VNI: Oxford’s unique and costly inflation index

Cherwell News investigates.

The Van Noorden Index, Oxford's unique inflation index which is often used to inform annual college rent increases, is consistently higher than standard national inflation indices and has recently come under fire for its lack of transparency.

When compared to the national inflation indices calculated by the Office for National Statistics such as the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the Consumer Price Index including housing costs (CPIH), the VNI trends consistently higher. This holds true for 2022, with the VNI standing at 12.86% versus CPI and CPIH figures of 9.10% and 7.90% respectively. This term, as JCRs negotiate rents for the next academic year, the VNI sits at 13.60%.

Concerns about the VNI have been raised in the SU that there is not enough transparency about the data underlying the VNI. One JCR president expressed their concerns with using the Van Noorden Index to determine rent increases, telling Cherwell: "Using the VNI to calculate rent increases is outdated. It seems to have been consistently higher than other national inflation indices and fails to consider how students will be able to afford these increases, considering student loan increases are capped at 7%, when over the past two years, the VNI has been 13.60% and 12.86% respectively."

A Cherwell investigation into rent increases in Michaelmas 2022 found that they ranged between 1.8-12.9%, depending on which college a student attends. The 12.9% hike was from Christ Church, who were using the 2022 VNI figure of 12.86%.

The Van Noorden Index (VNI), a system created decades ago, is named after the late Roger Van Noorden, an economist, fellow, and domestic bursar at Hertford College in the 1970s who is remembered in The Times as "acquiring a daunting reputation for prudence in the college and for financial expertise throughout the university". The VNI is an inflationary measure unique to Oxford, created to reflect the costs faced by Oxford colleges. It is calculated annually for all colleges by the Estates Bursar Committee, using aggregated cost information and forward forecasts. The VNI is based on the inflation rate of items like utilities, maintenance, and staffing - a narrower set of goods than is used to calculate national inflation indices. In 2020, New College described "the local 'Van Noorden Index'" as "collegiate inflation" or "in essence service-industry inflation".

Continued on page 5.
A year ago, when I was nought but a Silly Fresher, I was one of the poor unfortunate souls roped into organising the BNOC list. This seemed at first like a scary task, and then remained a scary task throughout the entire process. Even as a relative ‘newbie’ to Oxford tradition, I got the sense that BNOCs were something that students really cared about, and that the list was something I had to get right.

If you read last year’s list then you will know that I did, in fact, not get it right. With a surplus of Cherwell staff masquerading as popular figures, and with the remaining spaces occupied by more Union hackers than pub crawlers, this particular list turned out to be pretty unpopular. Coupled with certain –office politics– leading to a botched print spread and a flurry of Oxfesses espousing our misjudgement, fresher-me realised that my list was a flop.

However, in a storied show of perseverance (or maybe just a narcissistic bid to place my own name on the list), the BNOCs are back again. I don’t know if this list is any better; I’m sure many will argue it’s worse. If one thing’s for sure, it’s that we haven’t learnt any lessons about not featuring our own staff members. However, our publishers have asked us to create a ‘stir’ this term to drive up revenue, and we’re hoping that all press is good press, even when we are ‘the press’. So please, dear reader, whether you rip the list to shreds or find it mildly amusing, make sure you at least talk about it.

Meg Lintern
Editor-in-Chief

 Whilst the BNOC list is undoubtedly one of the biggest attractions of Trinity term, for some, Trinity is categorised by another event: rent negotiations. Sorry to get serious here, but whilst negotiations may be something that most people aren’t aware of, the cost-of-living crisis makes it difficult to ignore. Having undergone rent negotiations myself recently, I’ve come out feeling relieved that I go to a college which seems to understand the impact that rent increases have on already struggling students. However, the same can’t be said of all colleges – and whilst it’s too early to say what the outcome of rent negotiations will be, the elusive “VNI” figure, which many colleges use to determine their rent increases, stands at an astronomical 13.6%. The University estimates that Oxford accommodation costs range from £610 to £810 a month – over a 6 month period, this would be an increase of between £550-£660, and for some, this can be the difference between eating or starving. Financial support increases are also far from proportional: the Oxford bursary will be rising by 4%, and the government maintenance loan will be increasing by 2.8% next year. Stay tuned, as in the coming weeks, the Cherwell news team will seek to highlight the effects of rent increases across colleges, and what it might mean for you.

Editorial | 2
Vol. 298 | 1st week
Friday 28th April 2023

Jack Twyman
Deputy Editor

So it’s that time of year again... no not spring, rather Cherwell’s Top 40 BNOC List of 2023. Love them or hate them BNOCs are set to remain a perennial presence within the University. However, they are most definitely an source of controversy and this year’s list aims to reflect that.

To those other than Union hacks who actually care, I hope this list shows you that the Union is far from proportional: the Oxford bursary will be rising by 4%, and the government maintenance loan will be increasing by 2.8% next year. Stay tuned, as in the coming weeks, the Cherwell news team will seek to highlight the effects of rent increases across colleges, and what it might mean for you.

In conclusion, Cherwell has shown that the Union is no longer the sole creator of BNOCs, and that focusing on your passions (PM aspirations aside) is the best new pathway to fame. The BNOC list will always be a marmite issue, but hopefully it’s a bit more palatable now.

This year that’s passed, with Ukrainian Society President Varoslava Bukhta and incoming SU President Danial Hussein both featured for the first time. The new Diplomatic Society flourished this year, and elevated its President Rosie Wigglesworth to BNOC status. Student activist Beau Boka Batesa also features after a profile in our Week 0 print, and Lauren Webb who led Oxford women rugby team to victory at Varsity takes 17th Place. Drag Queen Brodie Brain – a success story of the OULGBTQ+ Society’s drag cuppers also debuts. All in all this BNOC list is diverse with around 65 per cent identifying as female, and around 35 per cent POC. Sorry @ Jacob Rees Mogg and @ Boris Johnson your successors aren’t guaranteed BNOC fame.

Get Involved! Follow Cherwell Commissions on Instagram

©CHERWELL.COMMISSIONS

Izzie Alexandrou
Editor-in-Chief

Editor-in-Chief
Meg Lintern / Izzie Alexandrou

Senior Editorial Team
Deborah Oggunnoki / Jutistina Roman / Jack Twyman / Maggie Wilcox / Oliver Hall / Suzanne Antelme / Thomas Bristow / Zoe Abeeroje

News and Investigations Editors
Alexandra Hedström-Blake / Andy Wei / Anika Gupta / Becky Powell / Binta Demgoc / Cecilia Catmur / Jakub Trybule / Olivia Boyle / Phinn Hubbard / Kutis Hall

Comment Editors
Adam Saxion / Ailish Gaughan / Nyat Aron-Adam Saxon / Ailish Gaughan

Profile Editors
Freddie Evans / Humzaah Ali / Io Oswald / Natascha Norton

Features Editors
Amelia Dowell / Ayesha Chakravarti / Ellie Whelan / Luke Dale / Oliver Smith / Sahar Malaika / Tom Grigg

Culture Editors

Life Editors
Ayaat Yassin-Kassab / Lottie Tellyn / Maryam Mazhar / Sonia Shuster / Sophie Magalhaes

Sports Editors
Jess Cullen

Puzzles
Lewis Callister / Sarah Beard

Creative Team
Sean Hartnett / W.S Luk / Tom Godfrey / Yuan Yuan Foo

In conclusion, Cherwell has shown that the Union is no longer the sole creator of BNOCs, and that focusing on your passions (PM aspirations aside) is the best new pathway to fame. The BNOC list will always be a marmite issue, but hopefully it’s a bit more palatable now.

A party to make the headlines!

Get your ticket while you can

with

Cherwell • The Oxford Student • The Oxford Blue • The Isis • PHASR • The Lunchbox

3rd May, 8pm til late at Thirst Bar, Oxford
**Oxford students attend London XR Protests**

**Jakub Trybull reports.**

Oxford students joined thousands of climate protestors by gathering outside the Houses of Parliament last weekend to demand the Government cease all new fossil fuels searches immediately. The mass demonstration dubbed "The Big One" involved over 200 different groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth and has been led by Extinction Rebellion (XR).

It has been four years since the group brought the capital to a standstill by parking a pink boat in Oxford Circus and causing the UK Parliament to declare a “climate emergency”. It is also the first major demonstration since the group announced in January that it would no longer use disruption tactics in demonstrations (something it, and other climate groups, have been criticised for doing in the past).

The coalition had two demands for the government: the immediate halting of all new fossil fuel projects and the establishment of emergency citizens' assemblies to “let the people decide how to end the fossil fuel era quickly and fairly”.

The deadline for a response was set for Monday 5pm where protestors gathered in Parliament square. The failure of the government to respond led XR co-founder, Clare Farrell, to vow to step up campaigning and action across the country.

Student Rebellion Oxford, part of XR Oxford, hoped to have 100 students participate in the protest. They claim this was probably not met, especially with the demonstration coinciding with Collections weekend. Oliver Sworder, a spokesperson for Student Rebellion Oxford and biologist at Keble, told Cherwell: “Although we didn’t make the target, nearly 500 rebels went along from Oxfordshire and we hope mobilisation may make more students come next time.”

He continues: “I left genuinely hopeful. Not that that government would heed the demand, but hopeful that somewhere between 20,000-50,000 people showed up-all with a common goal.

“It felt almost like a festival; children played in the streets, music was performed, volunteers gave out free food, talks about proportional representation, as well as on the state of the climate, or veganism, or people’s experiences were given, by MPs, normal people, and even celebrities such as Carice van Houten from Game of Thrones.

XR Oxford organised a coach to London and XR Youth went via train. Other individuals made their own way there but coincidentally caught many of the same trains or buses. Hertford’s Environment and Ethics rep, Beatrice McWilliams, echoed sentiments of hope and how protests can help cure eco-anxiety, telling Cherwell that “calling out [the lack of action] with thousands of others in the heart of London was a very valuable experience.”

Other students have criticised the protestors’ decision to move their way to London rather than staging protests in local areas. Some see this as hypocrisy as protestors will have inevitably caused emissions through fossil fuel use on vans. However, Sworder has rebutted these claims: “When we live in a society of no alternative, and when the government right now is extremely centralised, I think it is unfair in the absence of realistic alternatives that would still have the same impact.”

He notes that the protest was designed to “gather people together to foster conversation and connection, so doing so outside parliament is the best way of doing so, although there may be plans for more localised ones in the future.”

Regarding Oxford-specific climate action, Student Rebellion Oxford welcomes the new traffic measures but argues that the University can do more, with continued acceptance of donations from dirty companies and the careers service promoting students down the career pipeline into “industries profiting off the destruction of our future”.

**Fintech entrepreneur funds scholarships for Black British students**

**Rufus Hall reports.**

Oxford's Black Academic Futures programme has made two fully funded postgraduate scholarships available to Black British students.

Both course fees and living costs will be covered by the scholarship which will be available to Black British students across all subject areas. The scholarships also come with on-course mentoring provision for students. The first six candidates are expected to begin their studies in the 2023/2024 academic year.

The programme is supported by the philanthropist and fintech entrepreneur Valerie Moran, who moved to London from Zimbabwe in 2004 to pursue a career in financial technology. In 2019, she was listed in the Financial Times as one of the most influential BAME leaders in tech.

The university has relied upon Moran’s generous philanthropic support to finance Black Academic Futures, which aims to address the under-representation of Black students at Oxford. In the postgraduate sector, the representation of UK-domiciled Black students in Oxford was 3.5% below the average for UK higher education institutions.

Moran said: “ethnic minority students need support from people like myself to ensure that future generations are given every opportunity to apply and compete for the same job opportunities.”

The programme began in 2020 and has since grown to provide up to 30 full scholarships to Black British students annually. A 27% increase in applications from UK-domiciled Black applicants for full-time postgraduate research degrees in the year 2021/2022 followed the launch of the programme.

The University has said that “the programme builds on Oxford’s ongoing efforts to increase the number of postgraduate students from under-represented groups more broadly, and reaffirms the University’s commitment to addressing race equality, combatting discrimination and building an inclusive postgraduate community where all members feel welcome, valued and respected.”

**Oxford project maps Ukrainian refugee crisis**

**Toby Carmichael reports.**

Oxford’s researchers have released a significant report tracking the complex internal displacement of Ukraine’s population.

Published in the Population and Development Review, the team from the Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science and senior author of the report, remarked upon the metric’s humanitarian applications: “This metric is one of the only quantitative estimates of internal displacement in virtual real-time, which we are continuing to develop to help those in need during humanitarian crises.”

The researchers are hopeful that the report’s findings could be used to aid vulnerable people still within Ukraine. Prior to the publication of the study, data on displacement in Ukraine had mainly focused on those crossing borders into neighbouring countries. However, Dr Leasure noted that he and his team had become aware of the need to shed more light on the thirty-eight million Ukrainians who remained in the country: “it became really clear to us that our daily population estimates could help the United Nations and others to assess humanitarian needs and develop a targeted response strategy.”

The Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science continues to strive to provide research in the hope of reaching those Ukrainian civilians who require aid the most.
Students shoot first feature film in 40 years

Phin Hubbard reports.


The last feature film written, directed and starred in by Oxford University students was Hugh Grant’s first flick, “Privileged” released in 1982. It was criticized by Variety magazine at its release for having ”limited interest” to a wider audience but that Grant, billed as “Hughie Grant”, gave a convincing performance. Without “Privileged”, it would be difficult to imagine the fact of “Breakwater” but with conceptual ground cleared and the advantage of acknowledging its forebear’s weaknesses, perhaps this feature will have a wiser critical reception.

The film hits its £10,000 crowdfunding goal on Indiegogo and raised roughly £9,000 from the proceeds of an art auction held in Oriel College Hall with donated pieces by British artist Maggi Hambling and cartoonist Steven Appleby as well as a lunch at Fortnum & Masons all selling. Chen beamed when remembering the gala, adding that profits from sales of student artworks were split between the “Breakwater” fund and the artists themselves.

Morgan told Cherwell: “What has been the biggest challenge about doing this fundraising is that we basically have the same budget as an [Oxford Playhouse] show. But the support framework for that, because it is so tried and tested and happens every term is really there. The Cameron Mackintosh drama fund stopped funding films and what they give to a normal production at the Playhouse would have covered our entire film. So, we have had to go about it through other means. We’ve tried BFI grants and the Arts Council before but because we’re students we’re not eligible for them.”

Notably, there have been rumblings on Oxess regarding a motion put to Balliol JCR requesting funding for “Breakwater” which was unsuccessful. Morgan argued that a misunderstanding of the nature of the way JCRs fund art was behind the expressions of antipathy towards the request. Lead Danny McNamara added: “You will realize that the ‘daddy’s-money’ thing is just so inappropriate to say. Most of us went to state schools. Like a few of us, I came on an access scheme. I clawed my way into acting and to say I got there easily is just, I thought, quite comical.”

The film was shot over twenty-eight days from mid-March to mid-April on the Suffolk coast and in Oxford with professional actors like Shaun Paul McGrath rubbing shoulders with amateurs making their debut like Danny who attends Exeter College for whom this was his first time in front of the camera. “The learning curve was very, very steep”, he admitted. Reflecting on the change from theatre to film: “In some ways, its much easier than when you’re on stage. You don’t have to imagine anything; it’s all just there. Like, you don’t have to imagine you’re in the sea, you’re actually in the sea. It was quite cold.”

Morgan describes the film as a "psychological drama" filmed in a naturalistic style as "what we want to do is get inside the minds of the characters.” He joked: “There’s no insane car chase set pieces of cinematography”. The camera crew themselves were young professional filmmakers based in London.

The film will not be premiered until 2025 which Morgan and Chen hope will take place outside the Oxford-sphere at international film festivals like Toronto International Film Festival and Raindance Film Festival.

Medical Science lecture recordings will not be scrapped, department says

Oliver Sandall reports.

Early last week, students belonging to the medical science division (MSD) were sent a form from their student representatives polling views about lecture recordings and student well-being. Following a meeting last term, chaired by the associate head of the MSD, concerns over lecture attendance and its effect on mental health had been raised. Whilst the MSD has confirmed that lecture recordings won’t be cancelled, it is unclear what other measures are being considered.

A 14-question questionnaire from the student representatives polling of students to the MSD with student opinions. The form states: “This is just a preliminary polling of views. This will not necessarily be actioned. This is just to make student opinion clear to the division.”

This has led to some students worrying that lecture recordings might be stopped altogether. One Oxess said: “To the medical science division trying to get rid of lecture recordings because NOT attending lectures is affecting mental wellbeing: are you delusional?”

Lecture recordings, brought in initially as a necessity, have been used to help students cope with the workload, according to the MSD. One student pointed out that this was performed on a research methods course, “When I watch the recording I can go beyond this sphere. And whilst [the film] is very much made up of the people here obviously, we don’t like to think of ourselves as a student film but rather as an independent film.”

A documentary of the film’s production will be screened on 3rd June 2023 and will be followed by a Q & A with the cast and crew. Image Credit: Jemima Chen

Analysis: Lecture recordings are a necessity for today’s Oxford student

Frederick Maud comments.

As something of a Luddite in these matters, my heart instinctively rejoices at the thought of a return to ‘the old ways’. ‘Everybody seated on time, and their eyes fixed with ardent fascination upon the enlightened scholar, bestowing upon a room of enthralled students their ephemeral, and yet timeless, gems of wisdom. Then, I remember my head. This image is a romantic illusion. Not just post-Covid, but quite frankly in any period of history. In-person lectures do of course carry a certain quality that can never quite be re-created in virtual form, whatever dystopian substitution Mark Zuckerberg’s Meta nightmares might have in store.

But online lectures, I am convinced, are not just a convenience. They are a necessity. Rather than induce laziness in their viewers, as is so often claimed, online lectures are now an integral component of the hectic, unpredictable and invariably time-impoverished lifestyle that is the Oxford University student’s, let alone the medics’. Crucial to mastering this lifestyle, as we all know, is flexibility. This is what the online lecture provides.

Certainly, routine plays a critical role, both academically and for one’s own mental health. However, I am decidedly unconvinced by those who protest that online rob students of a fixed routine. Such a position assumes an extraordinary lack of self-discipline on the part of students who reached and passed an Oxford interview. After all, it’s not as though I get through six history books a week because a steady lecturer is stood peering over my shoulder. To those who accuse us of sloth, have ye faith? We have brains and an ounce of concentration yet.

If we continue to strip back the fanciful dreams of lecture halls filled with choruses of eloquent rhetoricians, we find that the average student’s practical experience is dominated, more often than not, by the desperate struggle to keep up with the pace at which some of our most esteemed academics convert the contents of their cerebra into speech. ‘If only’, I hear the medic lament, ‘I had some means of slowing this wretched thing down.’ That ‘wretched thing’, that crucial piece of medical information, might well be the difference between life and death, or - dare we conceive it - pass or fail. Once again, the online lecture holds the key.
Astrophoria Foundation Year gives its first offers

Martha Smith reports.

Thirty-five students received word that they had secured a place on Oxford’s Astrophoria Foundation Year for 2023/2024 entry. The Astrophoria Foundation Year is aimed at academically promising students who have experienced considerable setbacks in their education, preventing them from meeting the demands of an undergraduate offer.

The foundation year has been in place at Lady Margaret Hall since 2016 and has been described by one student as having been “beneficial for [their] self-growth, not just as a student but also as a person.” Notable alumni include Danial Hussain, the current President-Elect of the Student Union.

In the coming year, Exeter, Jesus, Mansfield Somerville, St Anne’s, St Hugh’s, Trinity and Wadham will all welcome their first waves of foundation year students.

The Astrophoria Foundation Year constitutes a further expansion of the university’s attempts to improve access with eligibility for the scheme depending on a number of criteria. According to the University, students should have experienced all three of: (1) socio-economic difficulties (e.g. having to leave education at a certain post code), (2) school-based difficulties (including attendance at a non-selective school where most students are eligible for free school meals) and (3) difficulties of individual experience, such as experience acting as a young carer.

Students who have spent time in the care system are also eligible for the foundation year, regardless of whether they are considered to have been disadvantaged in other areas. In 2020, Oxford launched Opportunity Oxford, a university-wide summer bridging course designed to help disadvantaged students prepare for their first year of university studies.

When asked what distinguished Opportunity Oxford from the Astrophoria Foundation Year, the University told Cherwell: “The two programmes are aimed at different target groups of students.” “Opportunity Oxford is suitable for students who are ready to start Oxford degrees with modest support”, while “the Astrophoria Foundation Year aims to give more substantial support to students who have experienced significant educational and/ or personal disadvantage and so need a more sustained intervention”.

Fully funded by the University, Astrophoria students have the opportunity to continue on to an undergraduate degree without undergoing the same formal assessment process. To gain their places on the programme, however, all 33 offer-holders (along with approximately 500 other applicants) underwent an assessment process consisting of a questionnaire followed by interviews taking place in March 2023. While the majority of teaching offered during the foundation year will resemble the format of an undergraduate degree, the University has recently confirmed that the Astrophoria programme also offers additional tuition not otherwise found in the standard degree structure.

This includes the Preparation for Undergraduate Studies’ course, targeted at helping with students’ personal development through confidence building and help in the development of practical academic and communication skills. Academically, students on the foundation year are offered the choice of one of four courses, including Humanities; Chemistry, Engineering and Material Science; Philosophy, Politics and Economics; and Law, before specialising in an undergraduate degree of their choice.

In time, the programme is expected by the University to expand to all undergraduate Oxford colleges.

Global youth climate training programme to launch in May 2023

Applications opened earlier this month for the Youth Climate Training programme, a collaboration between Oxford Net Zero and the Global Youth Coalition. Training will begin on the 3rd of May and run for 13 fortnightly sessions. This training will cover key discussion areas and aims to give youth the knowledge to engage in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change system. Numerous Oxford Net researchers will be teaching on the programme. The course will delve into important topics including Climate Change, Climate Justice and Climate Finance. Registration is open to anyone under 35 engaged in the global climate movement.

Malala Yousafzai awarded honorary fellowship at Linacre

Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace Prize winner and Oxford University alumnus, was recently awarded an honorary fellowship at Linacre College. The Programme has successfully provided scholarships for 5 students of Pakistani origin at Oxford University, as well as 6 work placements at the World Bank office in Pakistan. According to the co-founder of the Programme, Dr Talat Saleem Pirzada (Linacre), “the OPP has become a beacon of hope for thousands of Pakistani students aspiring to pursue higher education at top institutions worldwide”.

News Shorts

Sex toys found in student pigeons at St Hugh’s

On Wednesday, it was revealed in an email from the Dean of St Hugh’s that students had been “leaving unsolicited items in other people’s pigeon holes.” At the end of last term, “sex toys were found distributed to a number of people who were not expecting them”, causing “offence and distress.” St Hugh’s has made clear that “any future incident of this kind will be considered as harassment and subject to a disciplinary investigation which could result in a sanction up to and including suspension or expulsion.”
F

from the cancellation of regattas to health advisories against swimming due to sewage dumps, the once pristine rivers of Oxford are now increasingly unsafe. While local authorities are attempting to safeguard waterways, students are having to significantly change their activities on the water.

Current conditions
Only 14% of rivers in England meet internationally recognised ecological standards. The company which presently controls sewage in and around Oxford, Thames Water, consistently records hundreds of “sewage incidents” each year. According to Government data, the company has been given an amber rating for water quality for nine out of the last eleven years, including each year since 2015. Records of water levels, going as far back as 1995, indicate that periods of severe flooding or drought are becoming more common, with periodic and extensive floods causing considerable damage and disruption.

In Oxford, Castle Mill Stream continues to display dangerous levels of bacteria - despite being the only official bathing spot on the Thames.

Since privatisation, infrastructure has been neglected, with no new reservoirs built since 1991. Estimates suggest that 20% of the system’s total water supply is lost to leakage. Howard Street was flooded for weeks in freezing conditions earlier last month, after a burst pipe went unrepaired by Thames Water from late January to February.

Student activities threatened by dangerous waters
Aside from the economic, ecological, and sanitary impact of this state of affairs, river quality has a major impact on student recreation. Oxford’s river system and the sports which make use of them have been central to student and faculty life in the University for generations, but the impact of inclement weather and unpredictable sewage discharges is increasingly felt by recreational societies and boating clubs across the city.

The sport perhaps most intimately affected is wild swimming. The founder and head of the club, Ellie Ford, told Cherwell that Oxford Wild Swimming has “experienced a massive number of cancellations due to unsafe conditions in the river”, cancelling over 80% of their group swims in Michaelmas 2022 alone. This, they argue, is due to “almost constant” sewage discharges from Cassington and Witney Sewage Treatment Works, which sit upstream from Port Meadow. The society’s representatives are critical of Thames Water’s handling of the situation, citing irregular reporting of sewage releases, and feeling as though they “can never be confident that [they] aren’t being exposed to sewage”. Ford also emphasises that cancellations of planned group swims have a considerable impact on the mental health of students. Many rely on these activities as a form of stress relief and social connection. Group swims provide a valuable opportunity to relax, recharge, and connect with others.

James Evans, current president of the Oxford University Canoe Kayak Club, told Cherwell that “two or three sessions” were cancelled this year so far, due to sewage discharge on at least two occasions, and high water levels on another. He added: “to my knowledge, this has only happened in Oxford, but it has also happened at other sites.”

Likewise, the former president, gleston, believes that “the Isis has deteriorated consistently over time”, attributing this to increased discharge rates from sewage stations at Stanton Harcourt, South Leigh, and on the Winderush, and recalls the club cautioning members to wash their hands after every outing. Members of St. Catherine’s and St. Hugh’s College Boat Clubs corroborate these details, citing weather patterns and increasingly frequent red-flag warnings signalling dangerous currents as particular sources of frustration. One rower at St. Hugh’s points out that, while sewage does not often directly impact session planning, it remains a potential health risk due to the possibility of “nasty infections” in exposed cuts or sores, and disrupts students’ enjoyment of their time on the water.

