress them with the unexpected culture, rather than the usual suntan news. Yet before we knew it we are sitting in the 'Luna Bar' with cocktails being thrown our way by a big motorbike rider/cocktail bar tender called George.

The decision is made and publicly broadcasted: George is the new guy in our lives. The size of a sumo wrestler, clad in a black vest, with tattooed muscled arms rippling, he is a surprising softie at heart, with a soft southern Texan drawl. As a local of Lindos for eight months of the year, he gives us a useful insight. Not only a local information point but George also offers free alcohol and provides us with private tuition in cocktail education. Achieving the feats of getting two past salmonella sufferers to drink a raw egg concoction.

As the tax receipts pile up under the ash tray after numerous cocktails and shots are consumed, the enormous George doubling before our eyes, we make our broadcast. "George is the best cock...tail maker in the world, got something for...for everyone...we love him". Collapsing back on our stools, Tor starts chatting to some English forty year old with a blatantly fake cockney accent and the subject seems to be Chemistry...we wonder what men find impressive...



"Contrary to popular belief, Greece does have places where you can whip your top off without the £1500 fine."



Clockwise from top left: Greek houses; yacht moored off Rhodes; clubbers in Faliraki; sunset over the Greek islands; the beach at Lindos

One thing for sure - it's not working. Podge starts talking to a sailor from Plymouth who has never been further in his ship than Ipswich. Our own Faliraki is perhaps not so different after all. The e-mail Tor's parents received that night was not the one that had been intended, the computer in the bar suddenly having a surprising appeal in the early hours. Luckily for us Greece may have its Falirakis but just around the corner is that perfect hangover retreat. Genadi, south of Lindos, proved to be ours. The peace was only disturbed by the formidable silhouette of George on his Harley Davidson scouting the beach for us - an abrupt reminder of our promised lunch date from the night before. The rapid dive under the sunbed was the only hindrance to our recovery...

Contrary to what you might think, Greece does have places where you can whip your top off without the penalty of a £1500 fine. In Ikaria, a remote, secluded island where fishing

offers tourism some competition, we discovered some more unusual sights than on your typical day at the beach. The nudist beach at Naz is the ultimate in liberation. Not only for the chance to bronze those always glowing in the dark bits, but also an impressive hippy commune, if you take the wrong turn. A few needles, and unintelligible conversations later we finally were pointed in the right direction.

The hippy commune and nudist beach stand as a bizarre foreground to one of the most ancient ruins in Greece. Sun goddess Podge was in heaven - although finding it rather difficult to focus on the pages of *Robinson Crusoe*. The man to the left who should definitely try the latest anti-wrinkle cream, and the very fit Swede on the right with his porn star body were not conducive to our reading habits.

The least pleasurable bit of any holiday is the actual travelling, not least when you are a definite Class C candidate. Somehow the rucksacks didn't do much for the Class A quality we thought we could pass as. Made outcasts on top deck for the duration of a 22 hour ferry journey, our cafeteria no more than a sign, we certainly knew our place. Any attempt at entering the 'Sapphire lounge' below was thwarted by the little grey haired Greek man whose English amounted to "shoo". Thankfully with bargains struck on a victorious treble win at backgammon, we claimed our bodyguards, Joseph and Jack - English gentlemen all the way - to guard us while we froze into sleep.

We definitely felt like the stereotypical Bridget Jones when one day we were forced to ask some people where we were. I think the tourists who we targeted thought we were completely past hope when they initially replied, "Rhodes, Greece". Then, when they replied "Mount Smith" we gaily set out on a mountain hike without a map - all in aid of maintaining our mixed lacrosse fitness of course.

After three weeks Podge finally weaned typical Brit Tor off factor 30 and was glad to report that the tans reached a satisfactory level. While we found that Greek sensual pleasures remain a myth, evident only on graphic sexual position postcards which could even outdo More's 'position of the fortnight', Greece certainly gave us that alternative to the dreaming spires.

Maybe looking back it was that clichéd girly holiday, but as the ancient Greek saying goes, "Girls just wanna have fun!"

Pleasuring Yourself...

JFMANN finds out more about our oldest and most controversial habit

st Jones wrote: psychology has d that autoerotic quite universal velopment, and be thought, an n of the sexual use" had previ- as a disease. As ties a US Public mphet warned rously hinder a wards vigorous ough to be the er health prob-

hagged, hysterics, consumptions and barrenness - at length a total ineptitude to the Act of Generation itself. Some women, he goes so far as to claim, from the "Lustful and Excessive Abuse of themselves, have this Propension of the Clitoris, and are thus brought into a Resemblance of the Male Sex".

Early doctors were concerned that masturbation literally drained a man of his vital humour. By 1924 JFW Meagher concluded that "the somewhat popular lay idea that masturbation may cause imbecility, consumption, etc., is not only without foundation, but is ridiculous...to falsely tell a suggestible patient that he will surely die or go insane as a

were for horses and fourteen for humans. The human devices, made for boys, consisted of sharp points turned inward to jab the penis

should he get an erection during the night. A possible solution was marriage. Even Sheikh Ar-Tameeny agrees here. "Hasten towards marriage, the door to all goodness, success and richness". It was not until the 1880s, with the advent of electricity, that doctors and midwives found help in the form of the vibrator. This was an improvement on the dildo, which had been known in ancient times.

LYSISTRATA: ... Since the day the Milesians

an impressive array of attachments. Between 1900-1920, vibrators were marketed in American periodicals such as *Home Needlework Journal*, *Women's Home Companion* and *Modern Priscilla*. Slogans included "all the pleasures of youth...will throb within you", "Such Delightful Companions", "Aids That Every Woman Appreciates", and aimed at the male consumer "A Gift That Will Keep Her Young and Pretty". Sadly once these devices began to appear in certain films, they were taken off the market.

Men have appreciated other aids in this field. In the 4th century BC, Praxiteles

This is Philly shove it in n cored apple that picnic. 'B me all you've milk bottle th storage bin in wild after sch upright". While Trum when he said masturbation dress up for it in to getting out, you may l ing auto sexus version for wh a lover can pn is by contrast.



Masthead

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Katerina Lygaki
Editor-in-Chief

Love is in the air. As I’m writing this, it is Valentine’s Day. What are my plans? Don’t ask, it’s an extremely long story and I’m not ready to share. I’ve been a “pick me” right, left and centre but have finally found love where it matters the most: myself. Don’t mind me, I’ll be spending today looking in the mirror, admiring my beauty and telling myself sweet nothings.

But getting back to the heart of it all, love is in the air in Oxford. This week’s Life section is filled with love and the sex column is filled with passion... against love, but passion nonetheless. I’m not going to start sharing my thoughts on Valentine’s because everything I think has already been said and I don’t think that anyone cares on what I have to say on the matter. But I do think that appreciating love is cute. It’s powerful to love every day, even during a really shitty morning or a painful afternoon. At the risk of sounding like a “live, laugh, love” poster, I do think that appreciating love is difficult but so necessary. I just think that this shouldn’t necessarily be romantic love all the time. I’ve realised that people who love their degree, or love creating music, or even love writing articles (inserting my necessary student journalism plug for the week) are often the people in my life that I admire

most for being confident and not giving a fuck.

Not to over-share or anything, but I watched *Eat, Pray, Love* unironically, I think that’s all you need to know about me. You can definitely get that from my article, but you know what, I’m going to love the fact that I am 100% cringey. Excuse me, please make space for my new-found ego and I to get through, thank you. I know that every editorial I write somehow turns into a cheesy “love yourself moment” but this is in fact my final Hilary term at the university, so I’m going to savor it and act all retrospective and appreciative every time I write these. Every time I sit down to write, I start think how good life is— even though it’s also shitty— and that I love everyone and everything. I’m sorry for anyone having to read my shallow epiphanies, but you’ve been warned. As of now, I’m content to pretend that I’m deep and decide to love my life approximately 500 times a day.

Another Hilary, another Student Union president elected, and, unsurprisingly now, another ex-Union hack representing all 26,000 Oxford students. The last three SU presidents – Anvee Bhutani, Michael Akolade-Ayodeji, and now Danial Hussain – have all had some role in the Union at one point. Hacks are notoriously image-conscious, and one might be led to question how much of the desire to become SU president is driven by a genuine desire to help students rather than a cynical exercise in image-making.

Ciaron Tobin, the recently ousted JCR president of Magdalen, has been involved with the Union, OULC, the OxStu, and Cherwell, and was most recently elected an NUS delegate, following a flirtation with a run for SU presidency. While here, Bhutani has been involved with the Union, the SU, OULC, The Tab Oxford (???), both of Oxford’s major student news outlets, and even, embarrassingly, the Oxford Blue.



Isaac Ettinghausen
Editor-in-Chief

This incessant flitting between different student societies could be termed “BNOC syndrome”, or maybe “LinkedIn experience addiction”. I’m not saying that these people genuinely have no passions for the causes or groups that they work in, but it’s telling that some have been sighted at both OUCA and OULC events. In fact, its well known that there’s a large crossover between the Union, OULC and OUCA, as would-be hacks use the political societies to desperately hustle for a few more Seccies Committee votes.

This incessant need to go between middle-management roles in a variety of Oxford’s student societies is at best, highly embarrassing to watch in its shamelessness, and at worst, actively harmful to the experiences of people who genuinely want to take part in societies. This is particularly malignant when that society is the SU, which, in theory, is supposed to represent the best interests of the student body at large, rather than a select group of hacks who exist between the Union bar and the various coffee shops of Oxford. Perhaps if it weren’t for such people’s dominance in SU elections, people would feel more invested in its role, rather than the current sorry levels of engagement we see at the moment (see front page).

Leader: Perfectionism and figuring out how to break that cycle



Izzie Alexandrou
Deputy Editor

Over the past few weeks, I’ve been working on vac scheme applications, which naturally has led me to think about how I perceive myself. So, I’d like to end 5th week by reflecting on my self-esteem, and hopefully in the process, encourage you to slow down to make time for whatever it may be that keeps you grounded.

When I first took the role of deputy editor at *Cherwell* and JCR president, coupled with the dreaded vac scheme application season and (urgh) my Law degree, I wondered whether it would be possible to do it all. I took on these roles knowing that it would be a challenge, but I told myself did it because I wanted to make the most of my limited time at university. Whilst this is true and I currently don’t

regret any of it – I’ve become closer with some incredible people and managed to work on some amazing projects - I have to admit that it feels like I haven’t stopped to breathe all term, which I’m sure is a feeling that is very familiar to most of you. At some point, I began to question my deeper intentions for keeping myself so busy, and for allowing my headspace to get so congested. Part of me feels like I can only feel good about myself if I’m constantly doing something - I try to do as much as I can because I have this frustrating tendency to judge my self-worth based on my achievements.

