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INDEPENDENT SINCE 1920

# The “media matriarch”: how Oxford unknowingly platformed Pastor Tobi

Jakub Trybull reports

Hello and happy Sunday to you,” Tobi Adegboyega says to the camera. Walking through the ivy-draped quads of Trinity College, he talks about the importance of such institutions and expresses his gratitude for the invitation to speak “on this ground”. The video, shared with his 365,000 followers on Instagram, says in its caption that “[a]t Oxford University this weekend I got to answer some questions and share some thoughts with students and leaders of the Trinity College”. However, *Cherwell* can reveal Adegboyega was not invited by the University or the student group he addressed. Instead, he had been brought in by friend and fellow member of NXTION Family, Phadria Prendergast, using the event to publicise the group’s work. Adegboyega, widely known as ‘Pastor Tobi’, founded and led the Salvation Proclaimers Anointed Church (SPAC Nation). This group initially shot to fame in 2018 for encouraging young people to abandon crime and gangs and to set themselves onto a better path. However, it has since faced numerous allegations over financial fraud and sexual misconduct and has been shut down due to insolvency. Adegboyega and other former members of SPAC Nation have subsequently formed a new church, NXTION Family.

**The event**

Adegboyega’s video depicts a “Women in Media panel”, held in Trinity College on May 5, 2023. The event was organised by Oxford Women in Business (OxWIB) and *The W* magazine, which Prendergast leads. She was the main speaker throughout the event and at the end, she invited Adegboyega to the stage

for a 20 minute one on one interview that had not been planned or sanctioned by OxWIB. *The W* initially reached out to OxWIB in March, looking to co-host a “Women in Media” panel. Over the course of several weeks, the two organisations discussed logistics and what speakers to confirm, benefiting from Prendergast’s “extensive network”. By May 3rd, *The W* had sent OxWIB an email with a list of already confirmed speakers, stating that it would be “fully confirmed by the end of the day”. The list did not include Tobi Adegboyega nor did *The W* send the promised final list. Following a Zoom call later that day, OxWIB set a clear deadline for speaker bio changes later that evening because of “the short notice on speaker confirmations”, and emphasised that after the deadline “[we] won’t be able to make any changes”. They also stated that an OxWIB member would be mediating the questions and panel discussion, although on the day Prendergast dominated the questioning. *Cherwell* has seen the invite *The W* emailed to panelists. It talked at length about the event being hosted at Oxford University, about *The W* and about Prendergast, whom it claimed was a “University of Oxford mentor”. The invitation also stressed that the panel would explore the underrepresentation of women in the media. OxWIB was not mentioned once. Once speakers confirmed that they could attend, they were sent a finalised list of the programme, which included many genuine female editors. It stated that Prendergast would be moderating all the interviews, with OxWIB being reduced to introductions.

*Continued on page 5.*

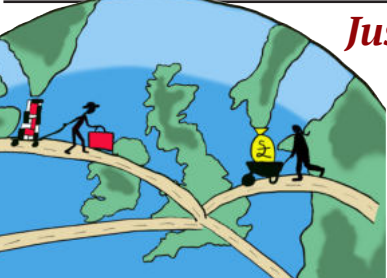


# Oxford interviews to stay online

Alexandra Hedström-Blake and Maggie Wilcox report.

The Admissions Committee (Part of the Conference of Colleges) has decided after a vote that future Oxford undergraduate interviews will remain online for the next five years. Interviews will follow the online model developed during the COVID pandemic, despite the University’s long-standing tradition of in-person interviewing. After a lengthy consultation process, 24 colleges voted in favour of keeping interviews online for the next five years versus seven against. This decision comes as the University may also be moving admissions tests online following their new partnership Tata Consulting Services (TCS). The decision to move interviews online was shared with some JCR and MCR presidents and students. Oriel students were informed in an email “future admissions rounds will be on-line”, despite attempts made by both the students and members of the college’s administration to keep interviews in-person. While responses to this are set to vary across colleges, Oriel has confirmed that it will attempt to offset any potentially negative impact on prospective and incoming students during the admissions process by maximising the opportunities available to visit the college “at other times during the year”. Such concerns over the welfare and support available to offer-holders and prospective students have been echoed elsewhere, with students at St Hilda’s College voicing fears over the disparities that may emerge between students with different access requirements, stating that it was the equivalent of “kicking people out”.

*Continued on page 3.*



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Reflecting on the international student experience at Oxford.

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Does Oxford love Abba too much?

Our editors go head-to-head in the Debate Chamber.

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# 23 Ukrainian refugees registered homeless in Oxford

Rufus Hall reports.

Dozens of Ukrainian refugees in Oxford have been registered homeless, the *Oxford Mail* has uncovered.

The *Mail* submitted numerous FOI requests to councils in Oxfordshire, revealing that 31 of the 2,143 refugees matched with sponsor homes under the Homes for Ukraine scheme in the county are now registered as statutory homeless, over two-thirds of whom are in Oxford.

This follows previous criticism of the scheme, introduced by the government in March of last year to assist individuals, charities, community groups and businesses to bring Ukrainians to safety in the UK following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In response to the request, Oxfordshire councils reported that at least 10 family groups are among the 31 Ukrainians registered homeless in the county. These groups include children and teenagers.

Statutory homelessness designates a situation in which a council is unable to obtain long-term accommodation for a household after 56 days. The status ends when such accommodation is secured.

Kateryna Bondarchuk, who fled Ukraine one week after the Russian invasion in February 2022, cited the high cost of rent as a problem for Ukrainian refugees attempting to find housing in the private rental sector. She said: “I think a lot of Ukrainians are homeless in Oxfordshire because it’s very difficult to rent a house when you don’t have a credit history, and your salary is not high enough for renting.”

The Homes for Ukraine scheme aimed to match Ukrainian refugees with household sponsors in the UK. Sponsors committed to hosting a refugee for at least six months, receiving payments from the government of £350 a month for up to 12 months after the

beginning of the sponsorship.

Bondarchuk highlighted other problems for Ukrainian refugees attempting to find housing after their sponsorship had finished. “Some landlords don’t want to rent their property to Ukrainians because they have visas which only last three years,” she said.

“Sponsors have been receiving £350 a month and it’s so little, especially if you host a big family. If the sponsors were paid more, they would host Ukrainian refugees for more than a year.”

These findings are the latest symptom in a string relating to the government’s handling of Ukrainian refugees. Previously, Robina Qureshi, the head of Positive Action in Housing, the charity which organises the longest-running refugee hosting programme in the UK, said that the government’s Homes for Ukraine scheme amounted to a “gimmick”, and had given people “false hope”. She cited the “tortuous and confusing” bureaucracy involved in the scheme,



which made it inaccessible to many refugees.

The *Times* reported on 29th March 2022 that fewer than one in ten applications to accommodate Ukrainian refugees in British homes had been approved, amid fears that thousands of sponsorship offers would be wasted.

Local councils in England and Wales have a statutory obligation to prevent homelessness. Due to the politically sensitive nature of refugee status, the question now arises as to whether homeless Ukrainian refugees will be given priority attention over the existing homeless population in Oxford and the wider region.

Cabinet member for housing at Oxford City Council, Councillor Linda Smith said: “[F]or those in Oxford, we provide the same homeless prevention support as anyone with the right to live here.”

“There is support available from the council and local refugee organisations for those looking to rent, providing advice and practical support with things like contracts, references and understanding the rental market in Oxford.”

Image Credit: Cyril Malik

# Hertford closes its library until 2025 for £16m renovations

Becky Powell reports.

Hertford College library plans to close in July 2023, with the fully renovated library to reopen in Michaelmas 2025. The renovations are estimated to cost Hertford £16 million.

Hertford claims that “our current library is not fit for purpose”. Last updated in the 1960s, they say that “staff and reader facilities are inadequate and cramped, and we do not have enough capacity for our modern or our historic collections.” The library currently houses an antiquarian collection of around 5000 rare books which they say is currently ‘below national standard’.

The design of the new building hopes to resemble a “living space.” It will have areas for silent, solo study, study carrels, and communal tables for group work. For improved accessibility, there will be a lift to allow step-free access to all floors. Additionally, they plan to create temperature-controlled rooms that have the

space and capacity to store their archives.

The main reading room will be underground with windows designed to maximise light. The front quad will remain almost without alteration. The plans also



include the construction of a room terrace which will look over the Radcliffe Square.

The projects for expansion will increase the floor plan from 273 sqm to 607 sqm, doubling the number of study seats available. It will also provide five new meeting rooms.

These works form part of the college’s desire to reach carbon net zero and biodiversity net gain by 2030. The design includes increased thermal performance as well as upgraded green spaces.

The renovation is part of the ‘Hertford 2030’ project which “preserves the best of our past and enables the future of learning.” The college aspires to have half of the renovation funded by philanthropic donations. They are offering alumni opportunities to name a chair in the new library for £1,000, add their names to an online benefactors’ book, or fund a particular area of the library.

From Michaelmas 2023 Hertford College is planning to offer students study space provisions and access to resources from other locations across college sites.

## News Shorts

### Rosa’s Thai coming to Oxford

A new branch of the restaurant chain Rosa’s Thai will be opening in Oxford on George Street. Rosa’s Thai is a popular national chain, with locations across London and other major cities.

The Rosa’s Thai website says that the branches represent a “family of foodies dedicated to serving up perfected Thai dishes. You’ll find us in unfussy cafes at the heart of neighbourhoods, cooking up fresh dishes from our kitchens straight to your table.” Rosa’s Thai is set to replace another Thai restaurant Busaba, which seems to have now permanently closed.



### Croquet Cuppers 2023 underway

Oxford’s Croquet Cuppers 2023, organised by the Oxford University Association Croquet Club (OUACC) is now fully underway.

The tournament is open to players of all abilities. It requires unlimited teams of 4 from the same college (JCR/ MCR) or Private Permanent Hall to enter. The entry fee to play is £2 a team, which the OUACC is marketing as “less than a meal deal!!”

Despite already being knocked-out, Balliol’s croquet team participated this year and told Cherwell that: “it was very fun” and though they lost their second match, “they will definitely enter again next year.”

More information can be found on the OUACC website.

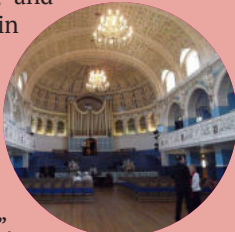


### Oxford’s first Muslim women Lord Mayor

Oxford’s new Lord Mayor is the first woman of colour, and a Muslim to be sworn into office. Labour councillor Lubna Arshad has replaced retired Lord Mayor James Fry. She was sworn in at a ceremony in Oxford Town Hall.

In a statement, Oxford City Council said: “Lubna has made history as the first woman of colour, first Muslim woman of intersectional background, and the youngest Lord Mayor representing the city. Her achievement is ground-breaking and represents significant progress towards diversity, inclusivity, and representation in leadership roles.”

The new lord mayor has said that her appointment was a “momentous occasion” and an “honour of a lifetime”.





# Making out in Mesopotamia: kissing older than previously thought

**Phin Hubbard reports.**

Kissing may be a thousand years older than was believed, a new study conducted by the universities of Oxford and Copenhagen suggests. The study dates ‘human lip kissing’ as being an established feature of life in early Mesopotamian societies by roughly 3500 BCE. Before Doctors Troels Pank Arbøll and Sophie Lund Rasmussen’s research, studies had suggested South Asia was the cradle of kissing civilizations supposedly establishing the practice by around 2500 BCE.

“In ancient Mesopotamia, which is the name for the early human cultures that existed between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in present-day Iraq and Syria, people wrote in cuneiform script on clay tablets”, said Dr Arbøll speaking with the Oxford Mail.

He continued, “many thousands of these clay tablets have survived to this day and they contain clear examples that kissing was considered a part of romantic intimacy in ancient times, just as kissing could be part of friendships and family members’ relations.”

Among the tablets uncovered was a Babylonian clay model depicting what has been confidently called an ‘intimate scene’ dated roughly 1800 BCE.

Dr Rasmussen added: “research into bonobos and chimpanzees, the closest living relatives to humans, has shown that both species engage in kissing, which may suggest that the practice of kissing is a fundamental behaviour in humans, explaining why it can be found across cultures.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, evidence from Mesopotamian tablet records suggest that the institution of human lip kissing may have contributed to the transmission of cold sores. The sores are the hallmark symptom of a person infected with the herpes simplex virus 1 (HSV-1), which Arbøll and Rasmussen tentatively identify with the “bu’shanu disease” referenced in a body of ancient Mesopotamian medical

texts. Arbøll qualified the hypothesis: “the symptoms [of bu’shanu are] reminiscent of the herpes simplex virus”.

However, Arbøll and Rasmussen stress that cuneiform descriptions are not to be taken at face value. “It’s important to note that these ancient medical texts can be influenced by cultural and religious beliefs”, said Arbøll.

Rasmussen offered a less conservative

analysis: “if the practice of kissing was widespread and well-established in a range of ancient societies, the effects of kissing in terms of pathogen transmission must likely have been more or less constant.”

Neither Atik nor Bridge responded to requests for comment.

*Image Credit: Ella Carran*



# Early-life athletic success may lead to shorter life

**Bintia Dennog reports.**

Oxford study finds that athletes’ early-life physical performance affects their ageing and death. An Oxford study has found that early-life physical performance predicts earlier than average ageing and death of elite athletes: baseball and basketball players who peaked sooner tend to die sooner.

These athletes had a 1.2-year shorter adult life expectancy, whilst those whose athletic performance lasted longer had a 0.8-year longer life expectancy, as researched by Oxford’s Dr Saul Newman.

Using data from 24,000 US male basketball and baseball players, Dr Newman calculated ages during peak athleticism and the rates of decline of athletic performance. This was done on the basis of height, Body Mass Index, and performance metrics, such as the batting average and the points scored per game, which were then used to predict late-life mortality patterns.

Newman found that athletes who experienced their peak at a younger age and sustained their athletic performance for shorter periods had a significantly reduced lifespan in comparison to those who peaked later and whose athletic performance lasted longer.

Famous baseball players, such as Yogi

Berra and Willie Mays, whose batting averages declined by 2% of their peak capacity per year, reached age 90, with Mays currently being 92. Sugar Cain’s, whose batting average declined by 12% per year, passed away at age 67.

Dr Newman said: “We know reaction times, motor functions, aerobic and anaerobic performance all decline with the onset of ageing. However, little is known about the effect of early-life physiological decline on mortality. With this study, I hoped to gain insights on this link by examining unique and rich historical data from elite athletes, which capture the early-life physical capacity of a unique group of people.” The research also suggested that athletes who peaked earlier may age at a slower rate, despite their shorter lifespans. Athletes who peaked early had their mortality rates double every 7.6 years of age, whilst those who peaked later had theirs double every 8.4 years of age. The study also found a positive association between height and late-life mortality rates in athletes, suggesting that taller players were more likely to die sooner.

Future research is necessary to determine whether this also applies to female athletes or the general population. Dr Saul Newman added: “A rise in wearable technologies provides an exciting opportunity to test this link in wider populations who now

have activity data like that of elite athletes at their fingertips.”