Changes on the horizon?
Thames Water provides consumers with a storm discharge map, but acknowledges that “this doesn’t tell the full story” with regards to water quality, and has pledged to modernise and expand their supply and sanitation infrastructure. The company has “committed £1.6 billion of investment in our sewage treatment works and sewers over the next two years”, specifically dedicating £15 million to upgrades at the Witney treatment facility. They have also pledged a 50% reduction of discharges in the Thames Valley by 2030.

The precise timetable for such changes remains unclear with both public and private partners pledging action in the face of an increasingly volatile climate. The environmental and economic fallout of sewage discharges and crumbling infrastructure is reason enough to demand a change, but the fallout on student life, on the mental health of student athletes, and on Oxford residents’ recreation only serves to emphasise how central the rivers are to life in this city. As recent demonstrations and complaints show, in Oxford itself and its environs, popular sentiment is increasingly critical of the water management status quo. In addition to petitions and public opinion, the issue has caught the attention of local government and Members of Parliament alike. On 30th January Oxford City Council unanimously called for Thames Water to be taken back into public ownership, while Oxford’s MPs have pushed for action on the question of water quality. The UK Government, under pressure from Labour opposition, has also recently put in place legally binding targets regarding sewage dumping. These will come into effect by 2050.

Image Credits: Yuhao Wang
What makes a BNOC? Oxford’s Top 40 give Cherwell the inside scoop on how to become famous.

Jack Twyman discovers what it takes to earn a place on the infamous BNOC list.

BNOCs. Whether you love them or hate them, their continued presence in the University is guaranteed. From student activism and the Oxford Union to drama and sport, BNOCs come from all over the University. But how do they become so well-known? What’s the secret ingredient that elevates students to the height of University fame? How did Daniel Dipper become such a staple of the Oxford nightlife scene? How did Leah Aspden come to be seen as a future celebrity in the making?

Eleven of our chosen 40 BNOCs answered our questions on their experiences being a BNOC. Of these, only one confessed to fostering long-term designs on this dubious prize. Shermar Pryce told Cherwell, “It has been my ambition since I was nought but a swaddled tot. Upon entering the hallowed halls of Oxford, I unrelentingly pursued my lifelong passion. Of these, only one confessed to fostering long-term designs on this dubious prize. Shermar Pryce told Cherwell, “It has been my ambition since I was nought but a swaddled tot. Upon entering the hallowed halls of Oxford, I unrelentingly pursued my lifelong passion. Of these, only one confessed to fostering long-term designs on this dubious prize. Shermar Pryce told Cherwell, “It has been my ambition since I was nought but a swaddled tot. Upon entering the hallowed halls of Oxford, I unrelentingly pursued my lifelong passion. Of these, only one confessed to fostering long-term designs on this dubious prize. Shermar Pryce told Cherwell, “It has been my ambition since I was nought but a swaddled tot. Upon entering the hallowed halls of Oxford, I unrelentingly pursued my lifelong passion.

For the rest of respondees, BNOC-hood was an honour that arrived unpursued, even unannounced. Farabee Pushpita told Cherwell, “I didn’t even know what a BNOC was when I arrived at Oxford.” For Brodie Brain “the plan was get shit done in the most authentic way possible, don’t suffer BS, and make wonderful friends along the way”. But Brodie has enjoyed rising to fame in Oxford: “I suppose being an actress relies on a certain level of public validation. But I’ll always be my own harshest critic.” Leah Aspden agrees: “I have done so much drama stuff to the detriment of my actual degree so it’s nice to feel like I’ve made it.” Most BNOCs just wanted to enjoy their time here. For Daniel Dipper realisation came “at the point when people started asking for photographs and everyone seemed to know my name, which was quite a surprise.”

Our BNOCs’ responses vary when asked how they thought they became a BNOC. Being social was a key factor – one anonymous response told prospective BNOCs to “spend more time being involved in societies and with friends than doing your degree.” Farabee enjoys “making new friends everywhere (hanging out is great for procrastinating on my degree)! Other BNOCs focused on their USP—for Lucy Wang their YouTube channel, for Hamish Nash his Oxfess comments tagging @ Shu Huang. Leah Aspden said, “I wanted to bring a Northern twist to Oxford, and in order to do so I had to be the loudest and most dramatic Northerner going.” For Brodie “getting involved in Drag Cuppers launched my rise to stardom so I would definitely say being queer was the biggest factor.” One anonymous response said it was “a mix of being very outspoken about racial injustice, being an actress, having a somewhat embarrassing TikTok and being very unapologetic about my personality or opinions.” Daniel focused on getting involved with activities “from DJing regularly, to being Magdalen ICR President, to being involved in the Oxford Union, as well as wishing everyone happy birthday! And we can’t forget my red jacket which people seem to recognise me by.” He added that, “some people say the way I am is almost like a cartoon character; not sure if there’s anything in that, but maybe a personality open to parody.”

Are BNOCs proud of their title? Some questioned its usefulness: “Is it really going to go on my CV?” However, many think “that it’s nice to be known and recognised by people, and I’m excited for the opportunities it presents to meet cool new people as well.” Leah is “buzzing” from her elevation to this sought-after status. Brodie “will definitely use it in some drag branding.” Some were nonplussed: “I feel pretty neutral about it really. I’m sure I divide opinion. But at least I am true to myself.” Another was sceptical “because of its associations with the Union.” Lucy is “holding firmly onto the few personality traits that I still have that aren’t studying Maths, so definitely!” But someone was keen to emphasise “it just depends what the reasons for that are! Hopefully mine are positive.” For Shermar: “it’s the chance to spread a generous dose of jollity throughout college and the wider Oxford community that truly brings self-satisfaction.” Daniel is conflicted “I don’t know if I really see it as something to be proud of, of course it’s nice people know me and hopefully respect the work I do, and its great people really enjoy my DJ sets.”

So what are the five key things you need to become a BNOC?

1. A strong brand and social media presence: As one BNOC, advised us, “make unique fashion choices, use memorable phases, and add a touch of controversial takes and actions. Transform into an idea, a concept even, rather than just a person. Develop a massive ego and over-inflated self-worth can’t help but notice you.”

2. Embrace a chronic lack of sleep to ensure you can attend everything: Since most of us have just a 3- or 4-year degree, and 40 hours of each of our weeks are supposed to be spent studying, something has to go. If that something is sleep, so be it. You shall go to the ball, Cinderella! And also Port & Policy, Beer & Bickering, Parkend Wednesdays, and Miscellaneous Freud Events.

3. Understand that more is more: Make more friends. Post more posts. Serve more. There are only 40 spaces on the BNOC list, so you’ve got to one-up every other student you meet in social kudos, media recognition, and pure unadulterated BNOC energy. A place on this list doesn’t come easy - it takes hustle.

4. Make the Oxfess admins your new best friends: Oxfess has a stranglehold over the attention spans of Oxford students - just ask HN and SH on this one. The easiest way to boost your name recognition is simply to get liking, get commenting, and get yourself that ‘top fan’ badge of honour.

5. Ensure that the Cherwell editors know who you are: As much as we’d like to pretend that this list isn’t rigged, we certainly dabble with the rankings a little. Despite a whopping 600 responses on our BNOC survey, most people ranking 25 and under had 3 or fewer votes. Who calls the ties? Well, the editors of course. So, if you want those BNOC aspirations to be realised, maybe make yourself a few friends on the Senior Editorial Team...

Those five are not exclusive: for Leah, the most important factors were “to play Macbeth in Macbeth, slay your rustication and be called ‘alright’ by Russell Brand”. And also “vote for yourself on the BNOC list”, though I should add you need to be a verifiable BNOC to get away with this one. Someone advises to “be discreet, wear killer fits on corn market, wear killer fits in the Radcam, do everything but not necessarily everyone.”

So there you have it, the secret recipe shared from Oxford’s current A-listers to its future one. Follow these tips and you can firm the guarantee on achieving BNOC-hood by the end of the year. Look forward to the assurance of you self-worth as crowds gather to pay homage to the newest BNOC on the block - though make sure to ignore the hushed whispers that undermine your newfound glory. BNOC status can guarantee many things, though probably not happiness. So what will you be known for? The good? The bad? Or the ugly?

Artwork by Yuan Yuan Foo
DAN DIPPER
3rd Year, Magdalen
Dan is best known as a DJ and social mobility campaigner; when he’s not behind the decks, he'll either be wishing people happy birthday or in the library revising for his finals.

CHLOE POMFRET
1st year, St Catz
Chloe has been the OULC social sec, hosting their famous Beit/Bickering, but she may be better known for her viral TikToks and study-Instagram. She's also the estranged rep for Class Act.

MATTHEW DICK
2nd year, Magdalen
In Matthew's own words, his personality only consists of 3 things: 1. Having the last dance. 2. Only drinking water and hot chocolate. 3. Being Union president.

YAROSLAVA BUKHTA
2nd year, St John's
Yaroslava has worked in media and NGO spheres in Ukraine for a couple of years. She is now doing her MSc in Social Anthropology and is the current head of the Oxford University Ukrainian Society.

JAMES NEWBERY
3rd year, Teddy Hall
James was President of the Drama Society for the last year. When he's not doing drama-related activities, you'll probably find him in Plush, losing his mind to Beyoncé's Renaissance.

DISHA HEDGE
2nd year, St John’s
Disha (left) is President-elect of the Union. Last year she was co-chair of the Women’s campaign. In her own words, she also "posts constant (and admittedly cringe) fit checks on my Instagram story."

LAUREN WEBB
2nd year, Corpus Christi
This season, Lauren was the youngest ever Rugby Union Blues Captain, and led the Blues to their first Varsity win since 2016.

IMAAN SAEED
2nd year, Teddy Hall
Imaan is the TT23 president of Oxford's Law Society. She urges all readers of this list to get themselves a membership.

BEAU BOKA-BATESA
2nd year, Lincoln
Beau is a poet, environmentalist, and occasional baller. When Beau isn't doing their degree, they're either online, banging out Plush on a Turnigy or taking advantage of £5.50 cocktails in a bar.

ROSIE WRIGGLESWORTH
2nd year, Keble
This year, Rosie is President of Oxford’s Diplomatic Society, co-ordinating embassy visits, ambassador talks, and evening events.

JASPHER MCBRIDE-OwuS
2nd year, Christ Church
Jasper was President of the Oxford Finance Society, but you might also know him from "gaping for breath on a college football pitch, tearing up Torpids or losing at pool in Balliol bar".

HANNAH EDWARDS
2nd year, Unr
In typical PPE fashion, this term Hannah is the Union’s librarian. When she’s not using her free time to argue with people (“competitive debating”) she loves college netball and, most importantly of all, Swifties.

HANNAH PORTER
2nd year, Trinity
According to Hannah, "when I'm not busy webbing, entering hops which bankrupt the JCR, working on The Isis, or planning VT23, you can find me in parkend keeping up my 100% attendance."

GRACIE ODDIE-JAMES
3rd year, Christ Church
You may know Grace from one of her many performances in Oxford and beyond. Where can you find her next? She says she's signed an NDA, but after a vodka lime soda at the KA, she may be inclined to tell you...

JULIA MARANHAO-WONG
1st year, St Anne’s
Julia is a Canadian-American from Boston. So far, her Oxford highlights include "being Cinderella at the Union Ball", where she is an elected member of the Standing Committee.
2nd year, Hertford
Fiona is a proud Kosovan and author who also works with organisations like the UNHCR, Magic Breakfast, Zero Gravity and Care4Calais to help raise funding and awareness.

2nd year, Christ Church
Lucy is studying maths, although she says that no one ever guesses it when they meet her. You might know her from her Youtube and Tik tok accounts, where she has over 100k subscribers combined.

2nd year, Regent’s Park
Finley, aka. Hummus Man, is known for founding Oxford’s infamous hummus society. Regarding the society, he has ominously warned our readers to “watch this space”.

2nd year, St Catz
Mia has previously served as EiC of The Isis and as Secretary of Asia-Pacific Society. This term, she’s hoping to serve at her English degree.

2nd year, St John’s
Mia has previously served as EiC of The Isis in Hilary, and as Secretary of Asia-Pacific Society. This term, she’s hoping to serve at her English degree.

2nd year, Regent’s Park
When she’s not writing the BNOC list, Jack’s busy with writing the rest of Cherwell, doing Diplo Soc, and living his best life wherever, whenever. He ran Tuesgays last Trinity but is best know for just being tall.

2nd year, Queen’s
Philip takes active roles in hockey, hockey, and the charity campaign “what’s a pound”. Seemingly confused as to his presence here, he “represents that you all too can make the list”.