It is difficult to get out of the habit of measuring your own value by the extent of your accomplishments, but I’m trying. It is clearly conceptually possible for me to exist as a perfectly valid human being without always having to be answering emails or going to meetings or heading to the Choffice for yet another lay-in. And ironically, Oxford is the perfect place to do this. Amongst the endless deadlines and crippling over-achiever mindset inherent in the typical Oxford student, Oxford is inundated with so much natural beauty

that it’s easy to find calmness. For me, at least, there is nothing more grounding than taking a walk in the park by myself and focusing on my external surroundings to take a break from my internal thoughts. Listening to the chirping of some nearby birds or watching a dog chase a squirrel up a tree serves as a reminder that life continues outside of my achievements, which of course is obvious, but is nonetheless easy to forget. As I write this, I am sat in University Parks with the sun on my face, surrounded by nature and I’m feeling that incredible sense of calm. Even though half an hour ago I received yet another law firm rejection, I feel surprisingly at peace. My past self would have analysed this rejection at length and allowed it to chip away at my self-image, determining that somehow, I’m worth less because some law firm didn’t think I was good enough for a two-week placement. But right now, I don’t care. I’m simply feeling lucky to be alive and grateful that I’ve taken some time to reflect on why I am worthy, irrespective of how much I’ve achieved.

A day in the life of a mafia boss' daughter

Veronica Corielli

On the 16th of January 2023, Messina Denaro – widely regarded as the boss of all bosses within the Italian Mafia – was arrested. This prompted worldwide media interest, with articles from overseas newspapers detailing Messina Denaro's lifestyle and crimes. This was not my father. The title is clickbait, but it does provide an example of how easy it is for the romanticisation of the Mafia (like the daily routine of a Mafia first daughter) to be eye-catching and interesting. More appealing, perhaps, than articles describing the terrible reality of organised crime. This phenomenon is incredibly widespread, and incredibly dangerous.

Mafia bosses – especially Italian and often Russian – with sleek black hair and deep, entrancing, dark eyes are romanticised on virtually any media platform. In 2020 the movie “365 days”, in which the main love interest is brooding Mafia boss Massimo, made headlines. Admittedly, not because its plot dealt with organised crime but because of its sex scenes. However, the fact that crime can so easily be romanticised as a “dangerous, dark and mysterious” trope is scary to say the least. The hashtag “Mafia boss” on Wattpad, a website that allows users to post their own stories/fanfics, has more than 1.2k adherents. Some of the most common hashtags associated with this are “Mafia princess”, “bad boy” and “guns”. When searching “Mafia” on Google, the first suggestions are Mafia game, Mafia movie, and Mafia boss. It has even been discovered that Messina Denaro himself had The Godfather posters in his apartment. Messina Denaro romanticised his own criminal involvement. Clearly, this is a widespread phenomenon. However, why is it so dangerous?

According to James Finckenauer, professor at Rutgers University and author of *Mafia and organised crime: a beginner's guide*, the phenomenon began in the 20s in the US due to Prohibition. Small criminal groups controlled underground alcohol sales and became wide-scale international organisations.

In his book *La increíble hazaña de ser mexicano*, author Heriberto Yépez wrote that the key to the making of a criminal was an authoritarian environment, repression and constant criticism from a young age. Lack of areas to excel in due to this upbringing encourage one to seek respect and excellence in criminal activity. For the US working class the mafiosi became a sort of role model for success in an environment that otherwise repressed them. Books like Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*, first published in 1969, fed this fascination until the glamorous image of the Mafia became embedded in pop culture. But in reality, mafiosi profit from human trafficking, murder, extortion, fraud, and other terrible crimes. Glamorisation creates numbness to the harsh reality of these crimes.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

Our planet is in crisis, can we save it?

Jack Twyman

As I am writing this I am sitting by a window looking out onto a garden of mown grass. A parakeet hangs off a bird feeder while it eats, and a grey squirrel scurries up a tree behind. The stream in my garden, once flowing and clear, lays stagnant in a concrete-lined pond. Extend this up to a planetary level, and with emissions already changing climatic zones, invasive species running riot, and the attack on biodiversity occurring at an industrial level, it is clear to see why some say the world cannot be seen as natural anymore. The future is looking evermore uncertain.

In the past decade, an estimated 21.6 million people annually were internally displaced by climate-related hazards worldwide, with this number only projected to grow. According to the British Geological Survey, humans move about 24 times more material around the surface of the planet than rivers move sediment to the oceans – 316 billion metric tons. The age-old European fetish of humans overcoming mother nature has in some sense, with ghastly consequences. It is therefore a significant characterisation of the proposed new epoch of geological time – the Anthropocene: a definitive characterisation of human dominance of the global system.

We are at a crossroads for humanity. We can overcome emissions, some argue, but removing them from the Earth and living in a sterilised planet free of wildlife. Or we could fundamentally change the way we love, making room for nature, and adapting consumption for a more harmonious planet and safeguarding biodiversity before it disappears altogether. Some call this determinist, and it is clear to see why. However, the current system we can see puts some people above the planet.

So why does it matter for us in the West? Surely we're far removed from the negative impacts of climate change – one report by UKRI suggested “production in cool, wet upland areas may benefit from warmer and drier conditions” with longer growing seasons. Don't most people have more present worries like the cost of living? But even here there will be consequences – 40C temperatures this summer has devastating effects on life – and obliterated any thought that the climate crisis is a future not present issue. The globalisation of the current era has enabled us Brits to enjoy exotic foods from all across the world – and our reliance on them is only getting stronger. Demand for food is rising globally and production needs to double by 2050 to keep up with demand. This chronic pressure means the food system is increasingly vulnerable to acute shocks. For evidence of this see the global impacts of the Russian-occupation of Ukraine. Monoculture of staple crops leave them vulnerable to pests and diseases more prevalent in warmer temperatures. And growing water scarcity will mean that 2/3 of the World's population under water stress conditions by 2025. For the UK, in summer 40% of food comes from dryland

and subtropical regions. In winter that is 80% – based of FAOs 4 tenets of food security, it makes us highly vulnerable. UK agriculture may be decimated by the hypothesised shutdown of thermohaline ocean circulation, which enables the Gulf Stream, which keeps the UK relatively warmer – Edinburgh has the same latitude as Moscow. Harsher winters would be critical.

The UK has a historical impetus to act because as part of the “developed” world, it is our problem to fix. Past emissions highlight European and North American roles in the present climate change. 23 rich, developed countries are responsible for half of all historical CO2 emissions, despite making up 12% of the population. More than 150 countries are responsible for the other half.

Western attitudes towards nature are also part of the problem. The cultural symbolism of the UK's patchwork quilt has ingrained ecological destruction into the national psyche.

In the former settler colonies of the Americas, Australia and New Zealand the marginalisation and attempted extermination of Indigenous cultures is perhaps one of the starkest examples of the Western assault on nature. The West sees nature as a resource, one to be exploited for economic value, and of little use otherwise. This negates the ecosystem services, climate regulation and those who live on a subsistence of the land. From wildfires in California worsened by excess fuel that is accumulating because of loss of indigenous land management to loss of species knowledge, the current policy is not working. Western schemes to “carbon offset” and “conserve” nature have removed people from their lands and actually worsened carbon drawdown productivity. The dichotomy of the “wilderness” and “civilisation” cannot and should not be applied to many regions.

Humans can live in harmony with nature,

contrary to Western belief that Saharan civilisation accelerated the decline of the “Green Sahara” according to new research led by UCL they may have held back the onset of the Sahara desert by around 500 years. This is a complex relationship in many cases following the arrival of Europeans to South America, the ensuing disease killed off half of the Amazon's population, with the average temperature dropping by 0.15C in the late 1500s and early 1600s. This “Little Ice Age”, a time when the River Thames in London would regularly freeze over, snowstorms were common in Portugal and disrupted agriculture caused famines in several European countries. Even the current geological epoch – the interglacial Holocene – has been attributed to the advent of agriculture, or the extinction of the megafaunal species.

So what are the solutions and what is the best way forward? My Cherwell article with Canqi Li interviewing the Vice-Chancellor showed that there is an appetite to work with fossil fuel companies to solve the problem. And removing emissions may have to be the bandaid to keep the lid on the crisis in the short term. But this cannot be the only way. The oil industry and its assemblage have disproportionate impacts on the poorest and most climate-vulnerable countries, while the benefits are reserved for the Richer West.

We don't need any awareness raising – the time for that has been and gone. All the talk of buying and consuming “green” with “green growth” and “sustainable growth” harbour shocking contradictions. There are those that believe that a whole transformation of the economic system is needed – a new alternative to present “capitalism” or “neoliberalism”, however, this is unlikely given the entrenchment and contemporary power of those deemed winners in the current system.

Read the full article at cherwell.org.

Image credit: Krzysztof Golik/ CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



ChatGPT: the future of journalism?

Is the artificial intelligence chat bot really all it’s cracked up to be?

Oliver Hall

It’s fair to say that software company OpenAI’s latest public beta, ChatGPT, has taken the world by storm since its release in late November last year. It has provoked debate on countless levels from ethics to the future of work. As a young and aspiring student journalist I have found myself told repeatedly in the last two months that this is the worst possible time to be looking to enter the industry but I have confidence – confidence in human judgement and appreciation of detail.

First and foremost, journalism is about credibility and accuracy. While ChatGPT can generate information that is factually correct, it inherently lacks the necessary human judgment to verify the credibility of the information. A human journalist takes into account sources, biases, and other factors when reporting a story, but ChatGPT simply outputs information based on its training data. This raises the risk of spreading false information or misleading stories, which would damage the credibility of journalism as a whole, something which has seen a concerning trend in recent years even without AI.

Journalism is also about empathy and understanding. It is not just about relaying information but also about putting it into context and making it relevant to the audience. ChatGPT, being an AI language model, lacks the ability to understand human emotions, culture, and experiences. It simply cannot provide the depth of understanding and context that a human journalist can bring to a story.

Third, this industry is about diversity and representation. AI language models are only as good as the data they are trained on, and if the data is biased, the model will be too. ChatGPT, being trained on massive amounts of data from the internet, can perpetuate existing biases and perpetuate them in its outputs. A human journalist, on the other hand, can bring a unique perspective to a story and ensure that marginalized communities are represented in the media.