*Image Credit: Oxfordunibal*



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...Without school access to computers or the resources necessary for online interviews, considerable concerns have been expressed over the move, although the University does offer equipment and technology to schools lacking.

Ria Mann, the St Hughs college Welare rep told Cherwell that “students may feel more comfortable at home in a familiar environment, however this is not the case for everyone.” She adds that access to comfortable, quiet spaces vary and that “the most important thing is giving everyone the most fair chance to perform well in interviews and there is definitely an argument that by being at home and online, this is less guaranteed.”

In a statement to *Cherwell*, the University confirmed “The colleges of Oxford University have decided that forthcoming undergraduate admissions interviews will take place online. This follows extensive consultation carried out with stakeholders across the University and elsewhere, concerning the merits of both in person and online formats in admissions interviews, and the success of this format over the past three years. Oxford will continue to aim to deliver a consistent and high-quality experience for this part of the collegiate University’s application process. We are grateful to the many schools, colleges, parents and guardians who support their students for an Oxford interview”.



# Oxford medical students comment on treatment of ethnic minority patients

Anika Gupta reports.

In response to critical reports of discrimination and lack of empathy in health care treatment of ethnic minority patients, a new study has investigated the link between sociocultural factors and the patient experience. The study, led by the University of Westminster with participation of scientists from Oxford University’s Department of Psychiatry, has revealed that encouraging and nurturing better connections between ethnic minority patients and health care professionals could lead to more positive health care experiences.

The study has uncovered that the care, emotions, and circumstances of ethnic minority patients have often been overlooked. Results indicate that if health care professionals conveyed greater understanding and warmth, as a close friend or family member would, then they could have a far more beneficial impact on the care they give to their patients. Fundamentally, the study found that ethnic minority patients “yearned” for themselves and their conditions to be understood by their practitioners.

Indeed, when Oxford’s current medical students of ethnic minority backgrounds were asked how they felt about the way patients like them were treated under the current healthcare system, their responses reflected the results and conclusions of the study. One student told *Cherwell*: “I think BAME patients are slightly misunderstood,

due to barriers in communication and cultural lifestyle choices.” They further mentioned that they felt the UK doesn’t provide the same level of attention to ethnic groups of different sizes, referring to having to register themselves as an “other” ethnic group in forms, even though they come from a large country in the Middle East.

Another student told *Cherwell*: “Doctors and healthcare workers don’t do enough

enough to bridge communication barriers and often hold stereotypes towards people of colour.”

The idea that there are gaps in knowledge and compassion of healthcare workers towards ethnic minority groups is recurrent. A participant of one of the examined studies implied that they seek professionals ‘who will listen to us, who will allow us to talk’, thereby hoping to gradually close the gap of miscommunication and misunderstanding



and foster positive connections.

Contributing author Professor Kam Bhui from Oxford’s Department of Psychiatry commented: “[...] the importance of warmth and positivity in health consultations should be explored as a way of improving care”.

The study concludes that training in developing better, more meaningful connections with patients could improve overall care for those patients from ethnic minority communities. When Oxford’s ethnic minority representatives for medicine were asked what they believed would improve the current system and raise awareness of the issues, they encouraged the implementation of practical approaches. They told *Cherwell* that they would like to see health care professions given “basic training into significant cultural variations within the community which are important to consider in administering treatment.” Additionally, they hoped to see more insightful intense case studies of ethnic minority patients being introduced in their medical studies, and at a wider level, increased diversity of healthcare professionals at all levels which could help promote patient-carer connections.

The results of this study: ‘A meta-ethnography investigating relational influences on mental health and cancer-related health care interventions for racially minoritised people in the UK’ have been published in the journal PLOS ONE.

Image Credit: Matheus Ferrero via Unsplash

## Just Stop Oil activist gives talk at Earth Sciences department

Sloane Getz reports.

The Oxford University Earth Sciences Department hosted Just Stop Oil activist Phoebe Plummer for a speaker event last Thursday, entitled “How To Just Stop Oil. Start acting like life depends on it: civil resistance to climate chaos in 2023.”

Plummer, a 21-year-old student and climate activist from London, generated controversy last year when she and a fellow activist glued themselves to a wall in the National Gallery and threw soup at Van Gogh’s Arles Sunflowers to protest against climate inaction.

Just Stop Oil, the organisation Plummer represents, has gained notoriety for their unorthodox protest strategies, which have included other art gallery protests and “slow marches”, which aim to draw media and public attention to the urgency needed to combat the climate crisis.

In her speech, Plummer stressed that without serious climate action, “We might see the destruction of all we know and love.” These sentiments have been echoed by Oxford academics at the Earth Sciences department and beyond. In a 2021 report, Raymond T. Pierrehumbert, the Halley Professor of Physics, urged that “As long as there is any unburned fossil fuel left in the ground, it is still worth fighting to keep it there.”

In an interview with *Cherwell*, James Skeet, a spokesperson for Just Stop Oil said: “History has shown time and time again that

disruptive civil tactics are a large component of what brings about change, the fact we have universal suffrage, the civil rights movement – it’s a very long list [...] most of the rights we enjoy today didn’t come about through polite asking but through people making the nuisance of themselves and demanding change.

“University students have always been at the forefront of real social change, so it’s absolutely imperative that young people are well versed in this sort of stuff and keen to get out into the streets – and ultimately its young peoples’ futures on the line.”

University students and young people make up a significant proportion of Just Stop Oil’s activists and students involved in the organisation at Oxford University and Oxford Brookes have demonstrated extensively in Oxford this year. Last term, Just Stop Oil activists hung banners near the Longbridges Boat House during the Torpids boat race and conducted a two-hour-long “slow march” through Oxford city centre to protest new deep mining projects in Cumbria. These demonstrations have been met with public frustration, but on the whole the student response has been largely supportive.

In response to a request for comment, a University spokesperson said “This is an externally-organised event booking that the University has assessed in line with its code of practice on meetings and events, as it does with all such requests.”

## Analysis: Don’t stop the speakers, Just Stop Oil!

Freddie Maud



Attempting to reproduce Vincent Van Gogh’s Sunflowers as part of a primary school art project is one of my earliest childhood memories. Only an artistic masterpiece like Van Gogh’s could have branded itself into my memory, and indeed the memory of a great many. It captures the imagination with its beauteous banality, as was its artist’s intention. I can only assume that it is for this reason that Phoebe Plummer, a Just Stop Oil climate activist, threw a can of Heinz tomato soup at it. For maximum impact.

Some will praise her for her bravery. For making a stand on what is undoubtedly one of the world’s most pressing crises. Others will question quite what relevance the stunt had to the climate crisis. Wherever one’s sympathies lie, Plummer’s recent invitation to speak at an event at Oxford’s Department of Earth Sciences is, in my view, something to be lauded. Her platform at the University was not her first. On 28th March, she appeared on GB News to speak with Jacob Rees-Mogg about fighting

climate change. To those who decry her invitation to Oxford on the basis of her being due to stand trial for her alleged crime, surely the fact that even GB News – a news broadcaster hardly famed for its endorsement of climate activism - hosted her, makes us all the more duty-bound to invite her too. Oxford does not shy away from inviting controversial speakers from the right. Why should we not welcome those from the left as well?

What’s more, Plummer’s appearance started a conversation. The Oxford Mail reported that an Oxford PhD student who attended the event spoke out about how, as an undergraduate at Cambridge, they wore “a lab coat with a BP logo on it” and how “[i]t was entirely normal to get Shell sponsorship when organising a conference”. If this student’s openness does not illustrate the productive, liberating potential of hosting speakers like Plummer, then I do not know what else would. All we can hope for is that we continue welcoming them, in the spirit of tolerance and intellectual creativity.



Continued from front page.

The finalised programme did not mention Adegboyega, only indicating that there would be a “Special Guest interview”. Programmes handed out on the day only stated that Prendergast would be interviewing “PT”, Adegboyega’s nickname used in NXTION Family.

Adegboyega’s visit was a surprise to all, including the female media figures invited to speak on the panel. One of the panelists told *Cherwell*:

“I agreed [to come] as I felt it would be a good thing to support younger people with an interest in the media and speak to the students at Oxford uni. “I had no idea who the guest speaker was and was genuinely surprised by his presence (especially after having Googled him on the way home). It was entirely out of kilter with everyone else.”

Another added: “As I sat there I thought their discussion was odd and wondered what the agenda was, and double checked the program to see who it was. Which if you refer to the program will see that it only mentions special guest.[sic]”

*The W* previously told *Cherwell* Adegboyega was invited “becuase he is well versed and experienced in handling the media”, and called him a “media matriarch”.

At the event and during the networking that followed, *The W* collected the contact information of all attendees. They told *Cherwell* “[t]here was no guest list and on the day no one took note of attendees via OxWIB, therefore *The W* created a guest list on the day of every attendee on arrival whilst they received goody bags”.

OxWIB are advising anyone who attended the event to email president@oxwib.com, urging attendees “not to engage with anyone you gave contact information to at the event”.

**The video**

Two days after the event, Adegboyega posted a video to Instagram. Standing in Trinity’s quad, he tells the camera “I count it a great privilege to be invited to speak on this ground”, while the caption claims he is there to address “leaders of the Trinity College”.

A spokesperson for Trinity College told *Cherwell* that “contrary to the claims of the video, the event was not a college or University-hosted event and no college or University staff were present to meet with Mr Adegboyega”. They added that they “consider his video to be misrepresenting the nature of his visit to the college”. Trinity College policy normally requires permission for external people to film on Trinity grounds, which was not granted to Adegboyega as all arrangements were made through OxWIB, who were unaware that this filming was happening.

The video includes selected clips of the one on one interview between Prendergast

and Adegboyega, sequenced with cinematic pans of the attendees at the event, who did not give permission to be recorded, especially for promotional purposes.

In April, Adegboyega spoke at an event held at Corpus Christi which generated similar footage posted on his/Pulse TV’s YouTube and Instagram accounts. Again, he was a speaker for an event hosted by another third-party organisation.

The video bears close resemblance to the other videos posted by Adegboyega, often posing in frames displaying wealth and powerful institutions, including the UK parliament.

**The associates**

Adegboyega and Prendergast have a history that predates the Women in Media panel. According to Abegboyega’s website, “Phadria has been part of the Nxtion Family since 2017, where she is part of the Welcome Team”.

On her Instagram, celebrating that she was on the Forbes 30 Under 30 list, Prendergast writes “thank you to the family I finally found in 2017, my real father (PT) who has all the words I need to write”. ‘PT’ is a nickname often used by those familiar with SPAC Nation and NXTION Family to refer to Adegboyega. [Link to forbe winners in jail article]

Visible in footage from the event is another associate of Adegboyega’s, former SPAC Nation pastor and current member of NXTION Family Mariam Mola (also known as Mariam Mbula or Nopapa Mbula). Mola was the subject of the BBC Panorma investigation Catch Her if You Can, which described her as a “career con artist”. Mola has racked up convictions and jail time across Europe, including charges that she led a crime gang in Italy that targeted luxury stores with fraudulent credit cards. According to the BBC, she also operated a “TRAP house” for SPAC Nation and pressured young women in her safe house to hand her control over their finances.

Prendergast’s LinkedIn profile previously indicated she worked in waste management before switching to journalism. *The W*, for which she is “global” editor-in-chief,

is a new publication incorporated on 30th March 2023. It does not appear in retailers and trying to buy a copy online returns with an error. Despite striking design similarities, it should not be confused with *W*, a fashion magazine and subsidiary brand of BDG.

Prendergast previously ran the *Women of the City* magazine (WOTC), which she describes on LinkedIn as “Europe’s fastest growing women’s magazine in enterprise and community” with “a global readership of over 250,000”. However, victims of WOTC’s alleged fraud tell a different story. Accounts on Instagram and Twitter dedicated to “exposing the WOTC scam” gather victim



Tobi Adegboyega, leader of former SPAC Nation Church and current head of NXTION Family.

Image Credit: Aijayreports/CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

accounts, who claim that the magazine posed as legitimate and charged up to £14,000 for products such as photoshoots, cover features, displays on London taxis, and “a panel at Selfridges with names such as Bobbi Brown”, only to ghost them after receiving payment.

WOTC has also been accused of handing out “grants with a catch”. One writer received a £500 grant for web design only to find themselves £750 down the drain. The grant could only be applied towards the cost of services at one firm, Revolt, whose website was coincidentally registered by WOTC. The invoice from Revolt ended up totalling £1250, and it contained no address or company registration details.

Following the “Women in Media Event”, OxWIB told *Cherwell*: “OxWIB did not know that Mr. Adegboyega would be one of the speakers at the Women in Media Panel, and we did not know about the link between Prendergast and Mr. Adegboyega until after

the event.

“We believe we were deliberately misled into thinking that this would be an ordinary event, when in fact the intent behind it was to platform Mr. Adegboyega and provide further legitimacy for the *W* Magazine. We are appalled to have been used in such a way, but we have a duty of care to our members to ensure that any personal information given out at the networking session does not put them at risk.”

As of Wednesday May 24, Adegboyega’s video taken in Trinity College has over 2,400 likes.

Neither Adegboyega, *The W* nor Prendergast have responded to *Cherwell*’s requests for comment.

“Trinity Colleges “consider[s] his video to be misrepresenting the nature of his visit to the college”

“We believe we were deliberately misled



# Captains’ Corner: OURFC

This week we spoke to Sophie Shams, Captain of OURFC Blues team.

**What made you want to get involved with rugby at Oxford?**

Well, as I am a postgrad, I’m old, and I know that I need a group of people around me. Rugby clubs are quite good at giving you a sisterhood and a family. Varsity was a big enticer for me and it really drew me towards Oxford because I thought if I’m gonna study I might as well go somewhere that has a rugby scene. I’m happy that I did because so many of the people that I spend time with are from rugby.

**What makes rugby the best sport?**

After a long day of sitting at a desk, getting frustrated that your code isn’t working, the best thing is running around on a pitch with your friends where you can just tackle, make your mark, let some frustration out, and have some fun. Rugby is just so inclusive – like any shape, any size, anyone can play, and you can meet so many different people.

**How did this past season go for you?**

I think it went better than everyone expected. We got new coaches in and the past Captain, Lauren, did such a great job in all of our success. So it’s quite a big task to fill those boots. We won the most games that we ever had since 2011, and that’s the earliest record we have, so it might have been the best season that we’ve ever had. It was the first time that we’ve won varsity at Twickenham since 2016, and we had such a great scoreline compared to all the other years. It was such a huge margin that it really put down our mark and stated we are Oxford Rugby and this is what we can do.

**How does it feel to be named as captain for this season?**

It feels amazing to be awarded the captaincy. I have a few ideas on how to pull in parts from my premiership, from my international experiences and just being with teams and with

different groups of people, using things that I like, and avoiding what I don’t. And it’s not just rugby; there are things I want to introduce from touch and rowing things that will ensure a bit more team cohesion. I feel that a lot of the players respect me and they come to me, and in turn, I respect and look up to them just in general for things. I’m always learning from them, which is rewarding. I’ve got quite a good relationship with coaches and I feel that I can bring us all together.