2nd year, Somerville
Miranda was OU CD Blues Dance President for the first Oxford win in Varsity history, and is “known for treating this like it was Olympic Gold”. She’s also repping the Maths & Computer Scientists.

2nd year, Christ Church
Lucy is studying maths, although she says that no one ever guesses it when they meet her. You might know her from her Youtube and Tik tok accounts, where she has over 100k subscribers combined.

2nd year, St Catz
Meg and Izzie as Cherwell’s Editors in Chief. [Editor’s Note: Meg and Izzie wouldn’t let us publish this list unless we put them in it]

2nd year, St Anne’s
Farabee is an English student and writer. She loves posting incessantly on insta about art exhibits, pretty sights, and her friends.

2nd year, Christ Church
Lucy is studying maths, although she says that no one ever guesses it when they meet her. You might know her from her Youtube and Tik tok accounts, where she has over 100k subscribers combined.

2nd year, Jesus
As the co-President of Oxford Climate Society, you can usually find Guy doing something climate-related. However, if you’re lucky, you might also catch him “getting sturdy in Bridge”. 

2nd year, Somerville
Miranda was OU CD Blues Dance President for the first Oxford win in Varsity history, and is “known for treating this like it was Olympic Gold”. She’s also repping the Maths & Computer Scientists.

2nd year, Oriel
The Hacks fear her, the Journos revere her - Freya has broken many stories both in Cherwell and in nationals. She spends a lot of time having coffee with student politicians (and occasionally real ones).
Trinity: overrated or overhated?

Term of goodbyes
Georgie Cutmore

If you happen to spend time with anyone about to graduate - this Trinity, prepare to be hearing a lot of bizarre, melodramatic statements along the following lines: “This is the last time we’ll ever have hall dinner in 4th week ever again”. We’re all in one big toxic relationship with Oxford. Despite drowning us in work and giving us questionable standards of what is a normal, healthy lifestyle, Oxford terms are unique, exciting and full of adrenalin. I don’t know if Trinity is the best term, but it’s certainly the saddest - full of goodbyes, ‘last times’, and the realisation that you might just miss the place.

I love it!
Ailish Gaughan

Yes, unequivocally. Whilst the Gilmore Girls is obsessive in me, I love the autumnal vibes of Michaelmas, Trinity remains unbeatable. What would we do without sunny afternoons punting, swimming or sunbathing at Port Meadow, probably getting skin damage? Or all-day Pimm’s day-drinking at Summer Eights to procrastinate? Nothing makes revising for those pesky exams as bearable as sunny windows on the top floor of the Old Bod. Maybe we all have Seasonal Affective Disorder, but if you took away Trinity, I honestly think most of us would have rusticated by now.

Great for a fresher
Oli Sandall

Overpriced balls, day-drinking in sunny beer gardens, and cramming for exams - that’s kind of what I expected from Oxford, actually. After many weeks of grey skies and wet shoes, I look forward to slightly less grey skies and slightly drier feet. As a fresher, returning to Oxford in Trinity and once again seeing the (hopeful beautiful) college that you’ve learned (or have been forced) to love over the past two terms certainly makes you feel like you’ve settled in.

Why an AI Pause Would Be Detrimental To Humanity

Alexander Elliot

Imagine you had a pet parrot. One day, you heard it say “kill all humans”. Obviously, it doesn’t actually want to kill all humans; it can’t even understand what the phrase means. It’s just regurgitating what has been heard from elsewhere, perhaps from a TV programme in the background.

An AI saying it wants to “kill all humans” is the same thing, albeit on a grander scale. It takes what has been fed into it, identifies the patterns and words, and spits out what is asked of it by humans. I would posit that AI poses as much threat to human life as a parrot (perhaps even less, given it doesn’t have a beak).

Nonetheless, countless reasons have been given for halting AI development, culminating in the recent petition to “pause” development for six months. Predictably, it views ever-evolving human ingenuity as a fundamentally bad thing. The irony of the petitioners saying AI “could represent a profound change in the history of life on Earth” on the internet (which, to my knowledge, is not a naturally occurring phenomenon) is not lost on me.

Yes, “profound change” to history included such tragedies as world wars, famines, diseases, and nuclear weapons. But it also included the internet, penicillin, vaccines, modern agricultural methods, and countless other excellent inventions. Why can’t AI join the gallery of running an AI disinformation programme, or inventing, it is in the hands of those who wish to do harm with it. Rather than slow down, the economic process of creative destruction has made us richer and happier, and indeed helped the environment. I’m sure no one reading this article yearns for the future of life with this petition; quite the opposite. It scaremongers about “losing control of civilisation”, as if anyone has seriously suggested giving AI the right to vote or run for office. Even if you still disagree that AI will be positive and [its] risks [would] be manageable? Moving on to the claim about jobs. I am always sceptical when technology is decired on the grounds of “taking away jobs”. Of course, I could pay hundreds of people to comb through encyclopaedias until I find what I’m looking for; or I could use Google. I could pay someone on the street to go down to Greenwich and just my clock based on theirs; or I could use a more accurate wristwatch.

The economic process of creative destruction has made us richer and happier, and indeed helped the environment. I’m sure no one reading this article yearns for the future of life with this petition; quite the opposite. It scaremongers about “losing control of civilisation”, as if anyone has seriously suggested giving AI the right to vote or run for office. Even if you still disagree that AI will be positive and [its] risks [would] be manageable?

Should we have paused Jonas Salk’s research until we were sure that “[its] effects [would] be positive and [its] risks [would] be manageable”? Moving on to the claim about jobs. I am always sceptical when technology is decired on the grounds of “taking away jobs”. Of course, I could pay hundreds of people to comb through encyclopaedias until I find what I’m looking for; or I could use Google. I could pay someone on the street to go down to Greenwich and adjust my clock based on theirs; or I could use a more accurate wristwatch. The economic process of creative destruction has made us richer and happier, and indeed helped the environment. I’m sure no one reading this article yearns for the future of life with this petition; quite the opposite. It scaremongers about “losing control of civilisation”, as if anyone has seriously suggested giving AI the right to vote or run for office. Even if you still disagree that AI will be positive and [its] risks [would] be manageable?

Predictably, the petition decries the “out-of-control” race to develop new AI. This completely ignores how products that we use today were created. The mobile phone was famously a competition between two companies; the first call was made to inform competitors that they had lost the race. Smartphone builders did not collaborate with each other to create the first touchscreen phones. It is only through competition that products improve.

The Future of Life Institute is not improving the future of life with this petition; quite the opposite. It scaremongers about “losing control of civilisation”, as if anyone has seriously suggested giving AI the right to vote or run for office. Even if you still disagree that AI will be good for humanity, the fact is that the cat is out of the bag. No number of pauses, regulations, and bans will stop bad actors from using the technology. Unilaterally disarming ourselves is irrational. I don’t claim to know how AI will progress over the years any more than Nicolas-Joseph Cugnot could predict how cars would progress. Let’s allow it to develop to its potential, rather than shutting ourselves off from a better tomorrow.
A

h, BNOCs! Whether you hate them or love them, there's just something about BNOCs that brings out the best in Oxford. "Big Name on Campus." It sounds like an honorary title but really BNOCs are just glorified class clowns. And who doesn't love a class clown? Yes, they are annoying but that's the point! They break up the monotony of academic life. Without them, we would be lost in a sea of books and lectures.

BNOCs are providing a valuable service. Let's be real, we've all shared stories with our friends about the antics of our beloved campus celebrities. After all, how else are we entertained when attending societies, bars, and clubs was impossible.

Four of my course mates. Throughout first year, I found myself assigned to a household bubble of four over Corn Street for a week, end up on next year's an u a ! B O C l i s t.

Facing non-BNOCs, I often resent and not appreciate and lead me to often resent, and not appreciate and growth. Freshers week – a start talking about you. It's

Kelsey Monteith

friends with a BNOC is an adventure. You enter a whole new world of meeting new people, hearing wild stories, and accessing different opportunities. These guys are the rockstars of our era.

I can't understand why someone would dislike BNOC culture. It's just a part of life. Some people are popular, and some are not. If you do some things worth talking about, people will talk about you. It's s u r e h o u s e o n m a r k e t you'd lose them, and create my own social circle, I tried to do this. They bring people together. Picture the spark that is formed when you discover that your new friend shares the same level of dislike towards a particular big shot as you do. A lifelong friendship can be made! Talking about friendships, being

Let Down? 

apparently, as a finalist, I should expect to leave Oxford with either a Blue, a spouse, or a First, and yet I won't even be leaving having experienced the full three years of my degree. I have Covid to thank for that.

I came to Oxford with few expectations, not thinking that I would go to university at all, but there is something about coming back for the final year that really flattens these experiences. First and second year often take these personal academic interactions for granted, or even dread them, but Covid made realise how hard it is to care about your degree when you can mutiny yourself, turn off your camera, or have "internet problems" and go on your phone in between lessons. I also denied the opportunity to engage with my lecturers and tutors, some of the most world-renowned experts in topics which interested me, and I feel as though this led me to often resent, and not appreciate and love my course.

Despite this, I'm going to end on a positive note. I may not have a Blue, or a spouse, and I'm doubtful about getting a First, and I may be slightly bitter about the fun, socially packed lives that I have watched first and second years live. But that doesn't mean that I haven't enjoyed my time here. I have made many deep friends, joined a society, explored the city, and attended academic events. I believe that it is important not to dwell on what could have been, but to look back and appreciate the happy moments that have happened. It's the small things that make your university experience what is it, and I wouldn't give up those moments for the world.

although Covid may have been forgotten, or banished to the past, this social legacy has continued to haunt me. I'm not only felt the traditional, one person tute until second year that really flattens these experiences. First and second year often take these personal academic interactions for granted, or even dread them, but Covid made realise how hard it is to care about your degree when you can mutiny yourself, turn off your camera, or have "internet problems" and go on your phone in between lessons. I also denied the opportunity to engage with my lecturers and tutors, some of the most world-renowned experts in topics which interested me, and I feel as though this led me to often resent, and not appreciate and love my course.

B

Let Down?

The Debate Chamber

To BNOC or not to BNOC? Nyat and Adam go head to head

BNOCs. Those who never sleep. Some of them quite literally appear to be everywhere. The range of extracurricular opportunities available at Oxford seems to turn some people into absolute machines, with little regard for the widely accepted human necessities of eating and sleeping and (actually doing) their degree.

Some may argue that BNOC culture drives competition among students or is simply a natural outcome of having prestigious societies like the Oxford Union. Fine. Maybe it is inevitable. But that doesn't mean it can't be bad. There is no greater representative of how terribly two-faced BNOC culture can be than hacking. Of course, when you are friends with someone you are willing to do things like step foot in the union (shiver) to help them get their silly little role “playing politics”, but when someone you’ve conversed with twice all year suddenly turns round and starts begging for your vote it is hard to maintain a straight face. To be honest, that aspect of BNOC culture makes me despise student politics and makes me fearful of the people who will be running our country in the years to come.

to go by, there is a relatively high chance that someone who is high up in one of the many student societies will be our prime minister someday. I don’t get it wrong, they’re not all bad. Take for example those who are “social mobility campaigners” and use the platform they have cultivated to make a positive difference to real issues and the lives of future students. That is the positive impact that BNOC culture can have. Unfortunately, the vast majority are just looking for something to fill that empty space on their CV, or in their soul.

Love Island’s Token Black Girl

Nyat Aron-Yohannes

Winter Love Island has come to a close, and as we draw closer to the summer season of Love Island, many black viewers are filled with dread, waiting to see who will be the next token black woman on our screens. It’s fair to say that black female contestants have not had the best time on the dating show.

Year after year, the black woman faces an intolerable amount of rejection. Every season’s first episode starts with the contestants picking who they would like to couple up with based on appearance. Samira, the first black female contestant, was picked last. A year later, Liverpool was also picked last, followed by Leanne. Then Kaz was picked last, and this year’s Love Island saw the same trend continue. When Tanya made her debut as the newest token black girl, only one male contestant stepped forward to couple up with her – Shaq, the only male black contestant.

The others not stepping forward promoted a tokenism, with other institutions like our student societies. After all, if the current record is anything to go by, there is a relatively high chance that someone who is high up in one of the many student societies will be our prime minister someday. I don’t get it wrong, they’re not all bad. Take for example those who are “social mobility campaigners” and use the platform they have cultivated to make a positive difference to real issues and the lives of future students. That is the positive impact that BNOC culture can have. Unfortunately, the vast majority are just looking for something to fill that empty space on their CV, or in their soul.

Diversity is different from inclusion. After all, if the current record is anything to go by, there is a relatively high chance that someone who is high up in one of the many student societies will be our prime minister someday. I don’t get it wrong, they’re not all bad. Take for example those who are “social mobility campaigners” and use the platform they have cultivated to make a positive difference to real issues and the lives of future students. That is the positive impact that BNOC culture can have. Unfortunately, the vast majority are just looking for something to fill that empty space on their CV, or in their soul.