And finally, journalism is about accountability. While ChatGPT can be programmed to adhere to ethical guidelines, it lacks the ability to make ethical judgments in real time. A human journalist can be held accountable for their actions and decisions, but ChatGPT cannot be held responsible for the information it generates or the consequences of those actions.

In summary, while ChatGPT has the potential to assist journalists in their work, it cannot replace the human element of journalism. The future of journalism lies in the ability of human journalists to provide accurate, empathetic, diverse, and accountable reporting. The role of AI language models like ChatGPT should be to support and enhance journalism, not replace it.

Now that is all well in good but what does concern me, and might you, is that those last 700 words or so were in fact written by the AI bot itself. Even more scary is the fact that those words are coherent, and I gener-

ally agree with them.

In places though, the piece seems formulaic and one-dimensional. The key lies in the inputs and requests that you submit. When I asked for the same comment piece ‘in the style of Jeremy Clarkson’, it opened like this:

“Listen up folks, I’ve got something to say about this ChatGPT business and its supposed future in journalism. It’s a load of old tosh, if you ask me. And let me tell you why.

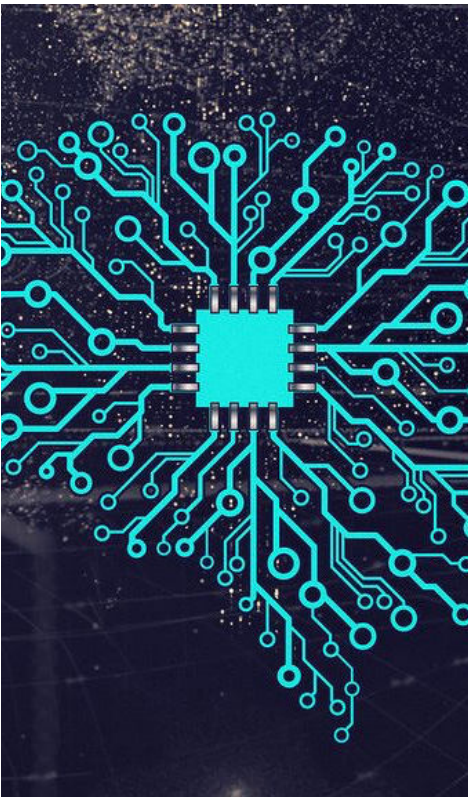
First of all, journalism is all about trust and accuracy. And I’m sorry, but ChatGPT simply doesn’t cut it in that department. It’s just a machine spitting out information based on its training data, without any human judgment to verify its credibility. I mean, have you seen some of the stuff it comes up with? It’s like trying to get driving directions from a satnav that’s had a few too many pints at the pub.”

Impersonation in the extreme? Perhaps, but the ability of the model to learn and adapt its styles is remarkable.

The impact on the business world is potentially huge too. In an economic environment of mass tech layoffs in the wake of the world reopening after COVID lockdowns, Microsoft has bet big. Their \$10 billion investment has left Alphabet feeling more threatened than ever and for the first time in years, there is the prospect of Bing becoming a serious player in the market again.

Don’t get me wrong, I am truly confident that the future of journalism is not articles written by bots or models but there is no doubt that it has a role to play. In terms of writing plans, giving ideas, and assisting writers across all fields the potential is game-changing but the newsroom and its employees are safe for now.

Image: CC2:0/Via Flickr.



Hilary: The “Grey” Term?

Sophie Lord

Around this time a year ago, I wrote my first article for *Cherwell*. I’m not writing this to be narcissistic – in that article, in the middle of Hilary term, I wrote about burnout at Oxford and the relation between this and meritocracy. Much of what I wrote back then still stands, as I write now in my final Hilary at Oxford.

Something about Hilary term feels, to me, grey. Michaelmas is sweet in post-summer glory – the arms of friends and the dreaming spires a warm welcome back after a long break. As the weather gets colder in Michaelmas, Oxford still remains beautiful and unchanging. Walking through Christ Church Meadows, you can feel the seasons change – one day, orange leaves crunch under foot, and the next, the Isis is frozen over.. With the increasing cold and dark comes the switching on of Christmas lights, and the luxury of Oxmas dinners and Christmas parties.

Can you tell I tend to romanticise? No university term, Oxford or elsewhere, is perfect. Between sparky Michaelmas memories were plenty of essays and hours spent in the library – which feels a fitting transition to describe Hilary. As I mentioned earlier, Hilary embodies grey. There are no seasonal transitions – it has been cold seemingly every day – and nothing to look forward to at the end.

It was this feeling, the constant working to fulfil goals that are slightly out of reach, just to do the same again the following week. This is the essence of Hilary: that my friends and I joke that we are living a St Peter’s variant of ‘groundhog day’, unaware of date, time, week, just living the same day on repeat. This is why I wrote a year ago, that, ‘everyone feels like we are pushing and pushing for a non-existent, unreachable goal’. Working to such a high standard, and constant tight deadlines, as we do in Oxford, is hard with little reward. Hilary feels like there is no end in sight.

However, a year later, my perspective is a little different. Perhaps this is my romantic finalist mindset, but I do now believe that there is a slight comfort that can be found in a repetitive and monotonous Hilary. I try my best to soak in the joy I feel on the walk to the library with friends, and in the chaos of a post-Bridge debrief

This is, of course, idealistic- romanticising moments of Hilary is redundant if you actually feel unhappy, which is an entirely fair thing to feel- but I have found that focusing on these little moments of joy, among the bleakness of Hilary, does make it a little less grey. Whilst it is easy to miss the cosiness of Michaelmas, and look forward to the sunny days of Port Meadow and picnics in Trinity, grounding yourself in a little appreciation does not hurt.

Read the full article online at cherwell.org

Disaster Relief in Turkey & Syria

Oliver Hall



This week, I was lucky enough to speak to Barney Mayhew, an expert in international crises and the logistics of foreign aid delivery across the globe (profiles piece to come!). He has worked in crises across the world for decades and it was fascinating to hear his take on the relief delivery in Syria. One thing that has certainly jumped out to me is the media’s inevitable focus on Turkey as a result of the fact that they can’t get access to much of Syria. Barney insisted though that the structures already in place would mean that organisations are prepared to deliver the aid that they do receive. Having said that, a week on the first international aid has only just arrived in rebel held areas - a worrying sign to say the least.

Jakub Trybull

The delivery of foreign aid has previous tension points - between Turkey and Greece, Armenia, and the first European aid from Italy arriving in Syria. We have also witnessed a remarkable moment of cooperation between the West and Russia, both delivering aid to a people in need. This sentiment of human unity falls short, however, with political lines remaining to be drawn regarding attitudes by the Al Assad regime with limited help reaching affected areas controlled by opposition forces. It seems, as it always does, that *everything* is political, even the value of human lives.



Adam Saxon



The issue of how to get effective, targeted aid to war-torn countries like Syria is difficult. Attempting to provide assistance to opposition held areas is near-impossible, and there is a serious risk of whole areas being forgotten about. It may, tragically, be too late to save many this time around, but there are lessons to be learned. In future, the response needs to be rapid, and both sides must reach out, put human life first, make (even temporary) peace and ensure a collaborative effort of some kind to distribute foreign aid can be put together. This would mean all affected areas can make use of the supplies and expertise of rescue teams like those sent by the UK last week.

the source
shapes of loving

ERASURE

in the stagnant silence between sips of gin,
stunted syllables sit on our lips like
battery acid and dissolve our skin.

so instead we'll pour our thoughts into that which can't reply,
into the night sky curling back against the rising sun,
arching her spine as the day unfurls its soul.

we'll listen to the drag of the ocean,
seduced by a masked moon,
and wonder if waves could wash our words
away into one clean hum.

we'll let the unsaid float
on ripples of light,
on the echo of a gull's cry,
on the clouds dipped in violet dye

and then stand by as
one
by
one
those sentences sink.

i've resolved to speak to her in unsent messages.
strings of sound that refuse formation
and hover on hold.

BY NICOLE GIBBONS

ONLY WE REMEMBER

only we remember
I think about the fall
of split-sky obelisks,
serapeum sultry with incense
boats sun-drowned and lotus-heavy
shards of the earthen pastoral,
the ruins of the mundane where
the child clutches his bird-amulet and
the women sing in the reeds

the past is a foreign country
remembered only in cipher,
set in rosetta
its indigenous ghosts linger
once-present and twice-lost

I think about what will be left
of us, remembered in
moon-bellied sunsets and
goosefeather on the lake
sharp-slick cities and
forever folded in frogspawn
loved in poetry, not in prose
I cannot conjure your smile, but
you smile anyway

now
god-kings lie silent in the valley
the sundial tells no time
the age of civilisation fades
and only we remember
so I think about the fall
the gentle frenzied fall
in love.

BY CHARLOTTE LAI



“Originality is overrated, but we do it anyway”

A look at the different ways in which fans can get creative while cosplaying their favourite characters.

Abigail Stevens

Random communities are harshly judged for their supposed disregard of the fabled concept of “originality”. Some people argue that fanfiction authors are inferior writers because they use other people’s characters and stories rather than devising anything of their own. Cosplay, while not as inherently controversial as fanfiction, raises a similar question: is replicating another’s creation as good as coming up with a “new” idea? Setting aside the argument that all forms of media are ultimately derived and reconstructed from the media the creator has seen, what exactly is the artistic process behind cosplay?

Like fanfiction writers, cosplayers are unbound. There is something freeing in making art which has no commercial value; you don’t have to worry about what will please an editor, producer, corporation, or potential customer, and its only purpose is to bring you joy. Cosplay is also a way to hone your skills; artists often start out by copying other works to practise their technique before trying to break new ground. But don’t underestimate the creative process of recreation, especially in the case of cosplay. Even the ones that are exact replicas from a film, television show, video game, theatrical performance, or another medium, require creative thinking.

While watching the series finale of *Game of Thrones*, my friend and I eagerly discussed what we would have to do to cosplay Sansa’s gorgeous coronation dress. NB: a few cosplayers on Instagram are working on this very costume, and it is taking them years to complete it. It is an intense and laborious process, especially since due to the obvious copyright problem most people don’t do this for a living and must work a paying

job. It involves scouring the internet and bookstores for decent tutorials, digging through bargain bins, and getting inventive with old clothes and accessories.