**Where can we watch you guys play?**

Matches are free to attend at the Iffley rugby club, and follow @ourfc blues on Instagram.



# LANCERS THRASH PYTHONS IN 16TH BLUES BOWL

*Men’s Blues take back the title with a final score of 41-7*

Image Credit: Gary Chesters

## OULAFC Varsity report

The game started out with good back-and-forth progress from both sides but neither team was able to establish themselves as the dominant offense. Soon, however, the Lancers found an opportunity, capitalizing on a botched Pythons punt return and recovering the ball at the 15 yard-line. A couple of plays later, Quarterback Joel Chesters ran the ball wide to the right, avoiding tackles to score the first touchdown of the game – after a successful kick the score was 7-0 Lancers. Chester continued to torment the Tabs the whole second quarter, starting with an impressive pass over multiple defenders which landed in the hands of receiver #19, Kevin Kim for the touchdown. Another converted kick by #8 Greg Rashid took the score up to 14-0. But Near the end of the second quarter, Chester once again unleashed a stunning ball which was taken to the house by #14 Aari Shah with a beautiful catch and incredible speed for a 70-yard touchdown finishing the first half with a score of 21-0.

The Oxford Lancers running game, led by running back #2 David Ojeablu defined the

start of the second half. The Pythons were facing threats from Chesters on the outside and Ojeablu up the middle throughout the game. The Lancers running duo proved too much for Cambridge as the tabs were caught out between clogging the middle and covering the outsides. Chester quickly scored his fourth touchdown, this time running it again wide to the left. Another converted kick took the score to 28-0

Eventually, the fourth quarter rolled around and after a touchdown from #2 Ojeablu, a worthy reward for his 90+ yard effort in this game, the 35-0 score changed in Cambridge’s favour and a small bit of hope brewed for the clearly defeated Pythons. A well-deserved touchdown for the Pythons came behind a great drive from runningback #1 Mackintosh. The converted kick took the score to 35-7. With just a minute left to go, Chester, the clear MVP of the match found his touchdown trifecta, a Lancer’s trick play had runningback Ojeablu throw the ball to Chesters who ran it in for the touchdown; his reception made the score 41-7 and marked the end of the Blues Bowl.

## Summer VIIIs

**Jessica Cullen**

Eighths week is upon us, and the four-day regatta is promised to be a spectacular event this year. The second of the two series of bumping races has arrived. Last term on the Isis saw colleges like LMH and Worcester enjoying amazing campaigns as well as a Just Stop Oil protest marking the final day. This term may have a few surprises up its sleeve. The weather is forecasted to be sunshine all four days, making watching the rowing with a Pimms in hand the perfect study break. The race takes place on the Isis and the goal is to become “Head of the River” and stay there - getting bumped means getting overtaken, and at the end you want to be the boat at the front. Last year’s winners were Oriel in men’s div 1, and University in women’s div 1, but all races are sure to be hotly contested. Racing will occur between 12:15 and 19:15 every day between Wednesday and Saturday, and lots of events will run at respective boathouses. With every boat house sure to be buzzing with excitement and BBQ, this event is not to be missed!

# Ever Gunner get a better chance?

**Declan Ryder**

On January 18th, Arsenal held a sizeable eight-point lead over City, and they have spent 248 days at the top of the Premier League table this season, the most any side has ever done to then not win the league. The accusations of ‘bottling’ from rival fans are natural, but the reasons for such a late-season falter are of course more complex.

The first thing to note is Arsenal were not expected by anyone to challenge for the title this season. Having finished 5th last season, most expected them to challenge for the top 4 again, but really even the aspirations of their own fans did not extend much beyond that for their domestic campaign. Arteta recruited well in the summer, though, bringing in the City duo of Oleksandr Zinchenko at left-back and Gabriel Jesus as striker, as well as utilising the perennially loaned-out William Saliba at centre-back, who has particularly excelled, although was injured recently.

His injury is a notable example of one of the crucial issues afflicting Arsenal in the late stages of the campaign: an unfortunate injury record and the lack of quality squad depth to make sufficient amends.

It is fair to say that the quality of City’s replacements is superior to Arsenal’s. When Guardiola wishes to rest Bernardo Silva, he has the quality of Mahrez to step in, and he even at times has the licence to leave De Bruyne out in favour of World Cup-winning Julian Alvarez.

The relentlessness of Manchester City cannot be underestimated one bit. This is a side that has won their last twelve Premier League matches. It is hard to argue against them being the best Premier League side of all time, so is it really fair to see Arsenal as having ‘bottled it’?

There are perhaps some foundations in the argument of Arsenal showing a certain mental fragility in recent months. In April, they threw away 2 goal leads in consecutive games, the first away to Liverpool and the second to West Ham. Some have pointed to such results to suggest that the side lacked sufficient experience in decisive moments to hold their nerve and ensure the win. Arsenal has the youngest average squad age in the league and don’t have the luxury of players who consistently know how to handle the pressures associated with a title challenge, as City do. Having said this, they have equally shown moments of character in recent weeks, too, such as rescuing a 3-3 draw in the last minute against Southampton, having trailed 3-1. In fact, their youth can be said to have been a factor in their free-flowing, fearless football at the start of the campaign which fared them so well.

Arsenal has had an unexpectedly impressive season, and although their performances in the past few months have been disappointing, to say the least, their inability to maintain their position at the top of the league should not be too excessively critiqued,. The fear is, however, that this is a missed opportunity and one which may not present itself again in the near future. United are likely to improve further under Ten Hag, as will Newcastle with more investment and both Liverpool and Chelsea have experienced off seasons this year, particularly the latter. It is slightly concerning for supporters of the Gunners that they may never get such a palpable opportunity to win the league again in the coming years.



# Just as nice for thrice the price?

Tom Grigg reflects on the international student experience at Oxford and the associated price tag.

I would be lying if I said I hadn't looked into getting adopted by my British relatives. Why? Well, as an Australian citizen, I have the poor luck of falling into the "overseas student" category when it comes to university fees. So much for being a member of the Commonwealth! If I could have successfully naturalised, I would stand to save a staggering £75,000 over the course of my degree.

This figure comes from the difference between the annual fees for a PPE degree for home students and those for students hailing from abroad. While the former are capped by the government at £9,250, the latter are more or less subject to the vicissitudes of the market, where the current equilibrium is £35,080. For a subject like Psychology, Philosophy and Linguistics, the number is £44,240.

Now, the University has a professed commitment to inclusivity in both an international and financial sense. However, if we look a little closer, in light of the above disparity there is a contradiction in some of the University's claims. Consider the following excerpts from the website:

"Oxford's international profile rivals that of any university in the world, highlighted by the breadth and depth of its research collaborations and a truly global student body and academic staff."

"Today, one third of our students, including 21% of undergraduates, are international citizens and come from over 140 countries."

"Our ambition is to ensure that no one with outstanding academic potential is deterred from studying here because of their background, personal circumstances, or finances."

Does this ambition really extend to the entirety of the student body? Of course, all the overseas students here are both willing and able to meet the financial demands one way or another. To get a broader perspective on the

international experience at Oxford, I sat down with a few students to listen to their thoughts.

Moving to university is a big step for anyone. For international students, it's a massive step. No one can better testify to this than Jenni, a first-year PPList. Her journey to college was more daunting than most. Forget the 23-minute train ride from Reading, Jenni flew all the way from Sydney, Australia: "I came here alone two weeks before term started... I was walking up and down the High Street, no one was helping me... I knew no one." Once term starts, one quickly becomes much too busy to be preoccupied with homesickness and whatnot, but those first few weeks can be especially isolating when home is half a world away.

Julia, an American PPEist coming from across the pond, discussed the additional travails she faced. On top of the canonical learning curves in time management, essaying and domestic duties, Julia spent her first few weeks in Oxford "getting phone plans, sorting out my visa, setting up a bank account... Stuff like that, where if things go wrong, this is actually a problem!"

The degree of culture shock one experienced was closely tied to the student's previous international experience. Irene, a biologist at St Hilda's who grew up in Australia and then Shanghai, completed sixth-form here in the UK, and recognises the head start this gave her when university began: "I learned about the culture, the people and how things work here... I feel like understanding the pop-culture here helps in communicating with people here and the other way around."

On the other hand, Mrinal, another first-year, was born and brought up in India, and we discussed the range of factors one had to acclimatise to in making the big jump to Oxford: "It was a totally new experience for me shifting from an Indian curriculum to a British one... The culture

here is quite different, there are different tastes, different hobbies, different foods... I think the catering system needs to improve in order to better cater for international students."

For most students, life inside Oxford is completely different to life outside Oxford. Cecilia, a second-year Engineer who has been an expat her whole life, emphasises this dichotomy: "It does sometimes feel like my life is split in two. Once I come to Oxford, I'm in Oxford; once I'm back in Paris, I'm in Paris, and there's no oscillation between the two."

Given how intense the term is, it can be nice to catch a break. For Julia, "a lot of times, it can seem like life in Oxford is everything... the way I escape that very intense lifestyle is coming back [to the US] and it's really nice to put everything into perspective, in the sense that no matter what happens in the UK, I will always have this home."

Throughout the interviews, the general consensus reached was that yes, there were additional logistics that needed consideration, but it was definitely worth it - it's not unreasonable to say that going to the top university in the world is always worth it. The differences between the international and domestic experiences were much smaller than the similarities. The main point of contention was, as this article has been driving towards, the fees.

The financial requirements associated with tertiary education vary around the globe. On one hand, you have the US system, exorbitantly expensive. When I asked Julia about her thoughts on the overseas fees at Oxford, she notes: "For a lot of [Americans], going to school in the UK is the cheapest option. Even with the flights taken into account, it costs so much less for me to go to the UK [...] when we were looking at Harvard, it was around [...] three times as much for a single year." On the other is the Danish system. I wonder if a case couldn't be made for the university itself to have a greater responsibility in promoting financial inclusivity. At the very least, I'm not sure the ambition "to ensure that no one with outstanding academic potential is deterred from studying here because of... finances" is quite compatible with the fact that the Student Loan option is

unavailable to international students. Scholarships don't provide a viable option either; as the website notes, numbers are "very limited, which is why we encourage students to explore options for sourcing funding in their home country." Australia, my home country, has a similar student loan scheme to the UK, but unfortunately it is only available for Australian students studying in Australia.

The fact is, most international students rely on private finance. Everyone interviewed recognised the privilege of being able to afford to attend Oxford; Ibrahim, another first-year, mentioned that his parents "have been planning for these kinds of fees for our whole lives." Mine have too, but the year-on-year increase of £6,000 - a roughly 20% increase, while the Consumer Price Index for the UK has measured annual inflation at 10.4% in January - is hard to swallow.

For every worthy student who is lucky enough to afford their place, one can't help but think of those who aren't so fortunate. Those students facing economic hardship, in both developed and developing countries, who have the intellectual means but lack the finances. There undoubtedly are comparable domestic cases, but this is mitigated by initiatives like the Crankstart Scholarship. For the international case, Cecilia argues - and it is hard to disagree - that admission is a case of merit conditional on financial viability: "It's only the best from those that can afford it."

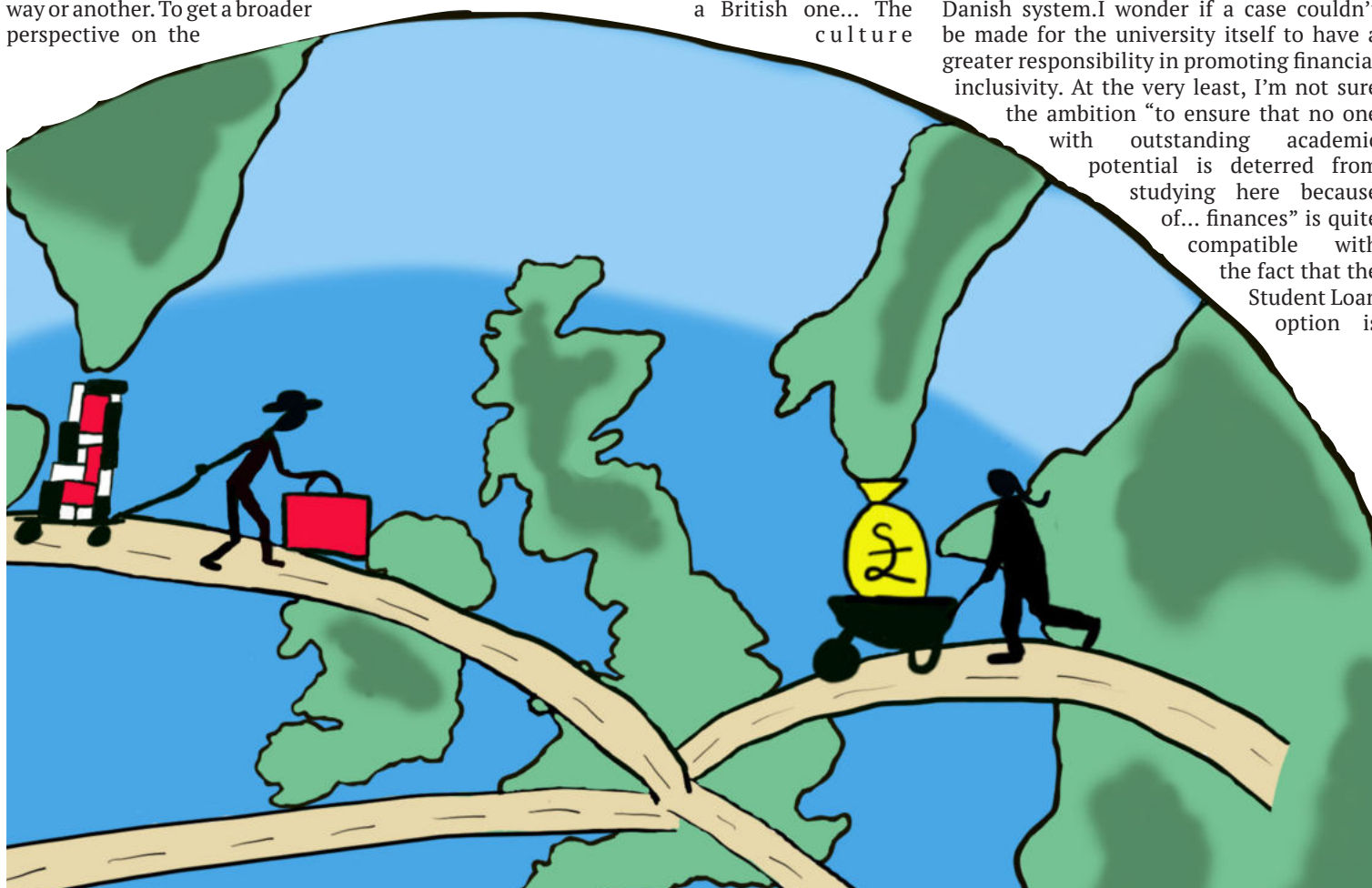
## Is there a solution?

Assuming the government is unable to financially support these students for political and economic reasons, I believe there is still the possibility of recreating the student loan option independently. Think of a large - and yes, it would have to be large indeed - fund from which international students could take a loan to cover the cost of tuition, to be paid back in the future, adjusted for inflation. The University is quick to tout the employability of its graduates, so I don't see why such a fund couldn't be self-sustaining once established.