Love Island is not the first to practice tokenism, with other institutions like our university being culprits of the same practice.

Have you ever seen a university post where the ethnic minority takes center stage? It can appear disingenuous. Ultimately, it causes adverse effects for the token individual, like the feeling of isolation and being forced to deal with immense pressure. As we are edging towards our 10th season of Love Island, I hope this time will be different. And to my black women, we love you.
Oxford announces Trinity Term 2023 will be its last

After 927 continuous years, The University of Oxford has announced that Trinity Term 2023 will be its last term ever. “We think it’s time,” said Vice Chancellor Irene Tracey. “It’s important to know when one has overstayed one’s welcome, and so we will be packing up this operation once and for all after the end of exams.”

Classes have been convened in the area that is now University of Oxford since around the year 1096. Over hundreds of years the University grew into one of the most prestigious on Earth. “But nothing lasts forever,” said Tracey.

According to sources, the costs of keeping Oxford running had gone well over budget. While several donors offered to bail out Oxford, the University instead has decided to sell itself to a venture capital firm that is now University of Oxford since around the year 1096. Over hundreds of years the University grew into one of the most prestigious on Earth. “But nothing lasts forever,” said Tracey.

According to sources, the costs of keeping Oxford running had gone well over budget. While several donors offered to bail out Oxford, the University instead has decided to sell itself to a venture capital firm that intends to liquidate the University in order to pursue more profitable, efficient education enterprises.

Oxford has confirmed, however, that several spin-off universities are in the works now. The plans for these sub-franchises will be unveiled over the next several months, but rumor has it that Magdalen College and the Blavatnik School of Government may become their own brands within the next ten years. It is yet to be seen whether any of these spin-offs will be as successful as the classic Oxford tribute University, the University Cambridge.

Messages of sadness came from all corners of the world after Oxford made the announcement, with many world leaders current and former expressing their disappointment. “We’ll be sad to see it end, but best night I ever had was at Oxford” said former PM David Cameron. “I am devastated and for all after the end of exams.”

Irene Tracey. “It’s important to know when one has overstayed one’s welcome, and so we will be packing up this operation once and for all after the end of exams.”

“Regina George kept noticeably quiet during Limp Dick’s grilling by a hack of days gone by regarding a certain controversial speaker. Yet her facial expressions were easy enough to read as she endured the complaints of her one-time opponent. In true Trinity president style, Limp Dick faced questioning and an enthralling three hour not-Sitting meeting. Do watch out the next time you step into the library, as he successfully dug himself into several holes. These people clearly have even less to do with their lives than The Taoiseach with his 25 minute long presentation, or academics who spend their energy policing gender!”

“Thems the brakes,” said Boris Johnson. “Always more to come.

John Evelyn

With Limp Dick and the week 1 debate absent, JE fears there would be a lack of content this week. But, dear readers, you can never underestimate the inhabitants of Frewin Court.

New drinking game: take a shot for every Oxfess about the Union in the last few days. Regina George kept noticeably quiet during Limp Dick’s grilling by a hack of days gone by regarding a certain controversial speaker. Yet her facial expressions were easy enough to read as she endured the complaints of her one-time opponent. In true Trinity president style, Limp Dick faced questioning and an enthralling three hour not-Sitting meeting. Do watch out the next time you step into the library, as he successfully dug himself into several holes. These people clearly have even less to do with their lives than The Taoiseach with his 25 minute long presentation, or academics who spend their energy policing gender!

I hear this was not the only time an ex-officer in a potential run this term. Winter is coming, and the Snow Queen is REALLY causing a stir.

And, in the Union’s hour of need, The Grandfather vanished. Clocking in a greater library finer than his vac day total, his time was up. It seems like Jevelyn’s suggestion he may die of old age was prophetic, though it may constitute a human rights violation to prevent him from his favourite activity of spending the day drinking in the bar. We’ll see if he makes his return to the ranks of Appointed next week, or if the SW1 Sneak succeeds in his coup d’état. Intrigue, drama, resignations, this week has really had it all. And it’s only week one.

Word Slide by Lewis Callister

There’s a first for everything (and everyone!) so this first-week issue has a word-slide themed around humanity’s firsts. Slide each letter round the edge of the grid into an empty box, within the same column or row, to reveal first-themed answers. Remember, if you find yourself without a letter available, one of the boxes has been filled out incorrectly. If you get stuck, clues have been provided flipped alongside.
Сryptic Crossword by Sarah Beard

ACROSS
3. Queen's inferior desperately trying to take flight (8)
5. Volcano overturns what used to be neat (4)
7. First rest easy for umpire (3)
8. 5 in 1 dip - coming soon! (6)
11. Richard follows common adverbial suffix - text (5)
13. Germanic settler in a corner (5)
14. Improvising on the way to the Rad Cam (5)
15. Could help bond? (5)
16. Wild prize (5)
19. Shocking dessert (6)
21. Friends lost in the mountains (4)
23. Doppelgänger confuses large toe (5, 5)
24. Breathtaking addition to any outfit (5)

DOWN
1. Ariel's in a messy state (6)
2. Scandalous carnival (6)
4. Sierra at the front of the line creates bias (4)
6. Bill involved in current events (6)
9. Defender of Satan perhaps? (8)
10. A sandy time of year (4)
12. A cyborg infiltrates wise man for advantageous destruction (8)
15. Basic couples talk alike (6)
17. Pasta, for example, is some source of energy (6)
18. There's a market for a surgery to restore cat's balance (6)
20. Dull pain between cardiac hesitations (4)
22. Leader amongst rats (4)

Sudokus by Lewis Callister

Kevin and Timmy present: The Adventures of Lord Gallalogic by Sean Hartnett
“It’s 99% politics and 1% law”: In conversation with Stella Assange

Interviewing Stella Assange about ‘Ithaka’, the new documentary about Julian Assange, the campaign to stop Assange’s extradition, and the implications for press freedom and democracy.

Freddie Evans

On 22 August 2022, Julian’s lawyers appealed to the UK High Court with new evidence. The result of that appeal is awaited.

I asked Stella what outcome she saw for her partner’s Sisyphean struggle against extradition. Will he succeed?

“T’m hopeful. If public opinion properly understands the case, the case is cogent, intolerable, and the courts would never credibly go along with it. It’s 99% politics and 1% law. You couldn’t get a more political case than this – from the content of the publications, which were about U.S. conduct during the Iraq and Afghan wars, including torture, the U.S. leaning on governments in Europe to get certain outcomes and then the way that the U.S. government has conducted itself. I think there is a lot more that is known now than before. It used to be a grassroots movement of people who follow Julian and WikiLeaks very closely but it’s grown, and in the meantime, there have been high-quality books that have come out by the UN Special Rapporteur on torture. I think there’s a lot of people now that are quite educated on the stakes. I don’t expect the general public to know 15 years and all that, but because I have lived it, but there are some general issues that people are getting. And then there’s Julian being in Belmarsh Prison for four years without serving a sentence. There are people who were convicted to say eight years in prison. They’re out after 50% of their time for violent crimes and Julian’s in there because he published evidence of government wrongdoing and he’s not even convicted.

For the regular by-stander, they look at the situation and they can see immediately, instinctively that it’s wrong.”

Stella is completely determined to spread Julian’s message to the world.

Julian’s father, John Shipton, a 76-year-old retired builder, has also been a hugely vocal campaigner for his son throughout the many years of legal proceedings. The recently released documentary ‘Ithaka’ follows the hard journeys Stella and John have travelled, shedding light on the brutal challenges Julian has faced and the wider implications for press freedom and democratic rights. I asked Stella what she wants viewers to take away from the documentary.

“I think a better understanding of not only what has happened to Julian but also the bigger implications of Julian’s case for freedom of the press, for the public’s right to know and for our basic democratic rights. Also to give them – the viewers – an alternate narrative to the way in which the story has been told for many years. The way we could do that was by letting people into our lives for them to witness what was happening in our lives and what was happening to Julian through our eyes.”

Before the interview I was fortunate to have exclusive access to ‘Ithaka’. Something said by John resonated. People seem above all else to be interested in the story about Julian. In Hollywood fashion rather than understanding who Julian might be as a human being, I raised this with Stella, asking about the media’s portrayal of Julian.

“When we started making the documentary, the narrative being pushed was extremely misleading and dangerously ignorant. If you read the newspaper, for years you would just not understand what was happening – there were claims that he was completely paranoid, that the U.S. government was going to prosecute him for publishing information. That started to change the day Julian was arrested because the U.S. revealed that it had a sealed indictment. It should have triggered a direct effect of the U.S. using espionage laws against Julian. Russia had not done this since the Cold War. What they had done in the past to journalists was to expel them, but they now have taken a policy change and it (the arrest of Julian) has become normalised. The U.S. normalised it with Julian and as a result, being a journalist, especially in situations that are dangerous or politically hairy is becoming more dangerous and their life and liberty are at greater risk.”

I asked Stella exactly what she believes the pursuit of Julian reveals about U.S. democracy.

“It tells us two things about the U.S. The first is that its freedom of speech protections are in crisis. The U.S. has very strong constitutional protections, and the most significant is the First Amendment. The First Amendment puts the constraint on the executive, that they cannot abridge people’s ability to speak. The case is unconstitutional. The problem is that the U.S. is in quite a reactionary phase and with the composition of the U.S. Supreme Court, the outcome is extremely uncertain. They’ve said things like, Julian is not a U.S. citizen, therefore, the First Amendment doesn’t apply to him, which is crazy. It’s a principle that they’ve extended from, for example, the Drug Enforcement Agency raids in Colombia and Mexico. The people who they arrest in Mexico and bring to the U.S. then try to say – this arrest violates my constitutional rights’, they say – ‘well, you’re not American so it doesn’t apply for you’. They’re doing that for speech. That brings me to the second thing – how the U.S. is wielding its power through the judiciary onto other jurisdictions. This is where the UK has a responsibility to stop a foreign power from abridging freedom of speech here or impinging on protections that should be robust. It’s not foreign laws that should apply here, it’s UK laws, and journalists should be able to publish without having to know secrecy laws in Turkey or Benin or the United States.”

My final question was about Stella’s views on the treatment of Julian by the UK government and its courts. What does this reveal?
“It’s about having the courage to say what you mean”: In conversation with Gwyneth Lewis
Discussing her experiences in Oxford, her views on poetry and relationship with language

Natascha Norton

Gwyneth Lewis is the former National Poet of Wales, the first writer to be given the Welsh laureateship and was recently appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2023 Birthday Honours for her services to literature. Her poetry has been widely praised and published in six-foot-high letters on the Wales Millennium Centre’s façade in Cardiff Bay.

N: You’ve been hosting poetry reading classes here during Hilary term as Balliol College’s writer in residence. What made you want to come back to Balliol and how have you found it now that you’re back?

G: Well, the first love is poetry. I was writing before I knew really what it was - since the age of seven or so. It’s the closest to my brain wiring. But then I also liked writing television scripts, because of the discipline of having to push the story visually rather than using words. I found writing plays very difficult. I have massive respect for playwrights. In an odd way, no matter what the form is, I find I have similar preoccupations in all of them. So, it’s great to be able to bring out different aspects in, let’s say, a novella or non-fiction book. I enjoy the variety because I get easily bored.

N: I don’t like doing the same thing over and over again.

G: Yes. It is wonderful to have been given the opportunity until now to stop this, makes the UK courts have had every opportunity until now to stop this, makes the UK court and political system look extremely compromised. The UK is advertised itself as a place where other countries can outsource repressive actions against dissidents. This is a country where dissidents, political opponents of all kinds, because it was a place that was open-minded and safe, but now is giving off completely opposite signals.”

Full article available online at Cherwell.org
aging offers no warnings

my childhood bed is five sizes too small
and home feels rotten with the stale air of youth.
there was no road sign on the way
alerting me that i was 20 km from adulthood

just a stiff mattress when i got here
and the reminder that what once was
will never be again.

when was the last day i sat in my high chair?
we didn’t throw a party.
when was the last time my mom helped me in the shower so
i didn’t get soap in my eyes?
what day did i learn to do it for myself?

when was the last day i sat in my high chair?
we didn’t throw a party.
when was the last time my mom helped me in the shower so
i didn’t get soap in my eyes?
what day did i learn to do it for myself?
when was the last day i sat in my high chair?
we didn’t throw a party.
when was the last time my mom helped me in the shower so
i didn’t get soap in my eyes?
what day did i learn to do it for myself?

Caravaggio: His mercurial life and works

Thomas Bristow

According to the art historian Andrew Graham-Dixon, Caravaggio lived ‘a life sacred and profane’. Born Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio in 1571 in Milan, the family moved east to the town from which he was to take his name in order to escape the plague. Caravaggio was raised in poverty and by 1584 had lost both of his parents. However, that same year he began a four year apprenticeship with the painter Simone Peterzano. In 1592 he moved to Rome, having quarrelled with and injured a policeman. It was this tendency for violence which was to follow him for the rest of his life. Rome was where he flourished, fulfilling his subjects required. When considering his style filled with the drama and violence that

Caravaggio was thenceforth famous.