First and foremost, cosplayers face the challenge of having to recreate something with resources that will never match those of a Hollywood costume shop. Figuring out how they did it isn’t really the point. They probably did it using professional equipment far outside your budget. The question is, how can you, an amateur costume designer with limited funds and tools, do it at home? Can you get some materials from a charity shop? Buy fabric on sale? And if there isn’t a pattern available resembling what you want to make, can you freehand it yourself? Or assemble pieces from different patterns?

With every new project, a new skill is learned, such as careful hand embroidery to fashion a Stark direwolf or moulding foam into armour and weapons. Photoshoots and editing images are a beast in themselves; some pros specialise in cosplay photography, but many cosplayers who want to share their creations with the world will resort to scouting nearby locations, assembling mini sets, co-opting family and friends as photographers, and building up their photoshop skills over time. When they finally complete a project, even if it looks exactly like it did in the show, who will dare say that they didn’t think creatively to get there, or that it is not art?



Image Credit: Abigail Stevens.

However, there are those who still think that “copying” someone else’s work shouldn’t be considered “creative”. What qualifies as creativity? The process or the final product? How different does it have to be? I find that when cosplayers reassemble old clothing into something that looks enough like what the character wore to convey who they are supposed to be, they still end up with something distinct. And while I will always celebrate cosplayers for the time and energy they put into “copies”, there are still many examples of how they come up with their own original ideas. The cosplay community is by no means restricted to only recreating things—in fact, I would argue that they would feel very confined by that.

Some cosplayers will borrow a concept or aesthetic to get started, such as the colours and images associated with a specific character or piece of media. If you have a look at @starbitcreation’s Rapunzel dress, you can see how it was inspired by Disney’s film but is still her own. There are a plethora of additional ways to put a personal spin on costumes seen on screen. Mashups are so much fun, such as Merida wearing Hawkeye’s gear (@armoredheartcosplay), Rey’s Jakku garments layered with Hamilton’s military uniform, or Loki wielding a lightsaber (@silhouettedcosplay).

Some people will transport a medieval princess to the modern era or gender swap a superhero or anime protagonist. The only limit to what you can do with a character is your imagination.

Yet some cosplays do rely on completely original visualisation, such as book characters with no corresponding adaptation. Book cosplays are some of my favourites; cosplayers are given a general idea of what an outfit might look like, but it is still up to them to design the costume and bring that vision to life. Characters from Leigh Bardugo’s *Shadow and Bone* were very popular on Instagram long before Netflix adapted the series, and you can see how many different people were given the same basic framework, but all delivered unique results. Finally, cosplayers occasionally dress up as characters of their own—I have seen a few people bring their D&D characters to life this way.

Cosplayers must think creatively, otherwise they would just buy a costume on Amazon. Trying to recreate something that was made in Hollywood or Broadway takes hours of conceptualization and planning, watching DIY videos on YouTube, ripping up your work and starting again. Cosplayers are creative, persistent, and come up with new things every day. Ultimately online fan communities are a way for the fans to express themselves through the characters and stories which inspired them.

Image Credit:
Aung Khant
Maung via
Unsplash.



Image Credit:
William Tung
via Flickr.

Planet Lam by Paradise Bangkok Molam International Band

Flora Bigham

Bangkok, the mid-2000s: sifting through crates of cheap second-hand vinyls in Chinatown record shops, Chris Menist and Nattapon “Nat” Siangsukon, aka DJ Maft Sai, came across the traditional Thai folk genres of Molam and Luk Thung. Enraptured by them, the two formed The Paradise Bangkok Molam International Band. The experimental band blend influences from traditional Thai folk music to psychedelic rock to Afrobeat grooves, exemplified in their 2016 album *Planet Lam*.

Molam and Luk Thung originated in the north-eastern Isan region of Thailand and Laotian and Cambodian borders in the 17th century. They are characterised by the khaen, a bamboo mouth organ, which provides a warm, all-encompassing sound, underneath a vocal melody. The genres underwent a shift in the 1970s as American GIs stationed in the region brought with them American popular music. Musicians began incorporating this alongside traditional elements as they entertained soldiers. It is these experimental records which the collaborators first focused on, playing them at live events, before forming the band in 2012.

The band consists of Piyanat “Pump” Chotisathien, former bassist of Thai Indie Rock band Apartment Khunpa, Sawai Kaewsombat on the khaen, Kammao Perdtanon (described as Thailand’s answer to Jimi Hendrix) on the phin, Phusana “Arm” Treeburut playing drums, and

Siangsukon and Menist on percussion and production. Finding success nationally and internationally, playing sets at Glastonbury and garnering support from Mick Jagger and Damon Albarn, the band have been instrumental in re-situating perspectives on genres previously disregarded by middle class urban Thais as “taxi driver music”.

Their 2016 album *Planet Lam* opens with an improvisatory-like riff on the khaen, surrounding the listener with warm, glowing harmonies. Described by Jotikasthira as “surreal”, it binds syncopated cymbals and funky bass lines to create a psychedelic feel.

The album proceeds with the upbeat rock-like cut, “India Chia Muay - Thai Boxing Re-fix”, commencing with a phin solo. Influenced by “the urgency and drive” of The Stooges, the cyclical phin weaving around the infectious drum beats, with tempo changes coming midway through, captivate the listener. The Stooges influence can again be heard on the fast-paced “Adventures of Sinsai”. If you find yourself running late to a lecture, I recommend listening to this on repeat, as you will find yourself subconsciously speed-walking along to the track (albeit with some perplexed stares from those you pass).

More experimental, electronically focused tracks can be found in “Exit Planet Lam” and “Exit Dub”. Combining dub reggae and ambient classical influences, the sparse arrangements showcase producer Nick Manasseh’s stamp on the work.

“Studio Lam Suite” is the band at their best, an eleven-minute culmination of

traditional and electronic influences. It launches itself with a trance-like phin solo, the free tempo providing an improvisatory feel. After five minutes of enthralling phin playing, an electronic drone phases in and out before percussion organically emerges, complemented by field recordings of Bangkok street noise. A warm, introspective sound is constructed, comparisons ranging from Aphex Twin to Sade, as the funky bassline and laid back groove come to the fore.

Listening to 80s house hits such as “Missing You” by Larry Heard last Sunday as I frantically tried to complete an essay on eighteenth century opera, my mind drifted to *Planet Lam*, and I couldn’t help but be bemused by the transgressive power of music. How is it that my brain connects this house groove from a Chicagoan producer to a band in Bangkok? How is it that the khaen’s drone-like role in parts of the album remind me of Celtic folk instruments, such

as the hurdy-gurdy? Perhaps it is simply an untrained ear finding similarities where there are none, but I can’t help but be enraptured by the globality of music, bringing people from across the world together. “Good Shit”, as the journalist Aaron Steine wrote in a review of the album.

The Paradise Bangkok Molam International Band, “rooted in tradition, with an eye to the future”, seem to have just that, a new album reportedly being released sometime this year. An exemplar of the international force of genre-bending, experimental music, *Planet Lam* transgresses boundaries and intermingles influences, creating an intensely enjoyable, diverse listening experience.

Further recommendations: Nat and Menist’s compilations *Sound of Siam Volume 1 and 2* and Rasmee Isan Soul, who combines Molam Jariang cultures with Western and African music, with thanks to Ome Pukdee at Magdalen for suggesting the latter.



Image Credit: Merlijn Hoek via Flickr

Books

My Favourite Childhood Book: *Anne of Green Gables*

Laura Brink

My first encounter with Anne Shirley-Cuthbert took place more than a decade ago, as far away from the wintry charm of her native Canada as possible. We were also removed by more than a century since the writer Lucy Maud Montgomery first published her novel *Anne of Green Gables* in 1908. On the day of my encounter, it was a summer afternoon and my mother and I were passing time in the car, trapped inside with the thickening two o’clock South African heat, waiting for my sister to come out of school. As always, my mother reached for a book to read to me.

I like to indulge in the idea that the day my mother first cracked the spine of *Anne of Green Gables* marked the first step in my journey to studying literature at Oxford. The book enchanted me, awakening me to the power that fiction has to make readers feel seen. In the novel, Anne becomes embroiled in “scrapes” so often that the plot is practically structured around whatever trouble she gets into next. I was just as awkward, loudly passionate, and prone to troublemaking as her, a parallel I found wonderful. The revelation of our similarities often made me giggle with delight, and, amazingly, my mother laughed at the exact same quotes. Reading together helped me realise that she also understood what it was like being a curious young person with more imagination than one knew what to do

with; if she understood Anne that meant she understood me too. We started calling each other “kindred spirits”, just like Anne and her bosom friend Diana.

Of course, I couldn’t relate to everything in the book. *Anne of Green Gables* follows an orphan girl and her life in the town of Avonlea on Prince Edward Island after being accidentally adopted by ageing siblings Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert. And here I was, not an accident as far as I’m aware, enjoying her story with my mother. But that’s the beauty of children’s literature: you remember what clicked into place for you.

Lesson learnt: books give you the vocabulary to voice feelings you never knew you had. That’s not to say that *Anne of Green Gables* is in any way didactic. On the contrary, Anne is prone to musings that exasperate her sensible guardian Marilla to no end, but she justifies herself by arguing that she may say something simply “because it sounds so nice and romantic, just as if I were a heroine in a book”. The fact that Anne is a heroine in a book was one of my first introductions to the writerly art of irony and how writers play with lines to make them both intellectually pleasing and also emotionally meaningful. In this case, the words freed me from the stifling responsibility of always having to be “mature”.

Anne is such an iconic figure in children’s literature that I’m sure many relate to my enjoyment of her character,

especially following the release of the 2017 Netflix adaptation, *Anne with an E*. The title references Anne’s love of romantic expression through words as she insists on spelling her name ‘Anne’ instead of ‘Ann’, which she argues “makes such a difference” aesthetically. The series illustrates its precocious protagonist’s imagination through beautiful visuals, and updates the original text to include a surprising degree of representation and nuance, because a series set in a community where the biggest cultural divide is between Methodists and Presbyterians just isn’t going to appeal in 2023.

The book’s poetic language will, however, always be what draws me to Anne’s story. Her habit of excitedly reciting poetic ramblings and her shameless indulgence in fantasy justified my own childhood participation in them.

Even now, when I open the curtains of my room in Oxford and see the majestic tree of Hayward Quad, Keble College, I think of Anne talking to the tree outside her bedroom window at Green Gables. I remember that so many people – 19th-century writers, fictional characters, even my mother back in South Africa – understand life the same way I do. Anne had ambitions of being a teacher when she grew up: I’m sure she would be delighted to know that I return to how she pictured Green Gables whenever I need a little help remembering why my literature degree matters.