This is what realising the ambition of admitting everyone with the requisite academic potential could look like. Unfortunately, it would require a considerable capital endowment. Ideally, it would be great to see the University put its money where its mouth is, but as Cecilia said "There's only so much money to go around, and because it is so expensive for any single student to come here, the University does just not have the budget to send more than a handful of students here." The alternative could be an extremely benevolent series of donations from alumni and other philanthropists who see the value in such a fund. Dear reader, if you are feeling especially benevolent today you could be the first to take this step!

I'd like to think that international students contribute a unique perspective that enriches the university experience for everyone, and of course, they have as much to gain from an Oxford degree as anyone else. The quality of its students is one of Oxford's greatest strengths as an institution. But the truth is, the system caters for most, but not everyone. There are deserving students out there that miss out on what Oxford has to offer, and I refuse to accept that it has to be that way.

Artwork by Ellen Appleby





# How do we keep Campsfield closed?

Emma Belmonte discusses how students can oppose the government's plan to reopen an Oxfordshire immigration detention centre.

In the first week of Hilary Term, the Student Union became an officially named member of the Keep Campsfield Closed Coalition. The coalition has been organising repeated protests to raise awareness and to express the strong local opposition across Oxfordshire to Campsfield immigration centre's reopening. But what is Campsfield?

Located in Kidlington just 5 miles north of Oxford, the Campsfield immigration centre was active for over 20 years before being closed in 2018. And yet in June 2022, the current Home Office announced its plans to reopen the centre. The 400 beds of the new facility would once more be occupied by people in exile whose situation the Home Office deems irregular. The people who enter those centres are detained without trial and constrained to a purgatory, waiting for the unforeseeable rulings of the Home Office. The inhabitants are subjected to a hell of administrative threats of expulsions, even though most of them will eventually be granted asylum. There are currently seven immigration detention centres currently running across the UK, which according to the government can accommodate up to 3000 people in total. Campsfield's reopening would therefore largely increase the Home Office's detention capacities, and cost no less than £227 million. The Home Office intends to justify this cost by 'going to the market', which translates to leaving the responsibility

of its administration to private companies. According to multiple accounts of past detainees, this model further worsens the conditions of detention as the administration is run in a perspective of making profits.

The closure of Campsfield in 2018 occurred in a context of repeated protests from local human right activists, as well as numerous hunger strikes and disturbances organised by the detainees themselves. In 2018, the Immigration Minister, Caroline Nokes, presented Campsfield's closure as a milestone achievement towards the Home Office's aim to reduce the immigration detention estate by almost 40% from 2015. In her address during Campsfield's official closure, Nokes declared: "Now is the right time to modernise and rationalise the detention estate. We are committed to ensuring we have a fair and humane immigration system that provides control, and detention must only be used when we are confident no other approaches will work." The closures of 2018 followed up on Stephen Shaw's commissioned reports on detention centres which carried shocking revelations about the failings of this system, the precarious running of the facilities, and its effects on vulnerable people in immigration detention. The Home Office further committed to a collaboration with charities and communities in developing alternatives to detention, protection of the most vulnerable and lastly to increase transparency.

However, there has been a drastic shift in the government's attitude vis à vis immigrant detention. Despite Nokes' declaration and the Shaw reports which revealed the archaism of this system behind closed doors, a brand new official discourse has emerged in the last 5 years. This was set out by the current Home Office in 2021: "Those with no right to remain in the UK should be in no doubt of our determination to remove them. Immigration detention plays a vital role in tackling illegal migration and protecting the public from harm." (Home Office and Tom Pursglove MP, 23 November 2021). The current Home Office's choice of words is clearly characteristic of the current tendency across Europe to make immigration a matter of security as irregular immigrants are constantly presented as potential threats to the public.

In February of this year, I interviewed Allan, one of the founding members of the Keep Campsfield Closed coalition (KCC) which was revived soon after the Home Office's announcement in 2022. Allan was himself detained in Campsfield in 2013. He arrived in the UK in 2009 after escaping from political persecution in Uganda, working and paying

taxes while waiting for his asylum request to be processed. One day he was taken without notice to Campsfield after his residency status was rejected. After being detained for 9 months, a judge ruled the end of his detention, and he was granted asylum status. Allan has experienced the criminalisation of immigrants and asylum seekers firsthand: "(detained) people who went out to access medical attention, to see dentists or to see any other physical pains or whatever, they had to handcuff them. So anybody who gets to see you at the dentist may think you are some very, very big criminal from somewhere". And yet,

only 10% of people detained in detention centres actually are foreign nationals with prison sentences. As for the other 90%, "their cases are just purely 'immigration'".

The Home Office presents detention centres as instrumental to

deportations within the Rwanda Agreement, which allows people deemed 'inadmissible' in the UK to be flown to Rwanda to seek asylum there, and thus: "a fundamental part of our Nationality and Borders Bill and the New Plan for Immigration which will make it easier to remove people who have no right to

“  
To see dentists  
they had to [be  
handcuffed]



be in the UK.”

However, unlike the official name ‘Immigration Removal centres’ suggests, a large majority of the people detained are never ‘removed’. According to the KKC: “86% of people leaving detention in 2021 were released on bail, and most made successful claims to asylum or other forms of humanitarian protection, rendering their detention wholly unnecessary”. If by law, these detentions are supposed to be strictly temporary, reality proves much different. As MP Layla Moran puts forward in a debate at the Parliament on September 23rd 2022, “the average length of detention was 55 days, but some men were held for “excessive periods”. The longest detention in that year (2018) was one year and five months, but we have heard from detainees who were held for more than three years. Many detainees are not held in one centre but are deported, released, or moved around the system.”

The ‘indefinite’ nature of the detention, coupled with the weekly “threatening” notices from the Home Office, are what Allan experienced as being the most scaring to the detained people’s mental health :

“The issue with being in a detention centre is the uncertainty because a person who’s in jail, real jail, is sentenced; the person knows: you’re spending three months, you’re spending a year, you’re spending whatever time, but in the detention centre, it’s indefinite. That is the hardest part of waking up and not knowing what is happening to you the next day... and you know what the Home Office does? They’ll keep writing you letters almost every week and none of those letters are good. You open up a letter that is threatening you, that is calling you ‘a danger for society’, you’re this and that. That’s something that breaks you down, because you came to a country seeking refugee status, thinking they will give you protection. But the people you run to, they keep the money to keep you in detention. Because it’s like if you have a boyfriend and the boyfriend has been abusing you and beating you up and doing all horrible things to you, then you run to

your neighbour thinking your neighbour will keep you out of that danger, close the door. But he just opens the door for your boyfriend to continue beating you there.”

Detention centres traumatise the detainees, denying them access to any mental health support; according to various accounts, this led to self-harm and suicide, as it is thought to have been the case in the Colnbrook immigration removal centre near Heathrow

on the 26th of March of this year.

Behind closed doors, immigration centres are inherently opaque, allowing for repeated violations of the rights of the people they detain. Although the law forbids the detention of minors, recurring

testimonies actually reveal the presence of children in detention centres, one example of which is accounted by MP Layla Moran:

“In 2013, I uncovered that a child was being held at Campsfield. A boy was held there for between two and three months. He would have been the only child in an adult-dominated, guarded facility with barbed wire fences. He would not have been allowed to go to school and he would have been unable to interact with other children or lead any sort of normal childhood. We know very little about him other than that he was between 12 and 16.”

Furthermore, the flow of information in and out of detention centres is strictly limited to, at times, unlawful extents. Journalists are never allowed to pass the threshold of detention centres, and as detainees do traverse it, their smartphones are confiscated and exchanged for ‘little phones’ to which they can transfer their lines, phones which of course do not allow access to the internet, nor to take pictures, videos or recording of any kind. In my conversation with Allan, I asked him if they had any other means of accessing internet:

“There is a library where you go, this internet, you can go online, you can go on your emails, but most of the sites were blocked. (...) things like YouTube, things like Facebook, lots of things, lots of sites were blocked.”

“Lots of sites” include the charity organisations which

provide legal aid and support for asylum seekers. This unlawful restriction of access to information is also part of the history of Oxford University’s involvement with Campsfield, as late Professor Barbara Harrell-Bond (Emerita Professor and founding director of the Refugee Studies Centre from 1982 to 1996) was devoted to providing legal help to Campsfield detainees, and as accounted by Allan, advocated to lift the censorship of information which blocked the access to a variety of internet sites in the centre.

So what explains this shift in policy? And furthermore, how did this shift occur in the context of an appearing continuity of the conservatives’ hold on power? Since 2017, Downing Street has been occupied by all rather anti-immigration conservative politicians and yet, the policies regarding immigration detention have completely changed. It is first surprising that it was under the government of Theresa May that the Shaw reports were completed, and thoroughly acknowledged as accepted, shown by the large plans to close the detention centre. On the occasion of the organisation of a roundtable headed by MP Layla Moran in February, a Lib-Dem Councillor shared his thoughts with me on this interrogation. According to him, the explanation was twofold: first of all, he

characterised Theresa May as having been relatively flexible when facing results from studies as well as public opposition, leading her to respond to the general condemnation of immigration detention centres. This pragmatism was not shared by her successors. He added that the shift occurred during the late days of the Johnson II government. Facing a growing precarity of centrist support, his government held more tightly to its supporters of the hard nationalist right, which explains this frenetic and alarmist attachment to detention centres. More recently, the government has extended the investment in detention centres beyond its borders with the announcement of a £500m package of UK public money meant to fund the construction of detention centres in France to prevent refugees attempting to cross the Channel

This year Oxford University has been awarded with the University of Sanctuary status, an award ‘recognising Oxford’s continued determination and initiatives to aid sanctuary seekers, whether they be students, staff or members of the local community’. The Sanctuary Fair on Thursday 11th marked the first appearance of the newly born Oxford Student Action for Refugees (STAR) group created under the impulse of Law student Juliet Van Gysegem who

declared that ‘the current focus is on the Campsfield campaign, but we will extend from this considerably in MT23’. What a better opportunity for the University to be coherent by acting accordingly with the claims for which it was recompensed? A first step would be signing a pledge to withdraw the University’s investments in industries profiting from border violence against people in exile, as Divest Borders Oxford has called for.

In the first week of Hilary Term, The Student Union became an officially named member organisation of the Keep Campsfield Closed Coalition (KCC), with the SU president Anna-Tina Jashapara attending their monthly meeting to push forward the campaign’s agenda within the University. New resolutions state that the SU will “commit itself to call on local and national government to reverse the decision to reopen Campsfield House detention

centre” and support campaigns and protests against the planned reopening. Students are supporting KCC and Divest Borders though passing motions in their Colleges’ JCRs and MCRs. This includes Christ Church, Keble and Exeter JCR which made a contribution of £150 each to the campaign, as well as Wadham’s MCR. This process within colleges has been enabled by the

support of Divest Border Oxford’s who put up a toolkit for anyone wanting to present such a motion. This step may be promising, in developing student mobilisation, and using the University’s reputation and connections as an added pressure on local and national governments. An open letter

addressed to the government, is currently circulating through Oxford University networks, and has been signed notably by both heads of Colleges of Sanctuary: Mansfield College principal Helen Mountfield KC, and Jan Royal from Somerville.

Despite these developments, student awareness of immigration detention remains largely limited. Yet, detention centres crystallise institutional racism and xenophobia. They participate in criminalising asylum seekers, in aggravating the precariousness of their situations and in preventing their social and economic integration. Without trials, they condemn individuals to wait in a limbo of uncertainty for a decision on their fate, preventing them from seeking the legal help and support that they are entitled to. All in all, immigration detention centres are the spear of systemic persecution of asylum seekers, often already scarred by such traumatising experiences.

As students of Oxford, are also members of the Oxfordshire community; as such, we bear a political responsibility to recognise the persecution reopening Campsfield would entail for asylum seekers. We must take action on a local issue which would have national scale consequences.

Artwork credit: Ella Carran



“Most of the sites were blocked, things like Youtube, things like Facebook



**END  
IMMIGRATION  
DETENTION**



# Is Oxford’s over-representation in politics a problem?

## At least they’re not from C\*mbriage?

Ailish Gaughan

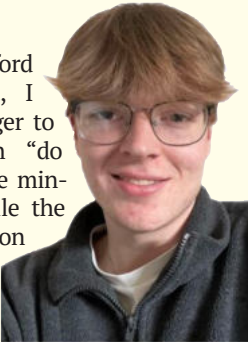
Obviously, it is a problem that one of the most exclusive institutions in the UK consistently churns out representatives of an entire country, most of which doesn’t have a clue what the Oxford-specific terms Vac, Battels or Bops mean. Maybe, you could argue that the most important role in Britain should be filled by a well-educated person. But surely a well-rounded, self aware, socially conscientious and down-to-earth person would be preferable? Even if they did go to Exet-ah. Equally, I think we can all agree that Rishi, Liz, and Boris might not be our finest work - by a long shot. At least we can say that Cambridge hasn’t seen a PM leave its pale green halls since before World War Two. Meanwhile, Oxford boasts 13 from Christ Church alone – if you can call that a win.



## PP-absolutely

Adam Saxon

Being an Oxford PPE student, I am no stranger to the question “do you want to be prime minister one day?”. While the answer to that question is a resounding no, I do not fail to see the reasons behind why my degree has the reputation it does. Oxford is massively over-represented in UK Politics. It is bad for our democracy and the functionality of our government (as we have clearly seen over the last few years) for Oxford to be seen as some sort of ‘finishing school’ for the UK’s politicians. We need a wider array of life experience for our parliament to be truly representative of our country and its rapidly growing diversity.



## Politics represents the worst of Oxford

Freddie Maud

If the best parts of Oxford - the work ethic it produces, the amount of reading it demands and much else - actually filtered into UK politics, my answer would be different. But the Oxford that we see represented in our political institutions - the drinking culture, the ‘chum-mery’ and blatant assumptions of superiority - reflects the very worst of our university. Until the best of Oxford, and indeed many other universities, is expressed in our politics, Oxford’s over-representation remains a serious problem.