Caravaggio continued to paint biblical scenes for the rest of his life in Rome, refining the use of light and darkness to produce such works as the violent and shocking Judith Beheading Holophernes (c.1602), and one of my favourites, Saint Jerome Writing (c.1605). Here Saint Jerome reads intently, his outstretched hand holds a quill and morbidly placed upon the desk is a skull. Caravaggio continued his religious work in Naples, producing the altarpiece The Seven Works of Mercy (c.1607), and in Malta he was inducted as a Knight of Malta. Before being expelled from the order in 1608 for violent quarrelling again, he painted his largest work, The Beheading of St John the Baptist (1608). It is 370 by 520 centimetres, and considered by some to be ‘one of the most important works in Western painting’. This was also the only painting that he signed, perhaps fittingly in the blood which gushes onto the floor.

The legacy of Caravaggio cannot be overstated. Influencing subsequent masters from Gentileschi to Rubens, his commanding use of light and darkness combined to create a unique style filled with the drama and violence that his subjects required. When considering his tumultuous life, I think we can see much of Caravaggio in his works, self-portraits aside of course. Despite only signing one painting, he is present in all of them. Whether in the mysterious, psychological complexity of his figures, or the plain violence that we know him for today.

nothing short of spectacular. In his early life, Caravaggio was probably influenced by the regional Lombard style which emphasised simple but naturalistic detail, providing a departure from the tense and grandiose compositions of Mannerism. His earliest known painting Boy Peeling Fruit (1592-95) is an excellent example of this. It is a calm scene, in which a curiously pensive young man peels an unidentified fruit, but the trademark use of chiaroscuro makes it none the less striking. Indeed it is this chiaroscuro (light-dark) for which Caravaggio was to become most famous. He developed and employed the technique with great skill, illuminating whole figures in bright light against dark backgrounds, creating a heightened sense of drama in wholly naturalistic depictions.

But it wasn’t always like this. In another earlier composition, The Musicians (c.1595), the use of light is far more subtle. The two central figures catch the viewer with their strange doll-like faces, and the composition itself feels crowded and uncomfortable. Similarly, in The Cardsharps (c.1594) the chiaroscuro is much less prominent. The painting depicts a young man who is being cheated at cards by another young man and his older master. From our view, the cheat reaches for the hidden cards, and their use against the naive youth is imminent. The bold difference in colour of the three figures’ clothing provides a strong contrast and the immediacy of the scene is brilliant. This work caught the eye of Cardinal Francesco Del Monte, who bought the painting and became Caravaggio’s first big patron.

In 1599, Caravaggio was commissioned to produce three pieces for the Contarelli Chapel in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi. The painting to the left of the altar, The Calling of Saint Matthew, is one of his most famous works, and rightly so. Having seen this in person, I can attest to its impact. The figures are rendered in vivid detail, and highlighted by the masterful use of chiaroscuro. The light seemingly floods in from the right, but almost only on the men depicted, rendering them clear against a plain background. Christ stands in the shadows, seemingly directing the light towards one of two men sat at the table (the identity of Matthew is debated). The strong use of light against a gloomy room captures perfectly a moment of great spiritual awakening.

It is a perfect example of the dramatic style for which Caravaggio was famous. The Source continued to paint biblical scenes for the rest of his time in Rome, refining the use of light and darkness to produce such works as the violent and shocking Judith Beheading Holophernes (c.1602), and one of my favourites, Saint Jerome Writing (c.1605). Here Saint Jerome reads intently, his outstretched hand holds a quill and morbidly placed upon the desk is a skull. Caravaggio continued his religious work in Naples, producing the altarpiece The Seven Works of Mercy (c.1607), and in Malta he was inducted as a Knight of Malta. Before being expelled from the order in 1608 for violent quarrelling again, he painted his largest work, The Beheading of St John the Baptist (1608). It is 370 by 520 centimetres, and considered by some to be ‘one of the most important works in Western painting’. This was also the only painting that he signed, perhaps fittingly in the blood which gushes onto the floor.

The legacy of Caravaggio cannot be overstated. Influencing subsequent masters from Gentileschi to Rubens, his commanding use of fundamental elements such as colour, light and darkness combined to create a unique style filled with the drama and violence that his subjects required. When considering his tumultuous life, I think we can see much of Caravaggio in his works, self-portraits aside of course. Despite only signing one painting, he is present in all of them. Whether in the mysterious, psychological complexity of his figures, or the plain violence that we know him for today.
Ready for takeoff: My Little Airport and the Hong Kong indie scene

An exploration into why 'My Little Airport' is accessible to both indie fans and Cantopop listeners alike.

Charlotte Lai
Lyrics Translated by Charlotte Lai

The Hong Kong music scene hasn't quite taken off like its Korean or Japanese equivalent in recent years. With the irresistible dance-pop swagger of K-pop dominating the global music scene, the glory days of Cantopop seem long behind us, relegated to above-40 barkeep and the 90s, Hong Kong – alongside Japan – were Asia's pop culture leaders. Cantopop is an integral part of Hong Kong's cultural identity – whilst still under British colonial rule in the mid-1970s, pop music sung in Cantonese resonated with an entire generation and gave rise to the stratospheric takeoff of pop stars in the '80s, such as Hui Koon-ki and Leslie Cheung. In the '90s the baton was passed onto the 'Four Heavenly Kings' of Cantopop: Jacky Cheung, Andy Lau, Leon Lai and Aaron Kwok, each dominating award shows, radio, and body pillow sales alike. Harry Styles, eat your heart out.

But Cantopop seems to have been left behind, whilst K-pop has continued its rise to the stratospheric takeoff of pop stars like BTS, Blackpink and the like, with their polished, slick production and catchy hooks. But this isn't about the sorry state of Hong Kong indie. I, like many other Hong Kongers, have often felt like 'a people without a country', caught between a colonial heritage and the Chinese handover. Hong Kong's dwindling cultural clout has left me grasping for artists who I can relate to in the present day. While my parents were brought up with the likes of Leslie Cheung and Faye Wong, I was raised on a ready-for-radio mix of Maroon 5 and Taylor Swift. Like the city itself, I struggle with my cultural identity, often caught at a crossroads between my Cantonese roots and my British education – almost-but-not-quite British. My Little Airport, a band I've been following for a while, has always been shaped by our complicated (to say the least) political history. As I sat quietly when my friends sang along to Cantopop classics during karaoke, I decided to write this article to review the Hong Kong music scene.

The album is My Little Airport's third release and their first since 2009. It was released on April 28th, 2023, following the release of their previous album 'Lunch' in 2011. The album follows the same musical style as its predecessor, with a mix of indie and experimental elements. The album has received positive reviews from critics and fans alike, with many praising the band's musicianship and the overall sound of the album.

The album opens with 'Lunch', which features a catchy melody and a soothing guitar riff. The song is a perfect representation of the band's sound, with its blend of indie and experimental elements. The guitar riff is instantly recognizable, and the lyrics are thought-provoking, with themes of love, loss, and the uncertainty of life.

The second track, 'I'm Just Kidding With You', is a slower, more introspective song. The guitar chords are simple, and the vocals are soft and soothing. The lyrics are about the band's experiences with the music industry and the challenges they faced while trying to make their mark. The song is a perfect example of the band's ability to write about their personal experiences and emotions.

The third track, 'Divvying Up', is a more upbeat song. The guitar chords are faster, and the vocals are more energetic. The lyrics are about the band's experiences with the music industry and the challenges they faced while trying to make their mark. The song is a perfect example of the band's ability to write about their personal experiences and emotions.

The album finishes with 'AV Like Iris Does', a whimsical ditty about a love affair. The song is a perfect representation of the band's sound, with its blend of indie and experimental elements. The guitar riff is instantly recognizable, and the lyrics are thought-provoking, with themes of love, loss, and the uncertainty of life.

Overall, the album is a great representation of My Little Airport's sound and their ability to write about their personal experiences and emotions. The album is a perfect example of the band's ability to write about their personal experiences and emotions.

This article owes a lot of thanks to Google Translate and Wikipedia. Music has never been something that I had in common with my parents, who often respond with 'why don't you do something more useful?' when I tell them about a new song I've written, or about a performance I've done with a band. I, like many other Hong Kongers, have often felt like 'a people without a country', caught between a colonial heritage and the Chinese handover. Hong Kong's dwindling cultural clout has left me grasping for artists who I can relate to in the present day. While my parents were brought up with the likes of Leslie Cheung and Faye Wong, I was raised on a ready-for-radio mix of Maroon 5 and Taylor Swift. Like the city itself, I struggle with my cultural identity, often caught at a crossroads between my Cantonese roots and a British education – almost-but-not-quite British.
**Top 10 films for a Trouble-Free Trinity**

Ten films for you to romanticise the summer term with.

**Hetta Johnson**

For many, Trinity term brings about deadlines, exams and proves to be one of the more stressful terms of the academic year. But, for every bit of stress, there’s a summer day, an approaching sense of closure and a long sprawling summer to keep us going. With those days in mind, here’s a list of my top ten films for a trouble-free Trinity.

1. **Ferris Bueller’s Day Off**.
   - In 1986 comedy caper, high school wise-guy, Ferris, has refined the art of skipping school and getting away with it. Ahead of his graduation, he is determined to enjoy one more day off with his girlfriend and best friend despite his principal’s mission to catch him. In the words of whip-smart Ferris: ‘Life moves pretty fast; if you don’t stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it!’. If that isn’t a welcome reminder for Trinity, I don’t know what is.

2. **Everything, Everywhere All at Once**.
   - With its dewy cinematography, longing stases and familial charm, this take on Jane Austen’s classic is the ultimate comfort watch.

3. **Good Luck to You, Leo Grande**.
   - Emma Thompson’s English teacher hires sex worker, Leo, in hopes of fulfilling everything she’s missed out on in three decades of marriage with her late husband. Daryl McCormack and Emma Thompson make an electric pair on screen and, with a minimal set and Emma Thompson’s final, empowering nude scene, Good Luck to You, Leo Grande, is an absolute feel-good delight.

4. **Pride and Prejudice (2005)**.
   - With its dewy cinematography, longing stares and familial charm, it’s a joy of a film to exhilarating action sequences, an iconic soundtrack and heartfelt relationships has ensured that this aviation adventure has stood the test of time and makes for the perfect summer watch.

5. **The Breakfast Club**.
   - Another iconic film from the 80s, The Breakfast Club sees a band of teenagers from different high school cliques thrown together for another after-school detention. Overcoming their preconceived notions of each other, the film resounded with my teenage self when I first watched it, over thirty years after its release, and remains timeless.

Books

**She’s glad her mom died, and I understand why.**

Nina Naidu

Having been one of those strange children that didn’t grow up with iCarly – I was more of a Victorious fan – I was surprised at my attraction to a book written by an actress best known for wielding a sock full of butter. Perhaps it was the title that drew me in. Well, of course it was. But why did I care so much? Even I wasn’t prepared for the raw emotional intensity this book would deliver.

Released in August 2022, I’m Glad My Mom Died is a candid memoir delving into actress Jennette McCurdy’s childhood as a former child actor, her struggles with eating disorders, addiction, and most prominently, a brutal reflection of her co-dependent relationship with her mother, Debra. We follow Jennette from her young days as a (somewhat) aspiring actress up until after her mother’s death from cancer. Through her visceral writing, we experience the innocent naivété that would permeate the first pages of her life. She reluctantly agrees to an acting career, launched at age 6, in the hopes of winning her mother’s approval. Whilst many would view a career as a child actor as a dream come true, for young Jennette it was anything but. At the expense of her freedom and happiness, she believes that this sacrifice will grant her unconditional love from her mother.

Obviously, it doesn’t. But it’s heartbreaking to see how long it takes to realise this herself. She confesses that she had been emotionally and sexually abused well into her teenage years, being given routine breast exams and not even being allowed to wash her own hair. Her mother does nothing to stop the development of her eating disorder. In fact, she encourages unhealthy dietary restrictions and enables her subsequent abuse from “The Creator” at Nickelodeon, as she so affectionately names him. We all know she’s talking about Dan Schneider, but by maintaining his anonymity, we are reminded of the ongoing reality for victims of child sexual abuse. And is it really Nickelodeon without the threat of hush money? Although, frankly, I’m more surprised she was able to write about that at all.

As I read her memoir, I couldn’t help but wonder when McCurdy’s iCarly co-star, Miranda Cosgrove, would make an appearance. While her appearance is brief, McCurdy fondly recounts their relationship, offering a glimpse of hope amidst the painful experiences she shares. She also touches on her jealousy towards Ariana Grande, who co-starred with her on the iCarly spin-off show, Sam and Cat. McCurdy’s sincerity and vulnerability throughout the memoir is welcomed, offering a rare insight into the intrusive thoughts that many of us have but rarely share.