Books

Current Reads

NO LONGER HUMAN
by Osamu Dazai
Deborah Ogunnoiki, Books Editor

Content warning: suicide mention
No Longer Human is a short novel by Japanese writer Dazai. The book is semi-autobiographical, following the life of a young man named Yoko who struggles to show his true self to everyone. Believing himself to be a fraud and a fake, he ‘disqualifies’ himself from being human.

In a lot of senses this reminded me a lot of Descartes, who had the thought that just because he can think, he must be real. Dazai thinks the opposite, he thinks that because he thinks, just not in the same way as everyone else, he must not be a real human being.

On nights out I don the name ‘Toni’ and tell people that I study Law at Warwick (My name is Deborah and I study Classics). This art of living a double life is one that I relate to quite strongly with Yoko. But how long can you keep up the charade of acting ‘normal’ before the guilt begins to consume you?

Shortly after writing this novel, Dazai himself committed suicide. And in a sense this novel may have been his will.

Maybe the charade of being who others want you to be is a burden that just isn’t worth it.

A review of *Better Yesterday*

Cathy Scoon

Opening on a convincingly era-respecting late ‘70s set, *Better Yesterday* begins with the troubled couple Sylvia & Harold, walking back into their minimalistic multi-functioning front-room following their evening show of *Macbeth*. The lighting is minimal and mellow, just like the set, but this brings across an ambience and intimacy suitable for such a play. Prop usage is impressive—especially the rifle which features later in the play - the viewer really gets a sense of the stereotypically idyllic home-setting for the era. But the first element that undoubtedly strikes the viewer beyond set, as the characters walk in, is their strangely ambiguous clothing. Whilst generally conforming to the garb of the times; something about Sylvia’s (Katie Peachey’s) shoes is peculiarly jarring.

However, costumes and mildly dissonant footwear aside, the chemistry between the actors is undeniable—most especially during the few intimate scenes which take place. Whilst, perhaps, Murray Whitaker’s performance at times lacks the realistic depth one would imagine his character demands, his performance is generally convincing. Still, it has to be observed that there is something peculiarly wooden (or excessively performative) about his portrayal of Harold, in parts—or perhaps this is intended (part of the Olivier-esque performative aspect of his character). But, as the play winds on and Whitaker descends into Harold’s dwindling state of insanity, the viewer must applaud his later performance. The reminiscing scene

Film

at the kitchen table in particular highlights Whitaker’s skill very effectively: the viewer must allow themselves to be impressed by that blank, emotionally-distant stare into the audience as Harold recounts the details of what he dislikes about his wife, Sylvia. Conversely, but equally titillating, Whitaker’s portrayals of various scenes from the Golden Age of Cinema (including his Bogart portrayal) are rather amusingly well done. These comical impressions, as well as frequent reference to contemporary events (such as Elvis’ death & the hippie subculture) really help ground the play in its intended setting. The superb Katie Peachey playing Sylvia is truly dynamite. Her execution of the strong-willed, but inwardly troubled actress and wife in the spotlight is very commendable. From facial expressions to body language, to intonation - one can really believe her to be what she non-verbally claims: a love-lorn, searching and confused woman desperate to speak out, yet also to keep silent on her turmoil.

The viewer must assent that the director and playwright, Anna Stephen, does a fantastic job of blending various sensitive issues such as domestic violence, suicide, abortion, infidelity, & drug-use alongside the jarringly jovial, light-hearted tone vaguely reminiscent of Victoria Wood. The play really does deserve the cute moniker ‘tragicomedy’, for this reason. Alongside this, Stephen must be praised for the clever way in which she uses *Macbeth* as a focal reference for the couple. The two plays seem to run on a dynamic parallel, wherein the viewer can make subtle links between the Lady Macbeth-esque

characterisation of Sylvia; and the ultimately vulnerable, though outwardly hard-faced and standoffish characterisation of Harold as a Macbeth parallel. The brilliant dynamic is just subtle enough not to be too brazen and obnoxious in the face of *Better Yesterday*—an asset which is never very easily attained in a play covering such intense subject-matter. The Macbeth dynamic also brings to mind a Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier-style complex (who ironically both starred in an unfinished version of *Macbeth*) which does come through a lot in the characters of Sylvia and Harold. Credit ultimately has to be given to the actors, and to Stephen, for creating and animating such a nuanced play and sustaining the plot despite its having only two characters.

The most important takeaway of *Better Yesterday*, though, is ultimately the idea of the damage the voyeuristic public eye can do to a relationship. It is a tale of how such an intense spark can tighten like a vice, transforming into a suffocating hold, before unraveling into a descent of disorderly chaos and heartbreak. The turn of tables towards the end as Harold’s illness is revealed, and Sylvia’s infidelity is brought to light, is an unexpected twist that the viewer may not have envisioned until the very last moment. Sequestered beneath this heavy message, is all in all also the very simplistic (but poignant) idea that sometimes in life, one often finds that everything was ‘better yesterday’. Harold is the one to eventually use the titular phrase, just before the lights go out on a touching but wistful scene of the couple entwined in embrace.

Coming Up...

THE TEMPEST

22-25 February, Oxford Playhouse

When Prospera is forced to flee her home, a remote island provides refuge to raise her young child. But when the opportunity for vindication finally presents itself, Prospera must decide whether to choose forgiveness or revenge. Meanwhile, deep within the island, an ancient force is stirring.

PUNK

21-25 February, Burton-Taylor Studio

In under three days, Emory will turn irreversibly into a machine. Wanting to leave something of value behind, he tries to get his story told. With the clock ticking, a curious stranger approaches Emory with a proposition: to film his transformation and become the star of his very own snuff film. In this dark comedy, Emory takes to the mic to retell the events of one insane weekend.

DEUTERONOMY

21-25 February, Burton-Taylor Studio

Atop a lonely rock, by the side of a dirt road, in an indeterminate expanse, sits a beggar. Along the very same road comes a man, a bag of apples slung around his neck, dragging behind him a tremendously heavy coffin. Neither of them seem to know who it’s for. Neither are in a rush to find out; they know that they both will. There’s supper to be had in the meantime.

Get your scream on: the best horror films of 2022

Rahul Jakati

It is not only at Halloween that we can enjoy a night in with ghouls and demons; 2022 was full of great horror films all year round. From homicidal robotic dolls to surreal nightmare dreamscapes, frights abound in last year’s output. Whether it is to share some scares with friends or simply corral a creep by yourself, here are six of the best horrors from 2022, ordered from comedic to truly bone-chilling.

Bodies Bodies Bodies is hilarious. Everything about it screams Gen Z. A group of lovably insufferable teenagers get together to party during a hurricane. Someone dies, fingers are pointed, and all hell breaks loose. This movie is a product of its time, and it knows it. The dialogue is razor sharp, teetering every so carefully between cringe and camp, and the actors tick every box on the ‘angsty rich screenager’ bingo board. There’s also a feature song written for it by Charli XCX that absolutely slaps. What’s not to like?

The Menu is a biting satire on elitism of all

kinds: from the ivory tower of wealth to the snobbery of gastrophiles, nobody is spared (quite literally). Ralph Fiennes is here an haute chef who invites a smorgasbord of clientele from all walks of opulence to a dinner they’ll never forget. Anya Taylor Joy is a delight as the straight man in a movie that gradually becomes more and more insane. It is light on scares, and heavy on (black) comedy, but make no mistake—*The Menu* isn’t afraid to get bloody.

Prey is historical horror done right. It’s a film about a humanoid alien hunter killing French trappers and Comanche warriors in the early 18th century, but—believe it or not—there is still a remarkable adherence to historical accuracy. A deep appreciation for native American culture, an exploration of gender roles and colonizer relations, along with a swathe of destruction and mayhem makes this a more than worthy creature feature.

Black Phone has heart. A kid gets abducted by the aptly named “Grabber,” and must use the titular device to talk to the ghosts of previous victims to help him escape. Throw in a psychic sister and you’ve got a King-

esque romp which is equal parts coming-of-age and horror thriller. There’s one scene involving the abuse of the main character’s sister that is especially disquieting. The film is no downer, however—it is certainly a “feel-good” horror.

Smile is scary, full stop. The film follows a therapist who uncovers a killer curse whose manifestation is—you guessed it—a smile. If you want nothing else than a balls-to-the-walls-lights-out-blankets-covering-your-eyes type experience, then *Smile* fits your bill. The premise might seem rote, and to some extent it is, *Smile* interestingly manages to weave in themes of the trauma of burnout and depression. But let’s be clear—this is a deeply dark, grim, and oppressive tale. It is a horror movie.

Soft & Quiet is a grim reminder that it is often reality which is scariest of all. As a person of colour, it can be easy to feel nervous reading stories about hate crimes and prejudiced aggression. *Soft & Quiet* gives voice to all those fears in an unnervingly topical movie about a group of white supremacist women whose views lead to a terrifying conclusion after a run-in

with two Asian-American sisters. There’s a haunting intimacy to the camerawork that seems to erase the psychological intimacy inherent in watching a film.

Here are also some honourable mentions: *M3GAN*, a tongue-in-cheek take on technology gone wrong. If you want to watch a homicidal doll do TikTok dances before killing someone, *M3GAN*’s got you covered.

X is a loving homage to the age of ‘slashers’. A group of young adults go to a secluded farmhouse in Texas to film a porno, which is of course occupied by a couple of geriatric serial killers.

Mad God creates the kind of surrealist dreamscapes that occupy your darkest nightmares, all in the form of a stop-motion technical masterwork.

Bones and All is like *Call Me By Your Name* but with more than one cannibal (jokes). It’s also a visually stunning film that explores the monsters inside of us all.

Image Credit:
Felix Mooneeram via Unsplash.



The magic of friendship

Platonic love might form the most fulfilling relationships of your life.

Phoebe Walls

Falling in love focuses on romantic relationships. We chase the magical moment of a first kiss, the thrill of the first time they take your hand. The ‘L bomb’ lingers on the tip of your tongue, and you’re silently, wistfully waiting for them to feel the same. But what about platonic love? The happiness that can spread through your every cell when a close friend is nearby. Conversations that effortlessly flow for three hours. Many neglect their friendships when they get into a relationship; that special someone can become the only face they see in a crowded room. Oxford is a university with a notorious workload, and many students swearing off relationships to focus on being hopelessly devoted to their love of learning, so time for a relationship of any kind can feel limited.