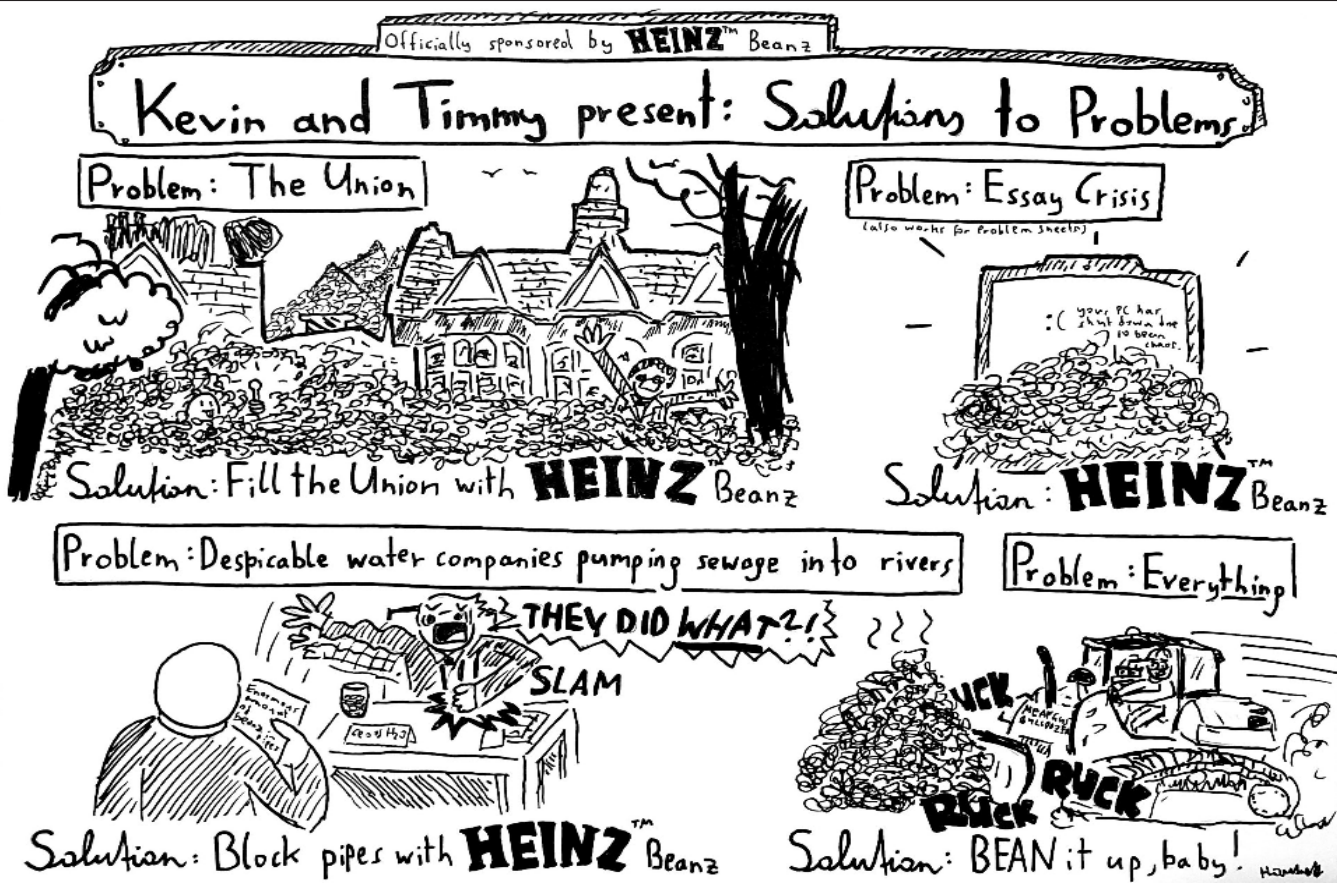


Image Credit: Sean Hartnett \*this cartoon is not sponsored by Heinz Beanz

# The quiet language revolution against Russia

Louis Johnson

First noticed it when news outlets began to replace ‘Kiev’ with ‘Kyiv’. The former is an English transliteration of the name of Ukraine’s capital from Russian, Киев, while the latter is a transliteration from the Ukrainian Київ. This soon spread. Where Western broadcasters once used Russian versions of Ukrainian names for people, cities, and so on, they are now switching to English spellings that are more in line with the Ukrainian language. Since the onset of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, language has become another frontier by which Ukrainians push back against years of Russian domination. The Ukrainian identity being proudly professed is necessarily in stark contrast to Russian. But how has language evolved in Ukraine and the wider post-Soviet world, and what does this mean for these countries’ relationships with Russia and beyond?

Ukrainian is a Slavic language, alongside Russian, Polish and many others. All these languages originally stem from a little-known common ancestor, proto-Slavic. The settlement of Slavic tribes across Europe led to the formation of the eastern state of Kyivan Rus’, whose people spoke Old East Slavic. This state eventually fell after being weakened by the Mongol invasion, internal division, and pressure from neighbouring countries. The western areas of the Rus’ state came under the control of Poland and Lithuania, while the eastern parts were ruled by the Golden Horde and later the Tsardom of Muscovy, leading to Ukrainian and Russian evolving as distinct languages. Ukraine was gradually annexed by Russia as Poland was carved up, piece by piece. Tsarist authorities ruthlessly suppressed the language, burning Ukrainian literature, banning teaching in Ukrainian and insisting that it was no more than a dialect or an offshoot of Russian.

The same Tsarist propaganda recurs in today’s Russia, with Putin’s claims of historical unity being the basis for his war of conquest. However, even as Russians settled their lands and imperial authorities denied their language and nationhood, Ukrainians kept their tongue alive.

When Lenin and the Bolsheviks came to power following 1917, they radically changed the country and its attitude towards Ukrainian and

other languages spoken in the country. Minority languages were now encouraged, not persecuted, and Ukraine became its own republic within the wider Soviet Union. However, later Soviet premiers (most notably Stalin) were far more intolerant and often brutal in their treatment of Ukrainians and the Ukrainian tongue. Russia was the country’s lingua franca, the primary language of government and the elite. Even following independence, many Ukrainians preferred to speak Russian, though this has steadily shifted as the government promoted the use of Ukrainian in areas such as education.

Then came invasion. Since Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, and especially since the invasion in 2022, Ukrainian citizens and the government have increasingly championed using Ukrainian over Russian. The use of Ukrainian in the historically Russian-dominated areas in the east and south has soared, with the proportion there preferring Ukrainian over Russian leaping from 10% in 2012 to 70% last year. This has come as one’s choice of language has changed from a matter of preference to a political stand. The senseless violence inflicted upon the country by Russia has led many Ukrainians to view Russian as the language of imperialism, the language of the state butchering their compatriots. Many Ukrainian institutions are moving away from Russian, such as the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. In Russian-occupied areas, while lots of anti-Kremlin Ukrainians still speak Russian, the tide is shifting.

Ukraine is far from the only post-Soviet country that is experiencing a politicised linguistic revival. In 1936, Stalin’s USSR began a campaign of ‘Cyrillisation’; replacing Latin and other writing systems used for minority languages in the Soviet Union with the Cyrillic script developed for Slavic languages. However, since independence, several countries have transitioned away from Cyrillic: Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and most recently Kazakhstan. The former two have replaced Cyrillic with Latin entirely, while the latter are still doing so. For these countries, shifting to Latin is a way of emphasising their nationhood and independence. Kazakh president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev called the process “spiritual modernisation” and for Kazakhstan, Latinisation has come during divergence from its traditional partner of Russia.

In Belarus, Russian has become the dominant language, after a brief Belarusian revival following independence was slowly sidelined in favour of Russian by the country’s very pro-Moscow dictator, Alexander Lukashenko (Belarusian: Alyaksandr Lukashenka). In response, the Belarusian tongue has become a symbol of political opposition to the regime. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the opposition candidate in the 2020 Belarusian presidential election who has received support from many Western nations, has championed the use of Belarusian. Indeed, she notably uses the Belarusian transliteration of her name rather than the Russian one.

Both Kazakhstan and Belarus have been longtime Russian allies, with Russian spoken as a language of convenience. The widespread use of Russian has been a source of soft power for Moscow, with the ease of cross-border tourism, business and diplomacy maintaining some sense of shared identity between the states of the former Soviet Union, far more successfully than across the former territories of several Western European empires. Russia has come across as a friend to many countries formerly in its empire. First gradually, and now very quickly, this sense has been eroded. In trade, many Central Asian states are looking away from Russia and towards China and the West. Moscow’s status as regional peacekeeper is collapsing; due partly to its war of aggression in Ukraine, but also the CSTO’s failure to act following Azerbaijani incursions into member state Armenia, exposing the Russian-led security organisation as a paper tiger and opening the door for the EU to lead peace negotiations.

While embracing their native tongue has been a part of nationhood for post-Soviet states, an explicit rejection of Russian is new. In a bitter irony for Putin, the waning use of Russian and embrace of native tongues across the former empire is symptomatic of declining Russian influence. In invading Ukraine, Putin hoped to use Russian speakers as a political tool but has instead created an impetus to drop the language entirely for Ukrainians and other peoples wary of Russian conquest. Language is not merely a vessel to convey ideas, but the way that we express who we are. As Russia’s actions have made it an international pariah, people across the world are increasingly expressing an identity in contrast.



# The Debate Chamber

## Zoe and Oli go head to head, debating whether Oxford loves ABBA too much

Dear Bjorn, Agnetha, Benny and Frida, it's not you, it's Oxford.

When I've been dragged onto the cheese floor by my horrible friends, and 'Waterloo' comes on, I scream 'SOS'. When the crowds start signing 'Fernando', I hope it's Alonso coming to run me down and end the misery so that I can stop crying over the 'Money, Money, Money' I wasted coming here. Instead, I am forced to stay and hear 'Mama Mia' for the fifth time, and the night goes 'On And On And On'. 'If It Wasn't For [These] Nights' in Park End, maybe I'd have more love for the band.

You might respond and say this criticism is unfair and that Oxford students love ABBA just like the rest of this country, but 'Don't Shut Me Down'; what I am saying is very much not 'Just A Notion'. I'm convinced the stresses of Oxford including the deadlines, the problem sheets, endless reading lists and unfinished essays drive people in their droves to this band. I ask, why can't we let the 80s go and set the Swedes free.

If I hear one Miley Cyrus song at a social event at Oxford, (likely 'Party in the USA'), I can guarantee I'll hear at least ten ABBA tracks. I have no qualms with their music: 'Voulez-vous' is a tune. It's the 'Oxford' element that concerns me. In fact, when

ABBA comes on it's almost as if the crowd becomes possessed. Placing their drinks down, stopping their conversation, huddling in the centre and belting out "Chiquitita". To the untrained eye you'd think they were brainwashed – I certainly did.

I have considered whether it would be worth sending a letter to the ABBA people for their own personal safety.

This letter would be quite short: "Avoid Oxford at all costs". I'm sure if the group ever took one step into the city they'd instantly be ravaged by a pack of sleep-deprived, Pret-fuelled Oxonians begging them to 'Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!' a new hit song. Like Kermit loves Miss Piggy it's an undeniable fact that Oxford loves, nay, craves ABBA. And I just don't get it.



Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! more ABBA! Surely 'When All Is Said And Done', no-one has any real objections to ABBA going 'On And On And On'? After all, 'I [must be] Hav[ing] A Dream Nightmare' if I were to say too much of a good thing is a bad thing. 'Mamma Mia', maybe I'm going a bit over the top with these song references, but I suppose that's 'The Name Of The Game'.

Though I'm not your typical Taylor Swift, Lana Del Rey (shout-out to the Oxford Busker), Eurovision Song Contest loving teenage girl, I may or may not become an ABBA loving 'Man After Midnight'. As I forget the lyrics to the latest Dave or Central

Cee track on the Curve Floor, the comfort of the same 15 songs on the Cheese Floor is 'My Love, My Life'. It is the place where many 'Dancing Queen[s]' are crowned and where many others are having the time of their lives offers – the home away from home for ABBA fans, there's 'No Doubt About It'.

But that's besides the point. Clubbing in Oxford is, itself, quite cringeworthy. Instead of being embarrassed by this, embrace the cringe and stop trying to be so cool and 'different'? We all secretly love ABBA, even those stuck upstairs on that tiny dance-floor in Bridge. But for you music snobs who hate on those glorious Swedes, I'll admit that it can get a bit repetitive. I'm not one to put 'Waterloo' on to 'get the night going'. No, definitely not. But at the end of the day, no-one is saying "SOS" when ABBA comes on in the club. Instead, the most annoying part is when the ABBA-obsessed girl (or guy) next to you starts screaming as soon as 'Money, Money, Money' starts playing.

So, if someone says "Voulez-Vous" listen to any other band?", I'd happily reply with "Does Your Mother Know" you have such poor taste?". 'Thank You For The Music', ABBA.

# Time to put a lid on it? Freedom to Hate?

## Fatima El-Faki

Oxford's drinking culture is known for the "work hard, play harder" mentality adopted by its university students. Most social interactions centre on the pub, the very conveniently subsidised college bars, or even formal dinners. It's inescapable. Students are incentivised to attend networking events with on-the-house prosecco, offering a taste of the drinking culture at the workplace.

However, as you progress through your degree, having that extra glass becomes less appealing when considering the inevitable, next-day hangover. I've noticed how your own drinking evolves just as much as you do throughout your time at university.

I remember being a first year and witnessing jaws drop when somebody mentioned that they didn't drink. But over time, people stopped caring. I believe that having open discussions is key, especially its inclusivity, as social interactions revolving around alcohol are so normalised that individuals not participating are almost unheard of. The apparent decrease in drinking can be described as "sober curiosity", as the author of *Sober Curious*, Ruby Warrington, has dubbed it. The term describes the self-reflection of one's alcohol consumption, and its prevalence corresponds to fewer and fewer people feeling pressured to drink at every given opportunity.

According to a UK university-wide survey by Students Organising for Sustainability (SOS), 81% of students said that drinking and getting drunk are a part of university culture. It is not inconceivable that those who do not drink might even doubt whether or not they are receiving the "full uni experience".

According to the same survey, nearly two thirds (61%) of students drink at home or at a friend's house before going on a night out.

A student told *Cherwell* that they felt as though not drinking was a social barrier as they felt "weird being the only one who didn't drink" and they would never attend 'pres' or 'pre-drinks' where "everyone bonded and got to know each other beforehand". The idea that students have to drink to feel included needs to be broken down, and seeing the rise in alcohol-free options or even alcohol-free events on weekdays is a helpful step towards this. However, another student from St John's College addressed the financial barriers regarding alcohol-included tickets. Attending as a non-drinker, they said, simply "isn't worth the money".

Moreover, the drinking culture at Oxford is hardly reflective of one's social experiences after graduation. As individuals from different cultures and upbringings enter our lives, it is unrealistic to expect everyone else to conform to the student drinking lifestyle that we are accustomed to at Oxford. However, non-drinkers remain a minority. According to DrinkAware, only 20% of adults aged 16+ were non-drinkers in 2019, and in 2021, 53% of adults aged between 18-24 said they had an alcoholic drink in a pub, restaurant or bar the previous week.

Britain's drinking culture is certainly not going away. On the whole, everyone faces social challenges, whether you are a drinker, a non-drinker, or even "sober curious". Although alcohol can bring people together, it can also leave a fair number of people on the outskirts of social settings. Ultimately, we should always refrain from placing pressure on others to participate in drinking, and Oxford is the place to start.

## Adam Saxon

Freedom of speech, of course, is something that the Oxford Union rightly champions. However, they often seem to breach the boundary between allowing freedom of speech and providing a platform to members of society who have rightly been banished from the mainstream due to their backwards views. Should we really welcome those who make members of our community feel unsafe? I would like to think not. In a recent piece for *Cherwell* (Freedom of speech in 2023: Why the Oxford Union will never cancel controversial speaker) Chloe Glynn argued that we should go "into the spaces that oppose it [the trans community] the most" in order to challenge them, a point which I disagree with. The problem with this point is that it isn't what the Union does. To the Union: this university should be a space for all its students and staff to feel welcome and safe, and you make it so that they are not. You are not going to them, you are inviting them to come to us, in many ways presenting to your members and the world that either you do not take their struggle seriously or outright don't support them in the first place. Nothing forces students to turn up to the event. But should they not at least feel safe in a space that many have paid £300 to join?