Despite the harsh title, McCurdy questions why we tend to romanticise the dead. McCurdy asks her mother this at her grave but ultimately admits to wanting to glorify her legacy like everybody else. But when the dead are not here to defend themselves, we are left only with the past. “Maybe she would have apologised”, she wonders, but she knows this just won’t do. You can love someone deeply and still acknowledge the happiness you’ve felt since they’ve been gone.

In a sea of celebrity memoirs, I’m Glad My Mom Died stands out as one of the most poignant releases of 2022. McCurdy’s refreshing honesty provides readers with a taste of what it’s like to read a book actually written by the author themselves. Though she was discouraged from writing as a girl, this memoir is a testament to what could have been for Jennette McCurdy. She’s glad her mom died. And I understand why.

Top 3...

dark academia reads

1. **If We Were Villains**
   - Think The Secret History meets the entire Works of Shakespeare. If you’re a fan of the renowned playwright, you’ll love the characters who almost exclusively quote him in their everyday dialogue.

2. **The Atlas Six**
   - Olivie Blake’s debut novel spins the question we’ve all wondered: “What if the Library of Alexandria had suffered a different fate?” Enter six magicians with a thirst for knowledge, prestige and power, competing to the death to be initiated into the world’s greatest secret society.

3. **The Picture of Dorian Gray**
   - Oscar Wilde’s only novel handles a young man selling his soul to the devil in exchange for youth and beauty, and the grapple with vanity and immorality that ensues. As one goodreads review puts it simply: this is a book about being hot and evil.
Macbeth at the Pilch, an ensemble of tragedies

Anuj Mishra

When, last year, I discovered that Oxford was to hold a fashion gala, I, with many fellow lovers of all things sartorial, was thrilled at the chance to see a real catwalk take place in Oxford. This Trinity, the Fashion Gala is back, for a reprise on an evening of patchwork, glamour and campiness, all within walking distance of the RadCam. The second week event is set to feature a dazzling parade of carefully-stitched fabrics and colours, designed by Oxford student creatives and worn by student models. Fashionistas and those with only a moderate interest in the garb alike will be able to come together in Oxford’s glitziest venue - Freud - for an evening of appreciation of fashion in all its forms. The choice of the chapel-turned-nightclub as a venue is certainly apt for its central walkway, which is set to become a sparkly runway for the night.

I spoke with this year’s co-Creative Directors, Shaan Sidhu and Harvey Morris, on their vision for 2023’s Gala and the process behind bringing it to Oxford students in Trinity term. The theme for the gala is a quote: “buy less, choose well”. The memorable advice comes from the late designer and fashion legend Vivienne Westwood, who passed away in December last year. Shaan and Harvey are striving to connect the ethos of the gala to the intent of Westwood’s iconic quote; as Shaan states, she and Harvey are keen to “encourage people to use what they already have” when compiling their outfit for the gala.

This is partly to prompt the sustainable use of items of clothing, especially given the amount of waste that has been produced by the fast fashion industry in recent years. As Shaan explains, it is about “being mindful about what you choose and how much you buy”. Equally, the theme is intended to allow guests to flaunt their personal styles of dress, and make the gala “a creative experience for everyone involved”, Harvey says. The Fashion Gala team has been working with a group of student designers, who number almost twenty. Some of the designers are working closely with their models, while others are modelling for themselves. Guests of the gala can safely expect a tantalising assortment of designs.

As for the evening itself, Shaan and Harvey emphasise the importance of the event being open and welcoming to all. Indeed, Harvey explains that the event does not have a specific dress code, being neither “necessarily formal” nor “necessarily casual”. He expresses that “fashion can feel very serious and constrained sometimes, and we want it to feel fun and inviting to everyone”. Shaan indicates the evening’s intention to be a “spectacle”, and a “showcase of designers and the creativity of people in Oxford” - of which there is certainly plenty. It will be “celebratory and joyous”, Harvey adds.

The Oxford Fashion Gala will take place on Tuesday the 2nd of May at Freud.

“Buy less, choose well”: The return of the Oxford Fashion Gala

Anya Bilettsky

When, last year, I discovered that Oxford was to hold a fashion gala, I, with many fellow lovers of all things sartorial, was thrilled at the chance to see a real catwalk take place in Oxford. This Trinity, the Fashion Gala is back, for a reprise on an evening of patchwork, glamour and campiness, all within walking distance of the RadCam. The second week event is set to feature a dazzling parade of carefully-stitched fabrics and colours, designed by Oxford student creatives and worn by student models. Fashionistas and those with only a moderate interest in the garb alike will be able to come together in Oxford’s glitziest venue - Freud - for an evening of appreciation of fashion in all its forms. The choice of the chapel-turned-nightclub as a venue is certainly apt for its central walkway, which is set to become a sparkly runway for the night.

I spoke with this year’s co-Creative Directors, Shaan Sidhu and Harvey Morris, on their vision for 2023’s Gala and the process behind bringing it to Oxford students in Trinity term. The theme for the gala is a quote: “buy less, choose well”. The memorable advice comes from the late designer and fashion legend Vivienne Westwood, who passed away in December last year. Shaan and Harvey are striving to connect the ethos of the gala to the intent of Westwood’s iconic quote; as Shaan states, she and Harvey are keen to “encourage people to use what they already have” when compiling their outfit for the gala.

This is partly to prompt the sustainable use of items of clothing, especially given the amount of waste that has been produced by the fast fashion industry in recent years. As Shaan explains, it is about “being mindful about what you choose and how much you buy”. Equally, the theme is intended to allow guests to flaunt their personal styles of dress, and make the gala “a creative experience for everyone involved”, Harvey says. The Fashion Gala team has been working with a group of student designers, who number almost twenty. Some of the designers are working closely with their models, while others are modelling for themselves. Guests of the gala can safely expect a tantalising assortment of designs.

As for the evening itself, Shaan and Harvey emphasise the importance of the event being open and welcoming to all. Indeed, Harvey explains that the event does not have a specific dress code, being neither “necessarily formal” nor “necessarily casual”. He expresses that “fashion can feel very serious and constrained sometimes, and we want it to feel fun and inviting to everyone”. Shaan indicates the evening’s intention to be a “spectacle”, and a “showcase of designers and the creativity of people in Oxford” - of which there is certainly plenty. It will be “celebratory and joyous”, Harvey adds.

The Oxford Fashion Gala will take place on Tuesday the 2nd of May at Freud.
THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF LIVING OUT

1. Thou shalt not kill thy housemate
   Tensions may run high sometimes, but that’s no reason to put out a hit on someone. Even an accidental one. If your housemates struggle with weak genetics, make sure not to put whatever will kill them into dinner.

2. Thou shalt not steal from thy housemate
   To avoid drama, start a Splitwise! It’s a quite a useful tool that tracks who owes who and how much.

3. Thou shalt not make unto thy House any humdrum image
   Do not deface your House with mediocrity. Deck your kitchen window out with seasonal garlands, or bring back souvenirs from your vac adventures! Anything to make it yours.

4. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. AKA Bin collections!
   You have a House. You can come and go as you please, oblivious to college move-in dates. If you so choose, use your 0th week as an extra bit of vac and come back knowing everything is just as you left it.

5. Honour thy father and thy mother
   If you’re lucky enough to have rent that comes from Mommy and Daddy’s pockets, make sure to call them at least once a term to prove that you remember they exist.

6. Thou shalt not commit housecest
   Some say that one of life’s hard truths is that it’s not a porno.

7. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy housemate
   Keep things civil. If you’ve got a problem with someone or the way they go about living, be honest and straightforward with them! If you operate from a place of mutual respect and understanding, nothing can ever go truly wrong.

8. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, or anything of thy neighbour
   If your neighbours are uni students, befriend them! One of the great joys of living out is the incredible autonomy (and partying) that comes with it.

9. Thou shalt keep things civil.
   If you’ve got a problem with someone or the way they go about living, be honest and straightforward with them! If you operate from a place of mutual respect and understanding, nothing can ever go truly wrong.

10. Thou shalt not make unto thy House any humdrum image
    Do not deface your House with mediocrity. Deck your kitchen window out with seasonal garlands, or bring back souvenirs from your vac adventures! Anything to make it yours.

---

Horoscopes

**What should each sign expect before May Day?**

**Aries**
Projects or submissions due? They’ll get done. Stay up all night and celebrate May Day – everything else can wait.

**Capricorn**
You’re a known overachiever, but remember to have fun and be silly with your friends.

**Aquarius**
They’re probably not as smart as you. Aquarius. Know your worth this week, and be confident.

**Pisces**
Don’t let Mercury’s retrograde kill your creativity for the next week – but maybe find different ways to express it.

**Taurus**
Happy Birth-month Taurus. This month is about YOU, enjoy the highs and don’t be afraid to let loose and have fun!

**Leo**
May Day is a chance to let your side that loves the limelight out, but don’t go too hard! The rest of the week is yet to come…

**Cancer**
Things will go your way this week! Prioritise your me-time, but don’t be afraid to say yes when opportunities arise.

**Libra**
You want balance in your life, but if you can’t find it this week, that’s okay. You can blame Mercury being in retrograde.

**Scorpio**
The sun moved into Taurus on Thursday, so look towards your close relationships for the quality time you need.

**Sagittarius**
The Leo moon energises you and presents exciting opportunities. Be ready for them!
**First Impressions?**

I found Austin to be good looking but unfortunately he had cut himself shaving and was bleeding profusely throughout the date.

**What was the highlight?**

The coffee was good.

**What was the most embarrassing moment?**

When I watched his blood from his jaw drip into his coffee.

**Describe the date in 3 words**

Friendly, calm, disappointing.

**Is there a second date on the cards?**

Probably not!
**DOUBLE TAKE:**

Most of my friends are graduating this year and are really stressed about their finals, but I still have one year left and want to enjoy my Trinity! What should I do?

---

**He llo cherub!** This is a tough one honey... The first thing to face would be the fact that you would be the only one of your friends who is not taking exams, and I’m sure they would really appreciate that you have the opportunity to support them. I remember having prelims last Trinity, but my best friend had already done her exams the term before. It was the most comforting thing when she decided to make me brownies while I was studying, and it helped to have someone do little lovely things for me while I was stressed out. I like to think I’d do the same for my friends (shout out to second-year engineers and medics at the moment!). It doesn’t have to be as much commitment as using your extra time for baking for your friends. It can be as simple as luring your EXTREMELY loud housemate away from your shared study because his exams have finished. I’m sure anything that you do to support them will be much appreciated and admired his willingness to interact with me and the people in my year group even when those in his year were calling us “silly frosh”, and it also means he now has friends when other people in his year will have graduated. You can also try and reach out to people in your own year and course. They’ll all be stressing out just the same as you next year, and can relate to the difficulty of having many friends keeping busy in Trinity and graduating this year. You’ll have the best time spending this Trinity getting to know each other and using your free time to go to events that you’ve been dying to go to, but haven’t – until now – had anyone to go with. Not only will you have someone to spend Trinity with, you’ll have people to spend finals with next year as well.

Good luck for Trinity and, remember to make the most of the calm before the storm!

Lots of love,

Aunty Alice x

---

To: [My Supervisor] Katie

From: Aaliyah Khan

Subject: So sorry for the delay

Dear Katie,

I am staring at the spreadsheet of degree classifications awarded in recent years / My head is spinning / My legs have turned purple and I am vibrating like a tuning fork / And I am really trying to plan / And to be on time / But it is like when WS Merwin wrote ‘To Being Late’ / Again again you are / the right time after all / not according to / however we planned it / I am trying to plan / Nothing is going accordingly / I was reading 1960s critical theory and / I based an entire dissertation draft on 1960s literary critical theory / But I have found my way out and now I am writing sentences like ‘Colonialism erodes diversity and attempts to control the permissions for cultural and institutional expression. It enforces punitive hegemony, acts upon supremacist validation, and rejects the legitimisation of worldviews countering the prescriptive bigotry-as-enlightenment it is founded upon.’ / On this, R. F Kuang wrote “[y]ou have such a great fear of freedom, brother. It’s shackling you. You’ve identified so hard with the colonizer, you think any threat to them is a threat to you. When are you going to realize you can’t be one of them?” / Katie, I don’t think I’m ever going to recover from this. / June Jordan writes a proclamation in line, with ‘I am become a Palestinian / against the relentless laughter of evil / there is less and less living room / and where are my loved ones? / It is time to make our way home’ / Blood from my eyes, Katie, I’m so sorry, / I’m still not done.