Some of the greatest love stories of your life will be friendships. That first friend you made on the first day of school on a scratchy carpet will always hold a place in your heart. You think of her often, how you bonded over Jaqueline Wilson and Big Maths Beat That. There are friendships where a quiet pint at the local pub can reconcile two years apart. Oxford friendships can feel particularly magical. Some long-lasting friendships are founded in Freshers week. I remember feeling far away from home, drunk on newfound freedom and vodka drank out of unwashed mugs. The dizzying, dancing way that you feel not just from the eye contact of a love interest but a friend holding your

hand as you spin on a sticky floor. Oxford terms bring a rollercoaster of emotions, and platonic love is the only cure to heartbreak, homesickness or fifth-week blues. There’s a comfort derived from seeing your flatmate in the morning, and a quiet contentment that comes from catch-ups on the way to the college bar. There’s a joy from a cup of tea with a long chat, or raging rants, or gentle gossip. Nothing beats the thrill of a friend telling you they love you. I’d never experienced this before university, an honest declaration of a platonic love that rings in my ears like the favourite songs that we sing together. Love interests will come and go, treated by a friend’s affection.

There is nothing more freeing than feeling like you can fully be yourself around someone, which is harder with a romantic interest. At the beginning of the relationship, people try not to come across too keenly, waiting for the other person to reach out first. Lust is fragile and fleeting. Best friends see all your imperfections and yet still make you feel seen and heard. Friends will talk each other off a cliff edge, listen to dramatic anecdotes intently, and offer solutions to any problem.

For Valentine’s Day this year, shops were crammed with pink cards and tacky bears. Many singles feel a sense of missing out as colleges organise Valentine’s events from formal dinners to traffic light bops. Love can seem all around and yet so unreachable. Perhaps the people who most deserve a card are in reach. Nothing strengthens a friendship more than confessing how much you appreciate someone.



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Some of the greatest love stories will be friendships”

Aries 21 March - 19 April

(Strip?) Poker. Raise the stakes. Indulge your competitive side. Remind yourself of what being hungry for success feels like.

Capricorn 22 Dec. - 19 Jan.

Soul Food. You, your favourite outfit, your nearest and dearest, an authentic Italian pizzeria on the Cowley Road. Nuff said.

Aquarius 20 Jan. - 18 Feb.

Paint by Numbers. But choose a painting you’re passionate about, maybe one that makes a political statement.

Pisces 19 Feb. - 20 March

Classic Movie Night. KFC bucket or Tesco’s own brand sweets. Watch a controversial and critically acclaimed movie then argue about it with your friends.

Taurus 20 April - 20 May

Nap. Like a long one. Please just go to sleep, you do too much and think too much.

Leo 23 July - 22 Aug.

Ramen. Go on a lunch date with your hottest friend. Umami broth and eye candy is all you need to perk you back up.

Cancer 21 June - 22 July

Scented Candles. Preferably 2 or 3. Bask in the flickering sweet-smelling glow of your room and reminisce.

Libra 23 Sept. - 22 Oct.

Holiday Planning. You’re all caught up in work, but look to the future for motivation. Sandy beaches and sun-kissed selfies await.

Scorpio 23 Oct. - 21 Nov.

Stargazing. You’re wild but you’re spiritual. Go look at the stars and let a tear slip romantically down your cheek while ‘White Ferrari’ plays through your headphones.

Sagittarius 22 Nov. - 21 Dec.

Gym Sesh. Get into that sigma grindset and go hit some PRs. Old school Rihanna will be your workout playlist. Then flex in the mirror for good measure.

Gemini 21 May- 20 June

‘Love Me Like You’ by Little Mix. Or some similar anthem. Then shout it at the top of your lungs. Tell your neighbours it’s either this or your pent-up angst.

Virgo 23 Aug. - 22 Sept.

Photo Dump. You know you love them. Romanticise every 5th week granola bowl/sunset/welfare walk/library session and post it to the gram to feel something.

Horoscopes

CHERPSE!

SOPHIA

First Impressions?
He was really cute, really friendly smile, and I liked that we had a lil hug the first time we met!

Did it meet your expectations?
I was nervous, but the conversation kept flowing pretty easily and any awkward moment was just laughed off.

What was the highlight?
We both lived in the same area as kids and bonded about how kind of crappy a place it was, retrospectively.

What was the most embarrassing moment?
My eyes always leak when it's a bit windy, so I hope he didn't think I was crying on our first date.

Describe the date in 3 words:
Sweet, unexpected, chill.

Is there a second date on the cards?
Hopefully a pub trip this week!

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I hope he didn't think I was crying on our first date.

LOREN

First Impressions?
She seemed really nice and friendly. The convo came very naturally from the get-go.

Did it meet your expectations?
It was far less awkward than what I imagined a blind date would be like.

What was the highlight?
Having a nice convo to start the morning.

What was the most embarrassing moment?
There were no embarrassing moments.

Describe the date in 3 words:
Calm, fun, relaxed.

Is there a second date on the cards?
Very possibly – maybe a pub trip later this week.

Looking for love?

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

Sex & the Spires

Roses are red, violets are blue... Valentine's is dead and romance is too.

I like to consider myself an activist and so I've joined a very worthwhile campaign: banning Valentine's Day. The chocolates, the flowers, the kisses, the sex—the goal is to ban all forms of love on February fourteenth each year. I'll continue to work on this valuable mission for as long as I'm single.

It's come and gone, the annual anti-single day is behind us for another year. And what a shame! What's not to love about a day devoted to making those who aren't in a relationship feel as if they are the world's biggest loner, and the bank accounts of those who are romantically involved, suffer unnecessarily? It's a day which fuels capitalism, keeping Cadbury's in business and providing every florist's biggest pay-day.

If you did have a romance filled, lovey, dovey Valentine's, then good for you. If you're delusional enough to actually look forward to the made-up holiday every year, then I hope you enjoyed your 24 hours in fairyland. I'm not a cynic, but I'm sure those romantic illusions are wilting by now, at just about the same pace as those flowers you were gifted. The day itself is like the Olympics of Love—the race to get the reddest roses, dipping strawberries in chocolate in record time and managing to secure your personal best in public displays of affection per minute.

Maybe you are part of an even more infuriating group of Valentine's celebrators—the 'Galentiners'. Quit pretending that all you need is your friends, you're kidding yourself if you think they'll give you the validation you crave. And talk about being exclusive, what kind of a friend are you to leave your girl out of the Galentine's celebration just because she has a boyfriend. You know who you are and you should be ashamed.

Congratulations if you made it through the day as a singleton while faced with the injustice of being bombarded with obnoxious, over-affectionate couples taking hold of every restaurant—as well as your entire Instagram feed. This year, we were really f**ked. The fact that Valentine's Day fell in 5th week seems like a cruel joke from the Universe. Forget reds and pinks, this week has been Blues all round.

If you're still reeling from feelings of loneliness and the fear of being forever single, then why not give yourself some love? For those who have decided to give themselves over to the darkness (also known as being in a relationship) then isn't everyday Valentine's when love is in the air? If you're a devoted

narcissist like me then love is always in the air... because I love myself more than anyone else.

So why not treat yourself to some 'you' time and experience some relief from the dullness of existing. No awkward chit-chat before, no finger numbness from swiping right on Tinder and no walk of shame home because you can do it from home. In fact, contrary to some beliefs, there's no shame at all in having a good time in your own company.

Anne Summers is doing a clearance sale for what I presume is all the returned items after the love spell broke for many this week and the 'Private Shop' on Cowley Road has just had a much needed 'makeover'. Take the plunge and invest in something saucy for yourself. You obviously can't be happy if you're single, but you can be slightly less sad while the pain of Valentine's and 5th week begins to subside. to be talking about embracing your singlehood? I wasn't going to sit at home sipping vino with my gal pals, kidding myself into thinking that Anne Summers is a replacement for romance, or sobbing over The Notebook. That's how I spend the other 364 days of the year.

I had three options to choose from on Tuesday night. You see, writing a sex column really does pay off. But I never kiss and tell...

Battling the Blues

Jessica Mason

It's Fifth Week. It is supposedly the saddest week of the term. It's still winter, the deadlines are piling up, we're tired and sad and we can't seem to catch a break! It can feel like there is nothing to look forward to, and the sun is nowhere to be seen. Hilary Term has always felt like the hardest for me, because I have never been the biggest fan of the winter months, and the blues that accompany them.

For me, January and February have always felt very desolate. Everything seems still; everything is frozen in its sad blue-grey tones; nature dies. And this Hilary, it was like a part of me died too. My planner has been teeming with tasks: sort out lecture timetable, plan essay, write essay, reply to that email from that tutor, read this, and that, go to that seminar, meet this friend, sort this out, sort that out. It feels crowded. I am in a weird place in my life right now and it feels like everything is holding its breath. Although I'm constantly running around from place to place with a tote bag so full of books that it's slowly bending my spine, it feels like I'm waiting. I am waiting for something to change. Amongst the cold greys and whites of winter there is a distinct emptiness. The winter months leave us trudging around doing the same old things, but it's like we're living in that awful wan blue filter that they used in the Twilight movies.

It feels really hard sometimes to just go about our days when we're not coaxed through them by sunshine that dwindles only after 9pm, or bright colours that actively make us want to go outside. I've reached the point where my alarm goes off in the morning and I just stare at my wall in a state of complete exasperation because my bed is cosy and warm and I know that I will be shivering as I half-shuffle, half-jog to

the bathroom.

But I think there is also value to be found in these harsher winter months. January and February are full of opportunities for new beginnings. This is the time where we can sit in the frozen silence and work out what we want for ourselves, before the sunshine and the bright colours return. Winter is a time to reflect and to grow. We can take a breath and really look at ourselves. I've been learning how to bring myself comfort, and how to be kind to my desperate little existence.

One of my friends sat me down recently and told me that I needed to be gentle with myself. It often feels like Oxford expects a lot from us. The pressure can be crushing some days, but it's important to just take yourself out of this isolated social sphere every now and then. For example, I like watching trashy tv shows, or going on walks down the canal. It makes me feel like a person, after playing at being a soulless academic machine all day. Last Thursday I

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I've been learning how to bring myself comfort

was feeling really overwhelmed and when I got back to my room I dramatically flung myself onto my bed, and then eventually convinced myself to go to the kitchen and make some pesto pasta (I'm currently in my chef era). When I got to the kitchen three of my friends were there eating at the table, and they stuck around and waited for me to cook and eat so we could spend some time together. I think there is something so beautiful about the simplicity of those moments. We exchanged stories about our day and ate in each other's quiet company. We were all so exhausted but when I got back to my room it felt like I had been inflated again. The simple act of speaking to friends helped to bring me out of my sulk and made me feel lighter.