Call me a hypocrite for making a criticism like this and yet still being a member. I think a lot of those who join the Union do so with the promise of seeing incredible speakers, before quickly becoming disillusioned due to its toxic culture and grating politics. The addition of homophobic and transphobic speakers to such a mix doesn't exactly make the Union a more appealing space.

Glynn also recognises that "defending

one's right to exist is awful". Why on earth does the Union put people in such a position then? I would also challenge the idea that this is the only place these questions can be accessed. We live in a more connected society than ever, and the internet and social media mean that more than ever it is impossible to escape the worst aspects of society. Maybe in the past it was relevant for the Union to provide space, where the world was not so interconnected, and as such there really was no other place to engage with and challenge such views. However, nowadays it seems impossible to spend more than a few minutes on the internet without being met with a case of discrimination or bigotry.

There are so many inspirational public figures out there who I can guarantee would be of much greater interest to the student body, and who do not question our peers' rights. In less than a year as a member, I have been lucky to see the Union host speakers including Billie Jean King, Malala, and John Major. All of these speakers I feel I learned something from. What is there to learn from someone like Kathleen Stock? Do I really want to know what 'one piece of advice' she would give someone in my position? Not particularly. Do I think anything will be gained from a so-called 'debate' with her? No.

So, what should we see from the Union? I don't expect a lack of controversy; there are important issues in our time that are likely to spark heated debate. But it doesn't have to be a case where we invite people who question the rights of our peers to be themselves and express who they are. The Union should be a place of inspiration. A place where we find like-minded people. A place where, yes, those who oppose us can challenge us. But we shouldn't accept that guests are going to challenge who our peers are as people. That crosses a line.



CHERBADLY

Radcliffe Camera is a Transformer

Scientists from the Oxford Robotics Laboratories reported, Tuesday, that a recent set of classified tests have confirmed that the Radcliffe Camera, long thought to be little more than a circular library, is, in fact, a Transformer. The Camera is, according to the report, a cybernetic alien being from the planet Cybertron, and is not, as previously assumed, a building designed by Oxford alum John Radcliffe, M.D.

“We are certainly surprised,” said one of the lead scientists on the team that made the discovery. “You see the Rad Cam is not an architectural marvel made by the hands of man but is actually a robotic being by the name of Domutron the Unforgiven who descended to earth in the sixteenth century in search of the All Spark.”

Information about the location All Spark, a godlike cube-shaped item that can be used to create cybernetic life, was supposedly kept chained up somewhere in the Bodleian Libraries, and it seems Domutron transformed himself into a library as a means of blending into the environment as he searched for clues. “Domutron has not transformed into his robotic humanoid form since he first came to this region of England,” said a military liaison with the experimental team, “so we assume that he is in a kind of hibernation.”

We regret to report that Domutron the Unforgiven, formerly known as “Radcliffe Camera,” is a Decepticon, the evil faction of Transformer intent on destroying humanity and establishing a fascist military dictatorship on their home planet of Cybertron under the cruel leadership of Megatron. Luckily, scientists added that it appears that the All Souls College Library is, in fact, a dormant Autobot who will transform into a warrior to protect humanity from Domutron should he awake from his cyber-slumber.

Students studying or checking out books from the Rad Cam are warned that, at any moment, the library could transform into a massive robot soldier. According to anatomical scans, anyone on the upper floor of the Camera would be instantly crushed as that part of the library would become the armored breastplate of Domutron the Unforgiven.

Students are also warned that scanning their Bod cards to enter the library may provide the cyber-spark required to awaken Domutron, and doing so may unintentionally invite a mortal robotic battle over the survival of Earth.

Codeword by Lewis Callister

Dont let the difficulty of this puzzle get you down...

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

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

John Evelyn

With the weather getting better, things are beginning to heat up at Frewin Court. As 7th week’s elections draw closer, and controversy continues to swirl around speakers, will there be a moment of rest for Limp Dick’s committee?

The token Northerner will surely be glad that his ball went to plan. Almost as happy as all of the SU people who attended despite condemning the Union so wholeheartedly for inviting speakers. Their Instagram stories told a different story as to how deeply upset they were with the Union. I’m sure they were equally happy to have Captain America, Pint-Sized Thatcher, The King et al crash their student council in return...

Speaking of a certain speaker, an open letter appeared in a certain national proclaiming free speech. Hundreds of names wrote their names in support of so-called ‘free speech’ and not deplatforming speakers. This seemed to drive committee even more than the promise of a debate dinner and a shoutout in CC. If only this many of them had turned up to bench moving the day after the ball!

Meanwhile, it seems the 70s Pimp’s boat may be set to crash. Having reportedly haemorrhaged all of his Standing candidates and most of his Seccies, it seems his titanic independent run might have hit an iceberg. Despite getting a feature from the journalist supreme detailing how his toilet is only for emergencies, it seems simply living on the houseboat of Otto Barrow’s Ghost isn’t enough to give him the drive he needs to win. No doubt to the joy of the Flying Scotsman, if he wants any chance of success the Pimp may have to pull

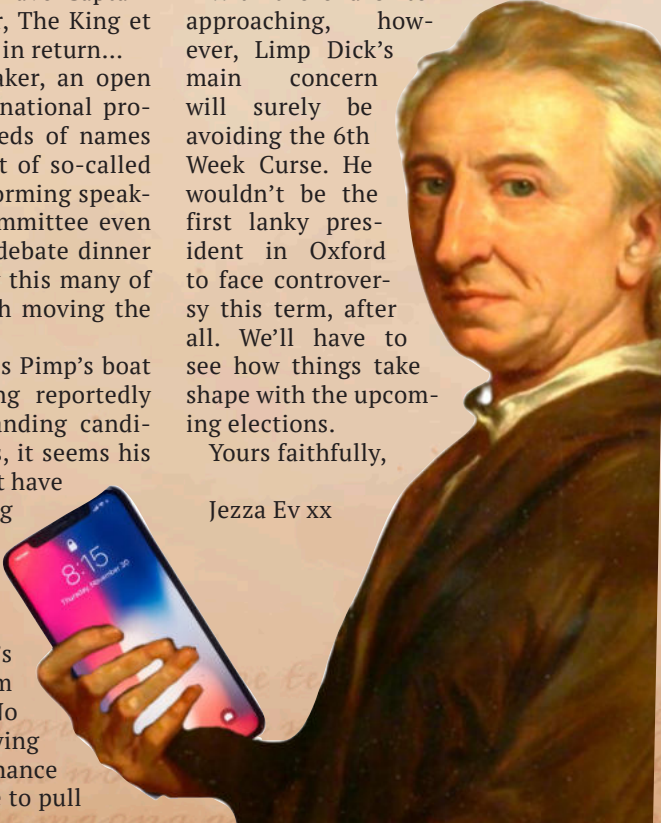
an even harder shift hacking than TriniTory has been in recent weeks. Something is in the water on Broad Street that’s making people hungry for votes.

Finally, we all got an interesting follow request this week. It seems someone has sought to tarnish Macaulay Culkin’s Doppelgänger’s name by attaching it to a rogue Instagram user. Though the team caught out the culprit, this was not without several panicked calls between committee members. One would think the online slander could wait until 7th week!

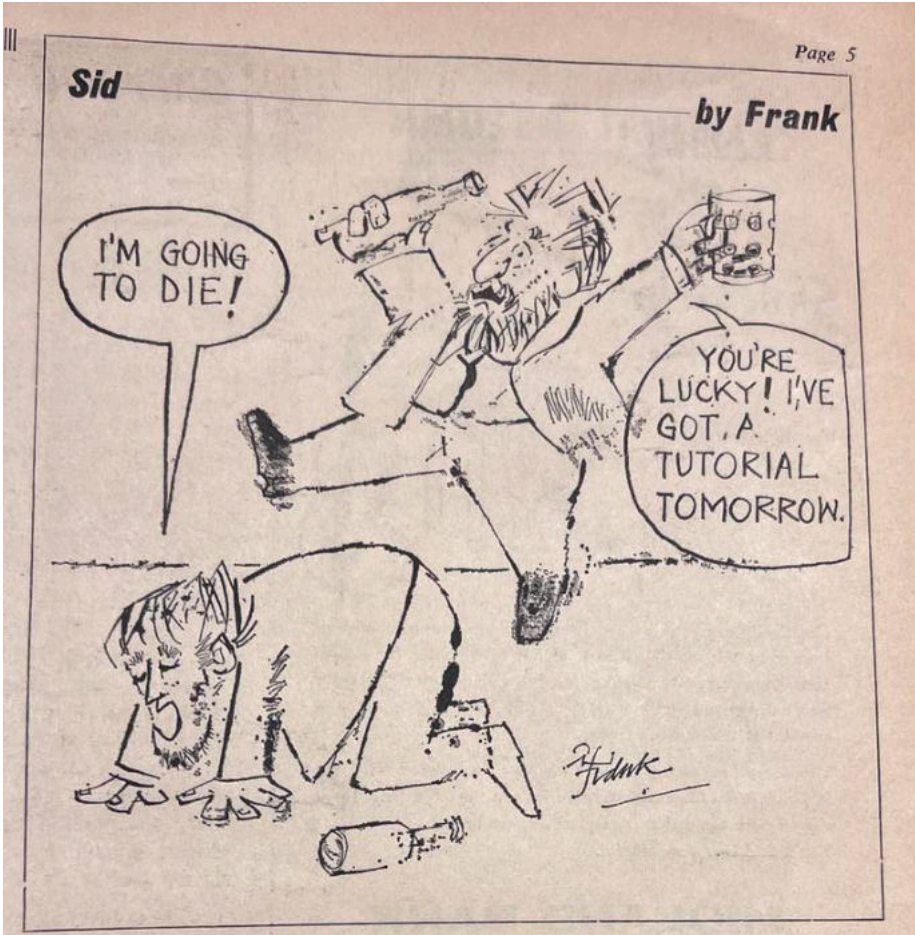
With the end of term approaching, however, Limp Dick’s main concern will surely be avoiding the 6th Week Curse. He wouldn’t be the first lanky president in Oxford to face controversy this term, after all. We’ll have to see how things take shape with the upcoming elections.

Yours faithfully,

Jezza Ev xx



FROM THE ARCHIVES





# Masthead

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**Zoe Aberoje**  
*Deputy Editor*

There’s no place like home...Essex. The best place in England if you ask me. Truly the cultural capital of this country. You might think I’m joking unfortunately for you, I’m not. From icons like Joey Essex to the big GC, Jesy Nelson to the queen herself Stacey Solomon (Dagenham IS Essex x), I really am proud of it.

If you ever happen to meet me and engage in small talk, one of three topics is guaranteed to come up within a minute or two of us speaking, how much of an Arsenal fan I am, what happened last night on EastEnders and how being from Essex is my personality trait. We can discuss whether it’s appropriate for the former two topics to be discussed in these kinds of scenarios at another point, (trust me I’m very happy to chat about it lol) what I’d like to discuss today is why I feel it so pertinent to mention my Essex-ness to strangers.

To put it very plainly, I don’t think people notice I am from Essex when they first meet me, for a whole host of reasons. I don’t tend to have the strongest accent when I’m at Oxford, it turns out I’m a subliminal code switcher. But probably

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*Cherwell* weekly, on  
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**Suzanne Antelme**  
*Deputy Editor*

Oxford life might exist in a bubble – a realm of plodges and pidges, Glink trips and scouts – but the City of Dreaming Spires casts a long shadow. For those of us within the bubble a Radcam on a Rorschach test might trigger a mental



the more obvious reason to you and me is I don’t think I look (or sound) like the typical fresh out of Essex girl.

I realise now that I’ve assumed knowledge of Essex which could very well be quite exclusive to international readers who happen to be reading my section. Essex to the rest of England is a bit like the New Jersey of the States. If you happen not to know either these places or their stereotypes I’m afraid I can’t help you there. Both have strong stereotypes about the people, mostly about the women. This stereotype being that they are loud, superficial and love a bit of fake tan. Think Jersey Shore or TOWIE. All in all the horrible stereotype is that Essex people are just a little less refined.

Now obviously I disagree with this perception of Essex people, but I certainly benefit from being able to tell people I’m from Essex as opposed to my accent giving me away. Studies have shown how the Essex accent is often discriminated against by people considering those who have them less intelligent. Some claims suggest a strong Essex accent could hinder your job chances! Imagine the fact that you said “innit” or “like” one too many times, costing you a job. Mad.

So I guess in one sense my lack of accent means I’m lucky in the job world. My time at Oxford seems to have diminished by Essex-ness, my friends certainly say it does. But at the same time I’m proud of my little (it’s not little at all btw) corner of the country and all the aspects that come with it. Bas Vegas, Towie and Fake Tan, you might call it cheap but I call it culture.



Trinity Term is an anomaly – it’s the only term when 5th Week Blues doesn’t apply. It is a term of two extremes, with students either drowning themselves in revision or blissfully paddling in Hinksey Lake or in the wake of a punt. There are those feverishly awaiting Summer Eights as a chance to break records, and simultaneously their bodies, and there are others looking forward to it as a chance to guiltlessly day drink. There are some donning gowns for their first exam, and there are a few already drenching theirs in confetti, prosecco, and putrid river water. Either way, there doesn’t seem to be a single week of crisis this term. Instead, students have an entire term of either existential panic or sunbathing and Pimms-drinking, and usually a good deal of both mixed together.

Trinity term is anomalous in other ways, too. It seems to hold moments of stopping and thinking, a sense of pause that Michaelmas and Hilary don’t bring. If you’re anything like me, you might be starting to inexplicably look backwards as we get closer to the end of the year. This time last year, I was deflecting concerns about my Prelims to worries that I had potentially ‘wasted’ my first year. Had I done enough work? Enough extracurriculars? Enough things? The conclusion of second year is bringing with it the same introspection, and I’m sure the end of third year will too. If one thing can be said of Oxford, it is that everyone seems to have their ‘niche’. Be it a ‘blue’, a ‘first’, or even a potential future ‘spouse’, everyone seems to have their thing, and it can feel pretty intimidating. With BeReal, Instagram, and regrettably also LinkedIn constantly reminding us of our peers’ overachievements, and with looming exams reinforcing fears of not being good enough, Trinity term can feel like quite an overwhelming one despite the respite of sunshine. On the other hand, there is a newfound sense of solidarity: everyone can relate to the swelling rise of stress levels, and every- is similarly torn between ‘enjoying themselves’ and ing’. Writing as a survivor of a full Oxford year, the one thing I can say is that getting to this point should be seen as achievement enough in itself. And if you’re still concerned about how best to spend your time? Well, why not write for *Cherwell*...

**Meg Lintern, Editor-in-Chief**



montage of all-nighter spawned essays written with the narrative coherence of Kafka. But throw ‘Oxford’ in front of anything and to those beyond the bubble it seems to take on a strange shine. Our this week looks at the lengths people will go to in pursuit of the Oxford brand, and this isn’t the first time Cherwell has uncovered the use of Oxford as a means to rinse reputations.