Aaliyah

---

**What in the hell are you worrying about?** This is the best time to fuck around. Want to go to the club? Go for it, you’ve got an important exam this week. Want to go to a cute cafe for the aesthetic? What are you waiting for? I’m not sure if you know, but I am a chronic extrovert and a people pleaser. Life feels like a constant, never-ending tea party. Yet, whilst I thrive off of the company, it can get tiring constantly having to listen to people’s awful jokes or weird private school anecdotes. I take full advantage of having busy friends because I also love spending time with myself. I’m fantastic and I have the best taste. Even now, as my friends are all doing their collections whilst my tutor has decided to put ours in 4th week (don’t ask why), I take advantage of the fact that I have a bit of independence by going to any library, coffee shop, or kilo sale whenever I want, without having to wait around for anyone to sort their shit out before we leave. Oh! And the house is so quiet! I can sit in the kitchen and have a cup of coffee and watch Friends through my headphones without worrying that someone is going to walk in on my precious screen-time. If you do actually leave your room, then that’s a great way to make friends who aren’t prioritising study time over spending time with you.

You’re in the rabbit hole before you’ve reached the bottom, so you have time to notice the things around you. There’s nothing to feel guilty about because you don’t have exams: stomp in through the front door after every night out, have loud parties in the shared space. This might sound like something annoying because you’re making a lot of noise in their space, but here’s how you’ve got to explain it to them. You’re only showing them the fun that they’re missing out on. This will motivate them to work harder so that once they get through exams, they can have as much fun and make as much noise as you are right now. It will just make them look forward to reaching the end. Also,loating makes everything way better. Let me know when you’re planning one of these nights out, because I’m basically going through the same thing.

- Mad Hatter x

---

(Flying) Squirrel Bisected by St Barnabas’ Campanile (21/4/23)

Flynn Hallman

I was going to take some photos of St Barnabas’ campanile from the canal in Jericho, but I ended up watching this squirrel for around fifteen minutes instead. It would climb up a tree and scurry along the bridge railing and onto the guttering of the residential block (bottom left) before leaping onto the balcony of the garden nearest to the bridge. After briefly dipping out of sight, it would then perch on the edge of the balcony and begin adapting its newest nuciferous asset for mouth-bearing mobility. I managed to get this shot of it as it came bounding back across the bridge, mid-Byzantine-obscuring flight.
Seaweed Egg-Fried Rice

This is one of my own recipes and became an absolute go-to for me when I was living on my own in Malaga. Admittedly, the absence of a seafood market is a bit of a downer here, but Sainsbury’s stocks a great frozen seafood mix to achieve a similar effect! Be sure to send your student recipes in to me at oliver.hall@magd.ox.ac.uk for a chance to be featured too!

INGREDIENTS
Serves 2
• 200g cooked rice (or more if you prefer)
• 2 eggs (lightly-beaten)
• 1/2 tsp salt
• 300g mixed seafood (pick up a mixed frozen bag from any supermarket for a super cheap and varied selection)
• 2 tbsp teriyaki sauce
• 2 tbsp soy sauce
• 5 tbsp groundnut oil (any other oil will work)
• 5 chopped spring onions
• 100g sugar snap peas

Feel free to mix up any of these ingredients to ones that you prefer, just make sure that you keep the rough quantities and methods the same.

METHOD
1. Make sure your rice is cooked and seafood defrosted before getting started. (If not, either use a rice cooker or simply boil for 15 minutes.)
2. Heat oil in a large pan over high heat and fry the mixed seafood for three minutes in total, adding the teriyaki and soy sauce as you go.
3. Add the sugar snap peas and spring onions and fry for one minute.
4. Add rice to the pan and mix ingredients, frying for two minutes.
5. Move all the ingredients to one side of the pan and pour in beaten eggs, then stir to mix and scramble.
6. Season with salt and ground pepper and serve with soy sauce.

San Francisco: More than start-ups and juice bars

Oliver Hall

This week I am writing from an altogether different location that feeds a long way away from Oxford and university because, well, it is. This past week I’ve been attending the National Congress of Student Journalism in San Francisco as a keynote speaker and an advisor and it’s been a truly brilliant experience. The conference itself was an absolute pleasure to attend and it was quite remarkable to see the level of student journalism at play at the High School level in the US that simply doesn’t exist here.

The best part though? As you might expect it has to be the food. The food scene in California is incredibly diverse, more so than I had ever really understood, and this is true nowhere more so than in San Francisco itself. Make no mistake, the superfood stores and the juice bars are here a plenty, just as advertised by every stereotype under the sun. But really, the culinary culture runs far far deeper. Chefs and business owners alike told me how the Napa valley offers a richness of fresh ingredients genuinely unrivalled around the world and how that enables them to do so much more than you might expect. This might be best demonstrated by the fact that on Saturday I bumped into no fewer than four farmer’s markets in different parts of the city – suffice to say I’ve never had so many free samples of fresh oranges and ethically produced hot sauces!

Starting at the high end, you find chefs like Mark Dommen. This is a man who has been on a serious culinary journey. Growing up on his family’s winery in Napa, he got his first jobs on the line in towns and cities around San Francisco. Then, after culinary school and a degree he made the big leap that so many aspiring chefs do, finding his way to New York. Here, working some of the most well renowned chefs in the business, Dommen honed his craft, moving from star restaurant to star restaurant, absorbing knowledge as he went. And where did he take that knowledge? Right back to the West Coast of course. Firstly, at a restaurant set on a farm/winery in the valley itself before moving into a head chef/partnership role at the world-renowned One Market restaurant.

This is where I first took him about his journey, and his ethos. Seasonality and balance are everything to Mark and this was never more apparent than when I was wandering around his kitchen in particular. This was grilled octopus served atop smoked carrot and a black garlic reduction before being topped with basil and sliced carrot. This is the epitome of a complete dish, the interplay of the textures from the octopus to the crunch of the carrot shavings and the diversity of flavours between the smoothness of the black garlic and the freshness of the basil came together for a true complete bite.

The next obvious stop on a San Francisco food-tour is seafood, and oh what seafood this city has to offer. A trip down to Fisherman’s Wharf has you instantly taken in by the plethora of seaside restaurants. Better than that though are the stalls and boats. Here, you can buy crab cocktails and shellfish straight off the boats themselves and of course indulge in that long-honoured tradition of clam chowder served in giant sourdough bowl.

The seafood does, of course, have a high-end too. Foreign Cinema is one of the most fascinating restaurants I have visited in a long time. In the Mission district and on the so-called ‘Theatre Mile’, it has set-up shop since 1999 in an old cinema, occupying both a stunning courtyard and suitably decorated inside dining room. The menu changes service to service and in that courtyard every evening a film plays, projected beautifully onto the sidewalk. It might be an all-time classic such as Il Gattopardo (The Leopard), or it might be something a whole lot more modern like Date Night.

Those films are accompanied by one of the most extensive shellfish selections I have ever seen. The oyster menu stretches well into the double digits as well as different offerings of caviar, clams, lobster, and crab. The platter is a sight to behold but not just a spectacle. These oysters are far smaller than those you might get from Jersey or Whistable but carry vastly more unique flavours. The prawns are juicy and meaty and I found myself very much rejoicing making it into town for the end of crab season – the freshness of flavour in the claws was by far the best I have ever tasted (believe me this is high praise coming from a Jersey native). That seafood is paired elsewhere on the menu with the freshness of vegetables and produce from the valley to curate a truly complete menu.

Passing from Mission, up through China and Japan town, there is a whole different world of food to be found. The streets are lined with dim sum restaurant followed by tea house followed by fortune cookie bakery. Almost all offer their own distinct regional specialities and is next to a supermarket selling the most incredible array of dried seafood, meats, and spices.

Up from here (quite literally up, those San Francisco hills are no joke), is the legendary North Beach. This is where the city’s Italian community have put down their roots and boy oh boy does it make for some special streets. Row after row of cafes freshly piping their own cannoli is punctuated by legendary delis such as Molinari selling fresh meats, pastas, and focaccia lunchtime sandwiches. In between those is of course authentic gelateria after authentic gelateria.

One such ice cream stop is Gio Gelati, owned and run by Patrizia Pasqualetti. A true child of the world, her family is originally from Milan and it is from here that she has taken her greatest inspirations. Patrizia explains to me her pure excitement at the seasonality of produce the valley has to offer, “at home I can get fresh strawberries for a month, two months tops. Here, everything goes on for nearly six!” This means that Gio’s is home to a plethora of flavours from kiwi to fig, to orange as well as all-time Italian classics such as hazelnut and ricotta. It is the epitome of a neighbourhood Italian gelateria.

My final stop on North Beach was the legendary Original Joe’s. This is the local Italian stop. Right on the corner of Washington Square Gardens is this stalwart of an institution, in place since 1937. There’s a terrace for the Californian sunny weather, an old-time dining room with an open kitchen and beautiful black booths, and a bar with every sport under the sun on the big screen. The latter was where I retreated with my wine after my dessert and is a whole community in itself with regulars popping their heads round the door, seeing the score, and taking a seat at the bar to snack on a pasta and meet like-minded people.

The food on offer is everything you would expect. The menu is terrifyingly and perhaps problematically long with all the classics from parmigiana to cioppino. I went for a Crab Louie salad starter to make the most of the end of the season and again was just blown away by the freshness and flavours. Admittedly, I slipped up on the main and chose sauteed sweetbreads, a particularly fatty cut of veal that I wanted to try but instantly regretted ordering (let’s just say there’s a lot of fat and not much veal). The day was saved though by the all-time Italian-American classics of ravioli in a meatball sauce and, of course, Brussel sprouts. Every time I come to the States, I am left lamenting the British attitude to this vegetable. We seem incapable of using them in any way other than overboiling them once a year at Christmas. Here, they are lightly grilled and dusted with parmesan for flavourful vegetable perfection. Choosing desserts is even more of a challenge so I did the only sensible thing and went for two. One of them was the pound cake and that would have been enough for two people, ridiculously indulgent and drizzled in a rich chocolate sauce.

So, San Francisco – it isn’t just start-up bros and juice bars. If you are a food lover there are few better cities I can think of for their variety of authentic cuisines and locality of fresh produce. It surpassed my expectations in every way and is beyond worth the trip for every foodie.
How to join the 1% 

Chloe Glynn

Last year's Marathon raised £58.4 million for charity changing thousands of lives around the world. Last weekend's marathon saw Kiptum and Sifan defy expectations, setting a new course record and beating injury respectively. Unfortunately, we got relegated. It's not

F:\ What's the best thing about being captain?
J:\ I think being able to be so involved in the process of the club and having such a strong group of girls around me. I'm very proud to be captain of the blues this year. All the girls are so talented, clever and hardworking.

F:\ Same I'm just really proud to be part of such a good group of boys. We've got such a good team off the field this season, no matter what happens on the field and its such a tight, knit group.

Where can our readers watch you play?
At the Varsity game, 1st of May at Oxford City Stadium. 2pm kick off for the women's and the men's kicks off at 5pm. Use it as a May Day hangover cure as there will be delicious food, and some fantastic football to watch.

We are really hoping for a big turnout from the Oxford supporters that puts Cambridge's to shame. We can promise you some entertaining football.

This week, we spoke to Jessica Cullen and Finlay Ryan-Phillips, Captains of OUAFC Blues teams.

When did you start playing football?
J: When I was 6 years old in Australia. I started playing football when the women's game was nowhere near as prominent or even acknowledged, and now look at it. We have such a great community here at Oxford.

F: I think fairly similar to me, five or six, just playing my local team originally. As I get older, progressed to sort of more serious standards. The people here are what sets it apart from other sports.

How did this season go for your teams?
F: Unfortunately, we got relegated. It's not a true reflection of the squad that we've got this year - we've struggled a lot with injuries and therefore consistency with the playing squads. But we've had some really good results and we'll be building for next season in order to make sure that we bounce straight back up.

J: This season we had a very new team as we lost a lot of players graduating last year, but we've had lot of success. We finished second in the BUCS League. We've put a lot of work out on promotion and got to the semi-finals of the Cup. The girls have really gelled, which is promising for the next few years to come.

How did the varsity game cancellation affect you personally?
F: It was a massive shock. An enormous thank you needs to go to our President and Vice Presidents for working so hard to sort it out. It was a hard line to navigate when you're a captain and also a player experiencing quite a difficult and disappointing situation. It did ignite a fire in a team that will produce a good game.

J: It was obviously really frustrating. It's something myself and the whole squad had been working towards for so long and it is disheartening when something that has been built up so much comes crumbling down at the like the last minute. But it was one of those things. We just had to get on with it.

Both the women's and men's teams won six of their last seven varsity games. Do you find that record intimidating or encouraging, or both, going into the game?
J: It's nice to look back at the record, particularly from the last few years. The men's side have kept quite a core nucleus of players that puts Cambridge's to shame. We can promise you some entertaining football.

F: I think it just has to be the varsity wins. Winning in my first year was special because it was the year Mickey Lewis sadly passed away. They are always a really great event. This last Brookes' Varsity was quite the game – with two of our players red-carded we still managed to pull out a win.

What's the best thing about being captain?
J: I think being able to be so involved in the process of the club and having such a strong group of girls around me. I'm very proud to be captain of the blues this year. All the girls are so talented, clever and hardworking.

F: Same! I'm just really proud to be part of such a good group of boys. We've got such a good team off the field this season, no matter what happens on the field and its such a tight, knit group.