I have hope for better days of warmth and sunny colours. I know I will feel whole again one day. But for now, it's important to be gentle with myself; watch trash tv, go on walks, and have dinner with my friends. These things are my sunlight in the middle of yet another Fifth Week.

Image credit: Linyue (Eva) Xu



Special Occasions in Oxford: \$\$\$ Edition

Sharon Chau

Though Valentine’s Day has just passed, whether you have another important occasion to celebrate with that special someone, or you’re celebrating your single, thriving status, here are some of the best food Oxford has to offer. On top of the date night restaurants introduced in my previous column, these fancy restaurants will almost certainly break the bank, hence why they have been sadly relegated to the ‘once-a-year’ list.

Parsonage Grill, Oxford
Offering “modern British dishes with a light touch” using locally sourced ingredients whenever possible, Parsonage Grill serves some of the most delectable (and expensive) food in Oxford, ranging from “twice-baked goat’s cheese & thyme soufflé” to “confit duck leg, roasted celeriac & juniper berry sauce”. The restaurant is lavishly decorated with plush velvet chairs and sleek navy walls, and its gorgeous terrace is

simply delightful in the daytime — though chattering in the freezing cold at night is probably less romantic.

The Alice
A British brasserie at the “heart of historic Oxford”, The Alice is a jaw-droppingly stunning restaurant—pink sofas, velvet cushions, crystal chandeliers, patterned wallpaper, and high ceilings make this restaurant a feast for the eyes. Its wide-ranging a la carte selection includes warm smoked eel with pork crackling, citrus cured salmon, 35-day dry aged flat iron steak, and duck with grilled clementine and onion pommes anna, with a similarly creative and succulent dessert menu. Come for an exquisite meal, then grab an Alice in Wonderland-themed cocktail in their gorgeous bar.

No. 1 Ship Street
Located in central Oxford and boasting a “sophisticated ambiance”, No. 1 Ship Street was voted as Oxfordshire’s Best Restaurant in 2022 and 2020 for good reason. Serving

rock oysters, devilled lambs kidneys, and a surf & turf for two with whole lobsters, the food is eye-wateringly expensive, but mouth-wateringly good. The decor is cosy and perhaps less extravagant than you would expect, but its incredibly central location puts it above many others on this list, especially if you have other Valentine’s Day plans at the movies, the rink or a cheeky Blackwell’s trip.

Cherwell Boathouse
Following the previous theme of dining on the river, Cherwell Boathouse provides an “understated but upscale” European feasting experience with an innovative menu including pressed wild mushroom lasagna with walnut purée; truffle and dashi; caramelised plaice with celeriac and capers, and smoked duck toastie with confit egg yolk; onion relish and mushroom ketchup. Despite its dreaded OX2 postcode, the food is slightly less expensive than the others on this list, and its relatively remote location is perfect if you’re worried about an awkward encounter with your ex.

Knoopologist: make it a mocha

Another week has passed and no doubt far too many hot chocolates have been consumed. My advice? – treat it as a form of self-care! I always tell regulars, a chocolate (or two) a day keeps the doctor away.

Knoops is obviously famed for its hot chocolates and that’s certainly the thing that makes people keep on coming back but there is one item on the menu that sometimes goes under the radar: the mocha.

I think this is for a few reasons. For a start, most people don’t realise that it’s on offer, drawn in simply by the standard chocolates. After that though, even more are unaware that you can personalise it to your heart’s content, just like a chocolate. And this is where you enter a world of possibilities...

The mochas are made much like the hot chocolates and not by merely adding a powder like many cafes. The chocolate is still melted in whatever milk you have chosen to achieve that perfect frothiness (the essence of the chocolate as Jens himself might say!) and then the espresso is added afterwards, allowing it to flow through the whole drink.

The standard mocha is offered at 54% but if you ask me, you are best going for a much darker option. The 80% Uganda is my preferred to give that smoky touch to the coffee. Otherwise, the 64% brings a fruity element into play and the 72% from Peru has a distinct bitterness that works superbly.

Elsewhere, the mocha milkshake can serve as the ultimate indulgence. The 96% and the 80% both bring an intensity balanced out by the ice cream to make a dream combination. Feeling out of the box? Go for the 28%. Usually, the white chocolate is far too sweet with the soft-serve milkshake but the coffee can bring in that perfect balance whilst still having the sweet vanilla notes.

That’s it from me this week – check back soon for more advice and tips on how to make the most of that Turl Street indulgence...



Table d’Alix: toujours parfait

Oliver Hall

A lot has changed over the year since I last reviewed Table d’Alix in Great Haseley. Even so, I was relieved to see that things were reassuringly similar. A new star chef and new dishes, yes, but the restaurant still has a warm, inviting atmosphere in which to enjoy the kind of authentic French experience almost impossible to find elsewhere in Oxford. We were welcomed with a firm handshake at the door by Antoine, as always. The owner and Maître D’ leads the team with friendliness, passion, and knowledge. Seated in the corner, I was able to survey the scene and remind myself of what a fantastic main dining room Table d’Alix has. Light pours in, bouncing off the trademark chandelier and highlighting a set-up full of perfect little touches. Bread, as one would expect, arrived first alongside a Ricard for the full French experience. I intended to save some of the warm selection of freshly baked rolls for my moules later on—suffice to say, there was no chance. Tartare de Bouef is one of my favourite French dishes, but also one of the hardest to find overseas. This arrived with the perfect selection of sauces and was made great by its incredibly rich Burford

Brown egg yolk.
Next up from the starters was a truly unique lobster dish. It consists of half a lobster served with potatoes in a rich cognac lobster bisque. That remarkable richness is explained by Antoine, who talked me through the process. The lobsters come in every morning and the heads are boiled straight away over the enitre day, reducing down to make a sumptuous bisque that would easily be delicious enough on its own as a soup, never mind when paired with fresh claw meat. Moules frites, this week’s featured dish in Table d’Alix’s ‘Tour de France’, were next. Every Thursday, they offer a classic French dish—think Boeuf Bourguignon or Coq au Vin—a glass of wine, and mousse au chocolat for just £25. The deal is superb value and is just the kind of reason that such a place manages to survive where so many other pubs and restaurants fail. There is nothing snobby about Table d’Alix, which has inserted itself into the local community with the kind of ease that many owners across the country dream of. The moules themselves were perfect, of course. Having taken slightly longer to come into season this year, they are now well-sized and served alongside traditionally crispy fries. The other main course we had was a true showstopper, and undoubtedly one of

my favourite dishes of the year so far. It was a whole Dover Sole served on the bone (just how I love it, as you may be aware by now!), with a rich caper butter. The sheer amount of fish is incredible and easily enough to share between two — the plethora of capers makes for a perfect counter to the indulgent butter. Get it served with the Petit Pois a la Francaise for the dream combo. These are to die for, cooked in butter and pancetta to leave you wanting more and more—something I rarely say about peas! And then cheese. I was struggling to figure out where to start with this, but on a basic level, there is just one thing you need to know: here in Great Haseley, there is still a cheese trolley. There is no skimping by taking the options anywhere near a fridge to ruin the flavour, and the diverse selection is perfect. For me, the standout was a delightfully punchy goat’s cheese from Corsica. Desserts (if you make it) are ridiculously indulgent, as you might expect. The Surprise du Chef au Chocolat is made with crisp honeycomb biscuits, and hazlenuts balance the intensely dark chocolate. Save some red wine from your cheese for the perfect combination! And I haven’t even mentioned the wine! Our Ricard, Port, and Guy Saget Chardonnay were all lovely but I cannot finish without writing about one of the best value wines I’ve tasted in a long time. The Chateau du Haut-Plateau Saint-Emilion is a 2015 vintage and available by the glass and the bottle for just £52. Its earthiness was genuinely a standout for the price, and the nose an absolute dream. It’s one of those reds that goes with pretty much anything and you could genuinely keep drinking all night long. Table d’Alix really is one of the most unique and special restaurants I have ever visited. Still a fairly well-kept secret, I just can’t see it staying that way for long. The new head chef has previously spent six years at Le Manoir Quatre Saisons, and regular visits from Raymond Blanc, his guests, and his staff, only point to just how remarkable the food is. Homely, reasonably priced, and above all delicious, there really is something for everyone here. Come from Oxford or much further afield and set up shop for the afternoon or evening—there really is not a more worthwhile way to spend your time.



Naval warfare: Oxford water polo

Duncan Pinchen

It was Oxford “B” Vs Cambridge “B” in men’s water polo. The Oxford squad huddle as Hertford spectators converge on the poolside. Cambridge? Absent... but soon the mint shorts emerge. Loss will put Oxford bottom of the league. A win: third. Unsurprisingly, coach Tom deals tctics with his fingers nervously retracted up his sleeves. This Varsity match counts and there is extra attention when fingernails are measured – contact is expected

20:00. The teams charge on the whistle. Oxford win possession and elicit a save from Alex H, the Cambridge keeper, controlling for 2-and-a-half minutes. That’s until Warren Handley can score from distance for Oxford. 1-0. The poolside tension is broken by grins and cheers. Cambridge surge to draw 1-1 within 20 seconds, and spectators’ faces refocus. Cambridge dribble, pass and press to trouble Oxford’s keeper, Joey Weinbren. Play is close until a penalty lets Will H score for Cambridge with 75

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This Varsity match counts and there is extra attention when fingernails are measured

seconds remaining in this quarter. 1-2. Oxford’s tip-off leads to mixed play until Cambridge’s Kai shoots from afar. 1-3, worried faces grow. 45 seconds of purposeful Cantabrigian play break with Oxford’s counter-attack. 2-3. Yet, Oxford overstretch leaving Ryan K unmarked. 2-4. Cambridge’s next two efforts require intervention from the post and then Joey himself, who is applauded. A few tense seconds then halftime. Oxford have the numerical advantage once Kai is sin-binned and Matt Courtis scores. 3-4. Then Cambridge’s rapid attack lets Henry S-T put one beyond Joey’s reach. 3-5. In retort, Alex W, threads a wondrous ball beyond the Cambridge keeper’s right hand and into the net. 4-5. Clapping erupts. James, Oxford’s wing, makes an ambitious effort and smiles return to the poolside as shouts and whoops reverberate. 5-5.