I didn’t realise how Oxford obsessed this country is until I started writing for *Cherwell* and discovered that if an Oxford college sneezes, the national press wants to know about it. This term in particular has seen us chucked before the limelight in the lead up to Kathleen Stock’s controversial Union visit. It seems that barely a day goes by without some brave pundit decrying the weak constitutions of Oxford students and bemoaning what this means for Britain’s future. Kathleen Stock herself took to Twitter to agonise over the infantilising powers of the crayons and jigsaws put out in Oxford libraries during exam season. God, imagine if an Oxford student spends five minutes not stressing over their exams or striving for academic excellence? How will the country survive?! No one had better mention 5th week Blues – Oxford students, not riding the thrill of the grind mindset? How presumptuous of us.

The national press is particularly obsessed with the Union, which is a shame because the walls of the Old Library are already straining from the pressure of so many rapidly expanding egos. Indeed, reading about the Union in the national press is a pet peeve of mine. There is a tendency for grandiose language and lionhearted framing. Even from Oxford alumni, who really should know better. Did hacking not exist back in their day? The Union isn’t a bastion of anything except outrageously unabashed glad-handing. Maybe everyone should be a bit more concerned about what that means for the future of the country.

Besides, it’s really rather inconsiderate of the national press – they should leave something for *Cherwell* to report on.



# “I’m trying to speak to people’s hearts”: In conversation with music collective Steam Down

Discussing the purpose behind making music and drawing inspiration from the Black diaspora and your culture

Deborah Ogunnoiki

When the line-up for performers at Exeter College Ball was released, most did not know what to make of this ‘Steam Down’. A group of self-described ‘Afro-Infinite’ artists from South London. Usually, balls have the same old, same old, student bands, who are good, don’t get me wrong, but Steam Down was so different from what we were expecting. Different, yet so insanely good.

When Steam Down performed at Exeter Ball, you wouldn’t be able to tell we had just finished collections the day before. The air was electric, head banging and mosh pits, everyone holding each other and dancing like it was their last day on earth, it was as if the entire student body had taken a collective sigh and let loose. The burdens of academic stress, whether we answered this question right, or if we wrote enough words for that question were forgotten in a way that the other performers at Ball hadn’t exactly managed.

Curious about the performers, whose dreads and use of pidgin language reminded me so much of home, I sought after them for an interview with *Cherwell*. I wanted to know more about this band who travelled from Deptford to perform at Exeter College Ball.

Loading up Microsoft Teams, I am greeted by Ahnansé, the creator and founder of Steam Down. My first question to him is: “What is Steam Down?”. He tells me: “It’s kind of a bit of a creative institution really. It’s really something that I aspired to be kind of, on one

hand, bringing musicians together, but then also creating new music. And also, to platform some of the people that kind of come through. So it’s a bit...multi-functioning.” Steam Down isn’t exactly a band with permanent members, but a free-flowing organisation of creatives. It’s such a unique idea, how does one come up with such a concept? Ahnansé says “I think a couple of years before I started it in 2017, I was thinking about things in the music industry. I felt like there weren’t really that many spaces for musicians to come together. And I also felt that I wanted to have a space to build something together with other creatives and to, I guess, platform each other in this in a way. That’s kind of what it started out as. And then I think it kind of evolved into Steam Down. And there are a lot of people that are part of it. And a lot of people have come through it and have gone on to do other things. And I quite like it that way...In summary, it’s about bringing people together. Especially in a live space is for people to feel a different energy than they had on them before.

If you’re stressed, you shouldn’t be stressed anymore. When that happens, I know I’ve done my job.”

Steam Down’s aim is to connect musicians together and help people unwind. How does their sound help us forget about our woes of the week? I ask Ahnansé about ‘Afro-Infinity’ and he tells me, “My definition of it would be, looking into the past, the present and the future simultaneously. So sometimes you might feel like, ‘Oh yeah, this feels quite ancient’, sonically speaking, and sometimes it might sound like, ‘Oh I don’t really know what this is yet’. So it has a bit of a future-looking space, like infinities, both infinitely small and infinitely large. And it’s also present all

tions at the same time.” Afro-Infinity is about not limiting yourself to a genre or a timeline. It’s not new music, but it’s not one of the oldies. Ahnansé explains that “I think a genre is

what happens when something’s settled, something that can be repeated. And I think if you improvise, as a musician, there’s not really that much of a boundary because you always searching and exploring, and the nature of exploring is not knowing. So they can never fit specifically neatly into a genre.”

If Steam Down can’t be assigned to one genre, then what sounds influence their music? If you’ve listened to their song “Free My Skin”, you may notice a myriad of sounds, from West African sax styles to a Caribbean style of tonal speech in the lyrics. Ahnansé explains the collection of sounds that comes from all over the African diaspora, “There’s such a long list, I don’t know where to start. But maybe I’ll say it this way: One of the influences is a member who is from Nigeria and he’s Yoruba. And he will tap into that, the tradition, in those spaces and, we share information across those spaces. I myself I’m from Grenada, Barbados, and St. Lucia. And I was fortunate enough to grow up there from the age of seven to 14. So there are things that I saw in Grenada, like the Tivoli drummers and the vocals that relates back to a more traditional folkloric music from the continent. Apart from that, we live in London, right? And we were like, I grew up like we grew up listening to D double E and Grime music. And then you’ve got Pop, RnB, and Trap and all this other stuff, they represent a more contemporary influence, along with Afrobeats.

“I think if you love music, like we all do, you are able to connect to your heritage and explore music within that space. There’s so much to Britain, to take from and be inspired by, like when you’re in London, and walk down Peckham High Street, and you’re walking past Auntie’s shop on one side of the street, and there’s Fùjì music playing, and then you walk past the Caribbean takeaway and then you’re hearing Reggae and Bashment playing on the other side. Just by walking down one high street, you’ve already culture hopped different times, eras, spaces, depending on the age of the people that are there. So in one day, you were all around that and that’s why it’s so natural to be able to pull from spaces in the diaspora, because it lives there. So, there’s a lot of, there’s a lot of musical heritage, learning, and information, that I’ve learned and others have learned through the experience of just being in London and playing with other people that are from different parts of the diaspora.”

The sounds of the diaspora is commonly drawn on by UK music artists like Santan Dave, Stormzy, and J Hus who draw from a Afro-Swing genre to incorporate their West African heritage in a UK rap style. For them, in their music, a sense of pride in their African-ness and their Black Britishness is conveyed. References to Black British culture and slang can be found throughout their lyricism, and the beats and instrumentals feature Afrobeat and Reggae-inspired tunes. I ask Ahnansé if this sense of pride in Blackness and being a part of the diaspora is a message that Steam Down seeks to convey in their music. He tells me, “I think there’s a universal message, there’s the Afro message, and there’s the individual message and that’s happening simultaneously. And I want to keep it that way. So that everybody can get something from everything if they’re open to it, even if it’s a culture that you’re not from, that culture has created something, and it can enrich your life if you allow it, if you respect it, use it wisely, and adopt it.

“I think music, I’m not really necessarily trying to speak so much to people’s minds, even though there’s lyrics, I’m trying to speak to people’s hearts. ‘Free My Skin’ is exactly that, the energy of the song should also give you that

feeling of release, the words are just a starting point for emotional transformation. And you can see it in a room when people let go. What are you allowing yourself to be free from in that moment? That’s up to you.

“We have faith, colonisation, and racism, and that’s something that’s affected us both internally and externally. How is your self-value and self-worth, and how is that related to colonisation, and racism, and how you perceive yourself, or even how do we perceive our own cultures? How open are we to some of our heritage when some of its been demonised because the ‘Western’ way needs to take precedent, so to ‘Overcome’ and ‘Free My Skin’ focuses on letting go of it internally. Letting go of the negative impacts of that colonisation, and also start respecting more of our heritage in some places, for example, if you’re a black woman, and you have your natural hair, amongst other black people, it’s very much like celebrated, whereas maybe 30 years ago, wouldn’t have necessarily been celebrated.”

In regard to respecting our culture and forming greater appreciation for it, I ask Ahnansé, “What is your reaction to people who claim that the use of Pidgin or Multicultural London English alienates them and makes Black music unrelatable?”. Ahnansé answers, “If it alienates you, then you’re not really listening. We don’t need to break it down so that you understand, we understand a lot of things and non-verbally...Something is being communicated beyond the language. This country prioritises the academic and intellectual over other means of communication and other ways of viewing the world. So just because you can’t understand it from an intellectual faculty, doesn’t mean you can’t understand it from your other faculties.”

It’s true that being able to connect to music despite a language barrier is now becoming more and more commonplace. Nothing stops the K-Pop stans from butchering the pronunciation of the Korean language when they sing their favourite songs, and yet, they still get the general sense that the song intends to convey

to them, despite not being able to understand the lyrics. In a world where Afro variations of music have become more popular with Burna Boy, Asake and WizKid going global, I ask Ahnansé whether he supports Afro-Beats going global, or if we should gate-keep the genre from those who threaten to misinterpret it. Ahnansé tells me “I think a lot of the music

that is shared within those spaces is music that’s made to sell because that’s what the internet is predominantly used for. So, products are used as a means of exchanging commercial value. But I don’t think the deepest aspects of any culture ever gets shared because I don’t think that you can monetize it easily...”

Music is an art form that speaks to people without the need for intellectual words and lyrics. If you’re looking for intellectualism, look towards literature, or Kendrick Lamar I suppose. But for the rest of us who just need a good song to play in the shower after a good gym sesh, or need to unwind after a particularly heinous finals paper, music can be the perfect answer. Steam Down as a musical collective has an interesting perspective on the benefits that music can have for us, a perspective that seems to speak directly to Oxford students who, especially in Trinity term exam season, have their fair share of burdens. So on your way to your next exam, I recommend giving ‘Free My Skin’ and ‘Overcome’ a listen, it might steel your for your next battle, or help loosen those knots in your stomach. Nonetheless, listening to music is an infinite experience, so make the most of your downtime.

Image credit: Steam Down from their Instagram





# “Let’s not be a bystander. Let’s actually do something”: In conversation with British Red Cross CEO Michael Adamson CBE

Discussing his time with the British Red Cross, supporting refugees and asylum seekers, how the Red Cross helped people through coronavirus and those impacted by the Ukraine conflict.

## Freddie Evans

Mike Adamson is Chief Executive Officer at the British Red Cross. He will step down later this year having served for over eight years as CEO and four years as managing director. Mike was appointed CEO in 2014 and has led the organisation during multiple humanitarian responses including the terrible Grenfell Tower fire, UK terrorist incidents, the coronavirus pandemic and the Ukraine conflict. Mike has an MPhil in Economics from the University of Oxford. He first worked as a management consultant, then in a variety of roles for the NHS and in the charity sector for the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and the British Red Cross.

I asked Mike what inspired him to apply to lead the British Red Cross?

“The Red Cross is a movement. Every country in the world has a Red Cross or Red Crescent Society. They all sign up to a set of principles around humanity, impartiality and neutrality, inspired by the actions of someone we would now call a social entrepreneur, Henri Dunant, from the horrors he saw at the battle of Solferino in 1859. After seeing the carnage on the battlefield Henri Dunant said two things - wouldn’t it be amazing if in every country in the world there were neutral, impartial volunteers ready to provide help, to whomever needs it, whichever side of the battle, whatever their gender, whatever their ethnicity, whatever their religion. He also said - when people go to war there should be some rules. Henri Dunant advocated for what became the Geneva Conventions. They are still as relevant today as they were 150 years ago. That was what inspired me. It was the opportunity with one of the biggest brands in the world to be able to make a difference in a way that is both local and global. It is an incredible privilege to play a part in the organisation and then to lead it.”

What have been the highlights of his time at the British Red Cross?

“When I see the work, we do on the ground. Three weeks ago I was in Turkey seeing the response to the earthquake in Turkey and Syria. I’m incredibly proud of the fact that we mobilised an appeal within a couple of hours of the earthquake through which we raised £35 million. Our partner the Turkish Red Crescent is doing an incredible job. They are feeding 1.5 million people a day. It is just on an extraordinary scale. They are providing

psychosocial support to people traumatised by the loss of loved ones, the loss of their homes, their livelihoods. To be able to play a part in that is just fantastic. That sense of the movement, and then to work on the issues that are so pertinent today. Our strategy is based around three big causes, people in emergencies, people who are displaced and people who fall between the gaps in the health and social care system.

You look at the challenges that we face as a nation. The whole attitude to for example migration, refugees and asylum seekers. People coming across the Channel on boats. We have a really important role to play both in providing practical support to people in these defining moments at their lowest ebb but also in putting the case for a much more human approach to policy. It means that people start from a position of kindness, being inclusive, being tolerant, wanting to help people. We do things, but we stand for something more in terms of our values and that is why we call ourselves a movement. The highlights are being able to be a part of that and to speak up when you know things could be so much better. If we told the story differently.”

Could you explain the fundamental principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement?

“There are seven fundamental principles - Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality. All seven are important. I think the most important are:

Humanity - we are here to help people without judging them, we support them because they are in need. We do not make any judgment about how they got there but we do try and learn from it.

Impartiality - just as I’ve described on the battlefield, we help whomever you are, whatever side of a cause you are on, whatever your gender, religion, nationality.

Neutrality and independence - we will not get involved in political controversies where they affect our ability to provide support to people. For example when the Red Cross is providing support to people in Syria, we won’t criticise the Syrian regime. We have to be neutral in order to cross a front line. Both sides of a conflict have to trust us. That is very difficult. When the International Red Cross visit prisoners of war in shocking conditions. We provide practical assistance, food parcels, medication. We will not comment publicly on the conditions in prison. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International do a really important job, they will tell the world about the conditions in those

prisons. That’s not our job. The most important thing we do is to provide a report to the authorities. Our neutrality is what then allows us to go back and provide help at the second, the third time. Our neutrality means that we can return into very difficult situations because we haven’t commented publicly on them. That can play out in the UK as well, where in our work with refugees and asylum seekers we will comment on how policy is making people more or less vulnerable, but we won’t do personal attacks on the Home Secretary or ministers or the government. We just present the evidence, and we bear witness to what we see. For us the humanitarian imperative is critical. We walk a tightrope between our neutrality and our independence.

These principles we live by. What is incredibly inspiring to me is that I can go all over the world and meet volunteers in Sierra Leone or northern Syria, and they will be talking about the fundamental principles and what they mean to them. Extraordinary.”

How does the British Red Cross uphold the principle of Impartiality when it comes to controversial issues for instance the UK government’s Illegal Migration Bill?

“We will bear witness to what we see on the ground, and we will offer opinions on how government policy could be improved. There is a big difference between operating in the UK as a 24/7 democracy, how ever flawed, and Syria. In Syria you stay silent, at least in public, because it would be dangerous to do anything else and might jeopardise our ability to provide assistance. You just try to provide humanitarian assistance. In the UK we have made it clear and presented evidence why we don’t think the stop the boats policy will work. It misses a bigger picture of what’s happening in the world. There’s so much confusion both in government and amongst the public about who these people are. 70% or 80% of the people who come across in boats are coming from Eritrea, Sudan, Syria and Afghanistan. 80%+ of them make successful asylum claims. That’s not because we’re so warm and welcoming but it is just that they have a case.”