13 seconds later, a Cambridge penalty is converted, but faces don’t fall this time. 5-6. Play is unremarkable, except a few speculative attempts, until Oxford romp

on in the dying seconds. Time intervenes and the score remains 5-6 to Oxford.

8 minutes remain in the game and the first two pass with increasingly dangerous attacks from both sides. Decisive play offers Oxford a chance, and the crowd erupts. 6-6. Jakob Timmerman bowls it cleanly into the Cambridge goal and the supporters spring up, cheering. 7-6. Advantage Oxford, in style.

Jakob, with a casual lob, places Alex C in prime position. 8-6. The win’s within reach..

Kai, cap hanging loose, cannons a shot at the top corner but Joey rises, literally, to the occasion, maintaining Oxford’s lead impressively. A time-out with the shout ‘1,2,3 Cambridge’ has little effect. Joey finds Matt, the furthestmost Oxonian, who lifts it over Alex H easily. 9-6. Surely it’s over.

Cambridge stretch Oxford, centre it and score, ending their 6-minute dry spell. 9-7. 162 seconds left, with Oxford dominating 24 before Ben Wharton shoots. 10-7. A clinical Oxford attack scores quickly. 11-7. Cambridge, snatch a shot, earning nothing, but soon break, probe forward and score. 11-8. With eight seconds remaining, Jakob is in place. The shot is saved and play fizzles out. Final score. 11-8.

Oxford rise to third. Cambridge, fourth. The mint mermen have a long, late, journey home.

Sport in Oxford and beyond!

Results:

Football Cuppers:
Womens Semi- finals:
Worcester 1 - 3 Hilda’s/Peters
Mens Semi finals:
Jesus mens 3 - 4 Brasenose mens

Fixtures:

Football Cuppers Finals
25th February, Iffley Road stadium
Women’s finals:
Osler Women vs Hilda’s/Peters
11am KO
Men’s finals:
St Hugh’s mens vs Brasenose
2pm KO

Beyond Oxford:

Zoe’s Intresting Fact.
In the space of one month, Arsenal and Manchester City men’s and women’s team will have faced each other four times. While the reccent 2-1 defeat of Arsenal Women by City have dashed thier WSL title hopes, time remains to see whether this fate will be shared by the men. I’m praying, no begging it isn’t.

Meal deals, mediocrity and mocking the home fans: big away days will never get old

Tom Farmer

A couple of weeks ago, I boarded the train from Oxford to Manchester Piccadilly with a blue and white scarf draped around my neck and full of a misguided sense of optimism. It was the FA Cup Third Round and Reading FC (a team I have long-since endured the infrequent successes and frequent failures of) had been drawn against Manchester United.

The famous Man United! 20 league titles, 12 FA Cup titles and a team full of superstars! George Best, Cristiano Ronaldo, Harry Maguire: the list of mind-blowingly talented players that have donned the famous red shirt is endless. What do Reading have? Andy Carroll, an aged striker who even in his prime was just a tiny bit better than average, as well as a handful of players who often gave the impression of occasionally being half-decent at football. A 4-0 defeat for Reading against Stoke City the weekend before (a team composed of players worth over £200 million less than Manchester United’s) had not buoyed my optimism. We were going to go to Old Trafford and not only do ourselves proud, but secure one of the biggest upsets in recent FA Cup history.

As the train weaved its way through Oxfordshire and into the Midlands, brief vignettes of cities and towns flying past the window, my mind oscillated between

the realistic and the sentimental, the two stock emotions for football fans across the globe. My stomach lurching with every bite of chicken caesar wrap, I couldn’t help but imagine the scenes of euphoria that would erupt as the ball bounced off a Reading player’s toe and flew past World Cup-winning goalkeeper David De Gea, hugging strangers like they were life-long friends and knowing that I had an “I was there” moment that no-one could strip me of. That, perhaps in an overly-simplified way, is the mentality of the football fan: hope over reason, potential over the inevitable.

Arriving at the ground, a few things were different from my usual trips to watch “The Royals”. Old Trafford holds over 60,000 people, whilst Reading’s Select Car Leasing stadium holds 24,000 but realistically only has the pleasure of hosting around 10,000 fans a game. The presence of “safe standing” too, where there are barriers in between each row to prevent Reading fans flying forward when we inevitably secure our historic win, is a new innovation which came into the top leagues of English football this season. However, the greatest difference was the noise of the “Blue Army” echoing around me. Instead of old blokes discussing the trials and tribulations of finding a good “real ale pub”, a conversation I have heard before kick-off at the Select Car Leasing Stadium, something is always different on away days. Like a Carlsberg-fuelled choral emsemble, Reading fans eased through

the usual repertoire with the tunefulness of a primary school carol service, but with the passion of soldiers about to go over the trenches.

Eventually, after two nights of dreams (one happy, one sad) Marcus Rashford laid it back from the centre-spot and the game was under way. What followed was simultaneously one the funniest and most stressful 45 minutes of my life. Reading cannot have held the ball for more than 5 minutes across the first half, with United battering balls into our box with the relentlessness and repetitiveness of a hammering carpenter. Yet, like clockwork, anything that got anywhere near the Reading goal was smacked away by the defence. Our two centre-backs Tom Holmes and Tom McIntyre are both born and bred in Reading, with there being pictorial evidence of McIntyre being a mascot for Reading when he was eight years old. Now the pair are in their early-twenties and, if you told that pair of eight year-olds that they would be doing their boyhood club proud at Old Trafford, they would have laughed in your face. After a tireless defensive effort, and

the intervention of VAR to correct the referee’s decision-making, it was 0-0 at the half-time whistle.

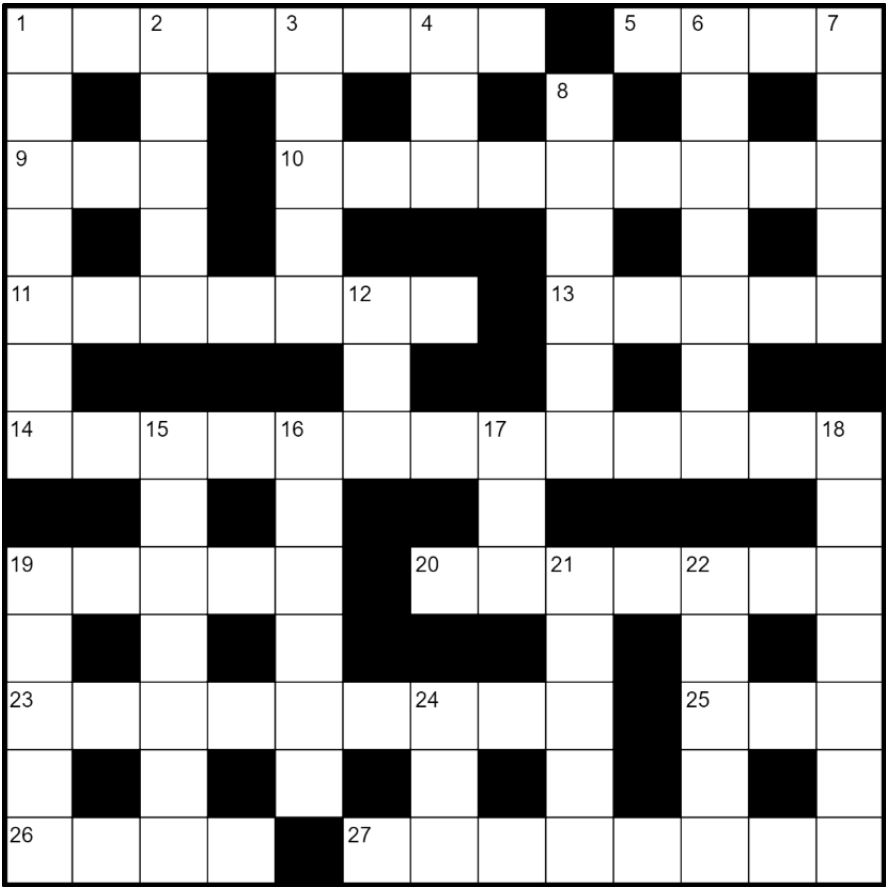
0-0! Against the famous Man United! 12 FA Cup titles, Alex Ferguson, Harry Maguire! Not one Reading fan dared to ask about which pub (real ale or otherwise) they would frequent after the game; the hope had well and truly manifested itself into the Blue Army.

Unfortunately, from 16 years as a Reading fan, I can truly vouch for the cliché “it’s the hope that kills you”

game, you would not have thought that was the case. A content grumble from the Man United fans was superseded by a booming “UUURRRZZZ” from the Reading fans- who had sacrificed at least £70 quid, their Saturday and inevitably their cardiac health- who occupied the corner. We might not have pulled off the shock many of us dreamt of, but we had certainly done ourselves proud as a club. As well as winding up some glory-hunters.

Puzzles

Cryptic Crossword
by Ifan Rogers



- Across:**
- 1. Closet with department cloak (8)
 - 5. Central part inside fabric or elastic (4)
 - 9. Oxford comedian is a little evil? (3)
 - 10. NASA tutor incorrect about space traveller (9)
 - 11. Vessel for mother's ruin (7)
 - 13. Keen for a lifetime in hesitation (5)
 - 14. Airspace tests goes wrong for evaders? (6, 7)
 - 19. Hold up booth (5)
 - 20. Landlocked country hidden in Finland ... or Radcliffe Camera (7)
 - 23. GI maniacs can be tricky people? (9)
 - 25. Computers and stuff? 100 in it (3)
 - 26. Agrees and dozes off (4)
 - 27. One who approves clumsy red noser (8)
- Down:**
- 1. Card game with the French causing play to stop (7)
 - 2. Exotic pure ecstasy used as currency (5)
 - 3. Authentic model leading kingdom (5)
 - 4. One from Cambridge up with a blow (3)
 - 6. Leo rang escort secreting source of vitamin C (7)
 - 7. Chemical compound caused by erroneous reset (5)
 - 8. Sincere entertainer accommodating half of demands (6)
 - 12. Beginners originally direct emotional poem of praise (3)
 - 15. Formally accused and debited (7)
 - 16. Article taken in setting fit for a king (6)
 - 17. Direct a sprint (3)
 - 18. Wiser about streetcars going back (7)
 - 19. Oddly spin my own name (5)
 - 21. Retiring forensics team in party night-club (5)
 - 22. Tracks, supports and complains (5)
 - 24. Initially a normal name (3)

View last issue's answers on the *Cherwell* website...

Kevin and Timmy and Emptiness

by Sean Hartnett