I was keen to find out if British Red Cross assistance for refugees and asylum seekers is mainly for those coming to the UK or if substantial resources are allocated abroad?

“It is both. We are the largest independent provider of support to refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. We are bigger than any of the specialist agencies because we can mobilise more funding. Internationally we are often supporting people who are displaced as a result of conflict or climate change across Africa and the Middle East in particular but also in places like Bangladesh. Sadly, what determines how much we can do is dependent upon how much money we have raised. Arguably, the biggest crisis in the world right now is the food crisis in East Africa, Somalia, parts of Kenya and Ethiopia and yet we have not been able to raise the profile of that emergency and raise large amounts of money for it and we have not been able to provide as much support as we would have liked.”

I asked how the British Red Cross helped people affected by the coronavirus pandemic?

“We did huge amounts of work both in the UK and around the world. From food

distribution and private food parcels here in the UK to providing cash. We were able to mobilise funds from our corporate and individual donors to create a cash fund that we could then get to people who had no income, no savings and no recourse to public funds. Refugees, asylum seekers, people in the gig economy, women fleeing domestic violence at home. We were providing support for people to get cash through a network of more than 200 referral partners so that they could buy a SIM card for their phone or food. We also ran a national support line. We were doing vaccination support. We ran some really innovative and award-winning campaigns around vaccine hesitancy. We grew our presence on TikTok. Also reaching out to some groups who were not coming forward. For example people with uncertain migration status didn’t want to come forward for a vaccination because they were worried that they would then be on official records that might leave them more vulnerable. We did so much in terms of helping connecting people into the vaccination centres. Internationally it was similar, with the economic support of cash and then helping people to get vaccinated. It was one of the most challenging periods in my time as CEO.”

What assistance is the British Red Cross providing to those impacted by the Ukraine conflict?

“We have raised over £180 million through the generosity of the British public, corporates and trusts. We have been working very closely with the Ukraine Red Cross since 24 February 2022 when the conflict started, to provide food, psychosocial support and cash since the Ukrainian economy has collapsed. In the conflict areas in the east of Ukraine we are involved through the International Red Cross in the rehabilitation of water and electricity supplies. We have just supported the Winterization Programme because it gets incredibly cold in Ukraine and people lost their electricity and gas supplies. We are supporting the neighbouring countries in Poland, Romania and Moldova where the Red Cross in each of those countries is also supporting people. When Ukrainian refugees arrive here in the UK, we meet them at airports to welcome and help guide them through the Home Office systems or local authorities and providing cash support to help get them started. We are doing an enormous amount.”

My last question was what advice would Mike give to Oxford students who want to support the British Red Cross?

“We would love it if students at Oxford wanted to come together and form a Red Cross group. The Red Cross is a movement that enables people to show their humanity and their solidarity. The principles and practical work of the Red Cross in helping people have never been more needed. Telling the story is really, really important. We support people at some of the defining moments in their lives when all seems lost. Sadly, I think there are going to be more people who are more vulnerable in the years to come. It is important that we remember our kindness to one another and our mutuality and that we act on that. Let’s not be a bystander - let’s actually do something.”

Full interview available online at [cherwell.org](http://cherwell.org)





# Turmoil visualised: The Black Paintings of Francisco Goya

Thomas Bristow

Francisco Goya was born in Aragon in 1746, into a middle-class family. Having studied painting since the age of 14, he eventually became a Spanish court painter in 1786. Most of Goya's earlier work consists of aristocratic portraits and a large series of bucolic Rococo-style paintings upon which the tapestries for the royal palace were to be based. But in 1793, Goya was struck by an undiagnosed illness that rendered him nearly deaf, and his paintings henceforth took a darker turn. While completing more official commissions and religious paintings, he also produced a series of etchings called the *Caprichos*, which depicted the deceptions and follies of mankind. During his period of recovery, Goya also painted *Yard with Lunatics* (1793/4), a lonely and dark picture of a mental institution that reflected the artist's own fears of mental illness.

Despite his illness, Goya recovered and was made the primary court painter in 1799. His works, however, remained noticeably dark. It's thought that Goya was affected very deeply by the Peninsular War (1807–14), and his mid-period includes the famous *The Third of May 1808* (1814). It commemorates Spanish resistance against Napoleon, and the painting is one of frightened and helpless men facing the firing squad, with bodies already laying before them. Alongside this, another series of etchings, *Los Disparates*, have insanity, asylums, corruption, and fantastical creatures as their subjects.

In 1819, at the age of 72, Goya bought the *Quinta del Sordo* (Deaf Man's Villa) outside

Madrid and began to paint his most harrowing works yet. There are 14 of these '*Black Paintings*', all of which were painted onto the walls of the house between 1819 and 1823, and all of which draw on and intensify the haunting insanity of some of his earlier pieces. It is thought that the disorganisation of the Spanish government made Goya embittered towards humanity, and so he retreated to the villa and projected his feelings onto its walls. The most famous of these paintings is *Saturn Devouring His Son* (though it must be noted that Goya never named any of these paintings). Here Saturn is huge, and crouches in an angular and tense fashion while he consumes the much smaller, limp body that he grips with all his strength. He is in the process of eating, and his mouth is wide open as the blood begins to coat what remains of his son's body. What is most striking are his eyes, the same bright white as his son's body

and utterly mad. The lack of definition in the bodies and the completely black background combine to create a moment of absolute horror. Goya decided not to paint in great detail, and the effect is a frightening and hideous representation of appetite and thirst for blood. Around 20 years beforehand, he had made a red chalk drawing of the same scene, but this work has none of the hideous madness of the later painting.

Another of the most famous works is the *Witches Sabbath* (pictured below). Here, the intimidating form of Satan is dressed in clerical clothing and looms over a coven of witches, seemingly screaming. They lean into the centre towards each other, and amongst the many smudged faces there are clear expressions of shock and fear. Some cannot even bear the sight of him and hide in their brown cloaks or behind each other. One interpretation has it that this was a

comment on the witch hunts of the Spanish Inquisition, others contend that it ridicules superstition. Whatever the artist intended, he was clearly disillusioned by this point, and had broken completely from his earlier bucolic court paintings.

It is tempting to merely see Goya as a madman in his later life, but these paintings reveal a melancholic view of contemporary Spain. It's true that he was ill, but the darkness of his works was perhaps more derived from his bitterness. The most subtle of the *Black Paintings* is *The Dog*. According to the Prado Museum, the dog is drowning. The small dog is depicted looking upwards in distress against an empty background, as it is swallowed by the brown mass below. As for its interpretation, I don't think it's too much of a stretch to suppose that the dog was a metaphor for Goya himself.



Art

## The White Stuff and its discontents

Luke Dale

Most people don't think about milk very often. Milk may be a staple of every Briton's fridge, but it doesn't service small-talk. At most, perhaps, a remark on a vegan colleague's "oat drink" will stir up a tense exchange of words about the dairy industry in an office kitchen. Otherwise, milk would seem to occupy—not unhappily—a subsidiary role in the dietary diary. A splash added to a morning bowl of muesli, or a dash in a cup of tea: such are, it seems, the quiet honours of milk.

But have we been drinking our milk too uncritically? This is the question posed by the new exhibition, *Milk*, at the Wellcome Collection—and their answer, of course, is a resounding "yes". Milk—we are told in the free brochure—is a "highly politicised liquid" used to "exert power". It is inextricably bound up with "whiteness" and the British Empire. What's more, as we learn later, milk is also a commodity, bought and sold by actors whose primary goal is not the health of the nation, but rather simply capital. Punters should be ready and willing to have any illusions they had about milk mercilessly dispelled in this fashion.

That the Wellcome Collection approaches milk through a critical-theoretical lens is not surprising. Last November, they closed their much-loved permanent display *Medicine Man* on the grounds that it "perpetuate[d] a version of medical history... based on racist, sexist and ableist theories and language".

Further justification for this assessment was not provided. Had the Wellcome suffered at the hands of a curatorial saboteur? Were the objects laid out in a prejudicial way? Speaking at the Sheldonian in February, Lord Sumption gave an alternative explanation: he argued that the museum "[was] proposing a political program for the modern day, supported by a highly selective approach to the past which sees everything through the prism of race". This latest exhibition all but confirmed his view.

Of course the "whiteness" of milk is on one level crucial; it announces a hearty sap, drawn fresh from the udder, uncontaminated and unsoured. The nutty hue of milk-substitutes, by contrast, acts as the first sign that something is amiss—be it oat or almond. But the conspiratorial minds behind this exhibition have drawn on two further facts to foist upon milk an unlikely racial significance. First: 5,000 years ago, lactase persistence—the genetically-determined ability for adult humans to digest the lactose in milk—developed in Southern Europe, and has since become present in 90% of Europeans.

Elsewhere in the world, particularly among non-white populations, lactase persistence is rare. Second: Britain was, until recent decades, a relatively ethnically homogenous society. As such, marketing and health campaigns—such as those promoting babies' health—tended to focus on the needs of the majority, which may not reflect the needs of today's population.

Innocent though these facts may appear, they are foundation upon which the prosecution case rests—namely in an absurd emphasis of the former, and a wilful ignorance of the latter. The imagined world of the exhibitioners is one in which the Milk

Marketing Board deploys spurious propaganda of milk's health benefits to promote the consumption of a racist liquid. Campaigns for wider access to milk, which might have been interpreted as an enrichment of working-class dietary standards, are in fact charged with the grave sin of overlooking the lactose intolerant. "Nutritional science" we are informed "was used to establish the idea of cow's milk as an essential food". Whether this "idea" has any truth to it is irrelevant—science is relegated to the backseat as ide-

ological hobbyhorses are flogged to death.

Sadly, the Wellcome Collection's approach is far from atypical. Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum is utterly in thrall of a kindred dogma, dismantling the Victorian-style displays that are its distinguishing feature under the auspices of a "change curator". Meanwhile, at the Ashmolean, the "Our Museum Our Voices" programme insists on the intercession of teenagers and their opinions between the patrons and the artwork—opinions which, it is fair to say, often happily correspond to the ideological inclination of the curatorial class. Increasingly, then, the heritage bequeathed to us in these museums is not just trapped in glass, but also in a host of moralising, "problematising" and, ultimately, infantilising, narratives that are in their nature more political than educational.

When Ishmael, the narrator of *Moby Dick*, pauses to consider the significance of whiteness in his own context, he concludes that it is an appalling "dumb blankness, full of meaning". A similar point may be made of our exhibition's milky exhibits: white in character, meaning can be projected onto their blankness to reflect our own interests. In this case, milk is merely the medium, the canvas of a study, in reality, of race, or of how race is conceived of in the minds of these curators. And as the grievances of the past bear down in ever greater number, there will be yet, it seems, much occasion for crying over unspilt milk.

*Milk at the Wellcome Collection, London, is open 30 March – 10 September 2023.*

Image Via Wikimedia Commons





# The Oxford fashion scene: In conversation with the Fashion Gala designers

**Anya Biletsky speaks to this year's Oxford Fashion Gala designers about their showcased pieces.**

The second Tuesday of Trinity is becoming a major date in the calendar for the Oxford fashion scene, host as it is to the now-annual Fashion Gala. At this year's event, guests were witness to a runway showcase of outfits by some of Oxford's most promising young designers. The looks ranged from floor-length statement dresses to graphic trench coats to elegant blazers and tartan two-pieces. For some, this was their second time showcasing their works in the Fashion Gala, whilst for others it was their first time having their designs publicly exhibited.

I spoke to some of the Fashion Gala designers, who told me about their background in the world of fashion and design, their pieces for this year's gala, and where they find their inspiration.

## Thomas Kemball

Thomas is a second-year student reading English at Lincoln College, but he has long been interested in the visual, having taken an art foundation year, during which he began working closely with textile art. His love for fabrics and skill at sewing only went further and further from there. Chances are, you've already encountered some of his work; Thomas is a veteran of fashion at Oxford. As well as the Gala, he has been involved in student plays, working as Costume Designer for the *Tempest* at the Oxford Playhouse in Hilary 2023, and he is styling for *Mitigating Circumstances* this term.

At last year's gala, Thomas explains, he made and showcased his "first proper outfit" - a dress inspired by the Battenberg cake. If that isn't delicious enough, this year he brought five designs to the gala, influenced by the "teatime aesthetic". The designs were all connected by the theme of "heritage and Britain"; identity is at the core of Thomas' designs. When asked about his fashion inspirations, Thomas cited designers like Mimi Wade, Martine Rose and Grace Bonner, and expressed particular interest in the collaboration between Louis Vuitton and the late Virgil Abloh - he finds "lots of influences everywhere". And he certainly brought these interests together in his designs. Through the imagery of "quintessential Britishness" (including a top made out of a scone print), he explores what it means to be English - "who is allowed to be English, who looks English, who doesn't look English". He incorporated an array of materials, including tartan, lace and bows - very much in appropriate homage to Vivienne Westwood. Whilst the theme of identity is central to Thomas' designs, he emphasises that he equally wants his work to be "light-hearted". "Fashion is an art form, but it's fun", he tells me. He was very keen to make the process collaborative with the models who wore his designs on the runway, which he considers a chance for "showing off the person and the clothes at the same time".

## Rose Morley

Rose studies Geography at St Edmund Hall and is in her second year - not only of her degree, but also of showcasing her sartorial skill at the Fashion Gala. Known for her vibrant, eye-catching statement pieces, last year Rose created an elegant black dress made with blow-torched foil attachments which made heads turn.

This year's piece was no less daring - a floor-length fuchsia gown, which Rose modelled herself, complete with a gravity-defying updo, powdered makeup and a hot pink

lip. She describes her dress as "totally luxurious in a Shocking Pink satin", which is a "delight to look at" but "rather more terrifying to stick a needle into". I for one am glad she overcame this fear to deliver to us what was a spectacular runway look. Rose explains that the idea for the dress came from imagining what would happen "if Kylie Jenner's Schiaparelli lion dress got put through the mind and motifs of Frieda Kahlo". The make-up, which is quite frankly a whole art piece of its own, "takes inspiration from the incomparable Pat McGrath's Christian Dior Spring 2007 and Autumn 2009 looks". Meanwhile, the luscious up-do nods to the delights of Marie Antoinette, in that the "hair is a little up in the air, quite literally." Rose raises the bottom of her skirt to show me a pair of delicate cream Mary Janes, which finished off the daintiness of this regal 18th-century look with a maximalist twist.

Rose explains that her mother is one of her inspirations in all things fashion, giving her a "childhood of going to school in period-accurate costumes for WWII dress up day or World Book Day" which "sparked the joy" for "dressing up". Her joy for "dressing up" is very much palpable in the exquisitely adventurous looks she has brought us for two years running.

## Olivia Tajo

Olivia designed and made four pieces for this year's Fashion Gala, the first time she has displayed her designs in Oxford. Now in their second year studying English at Wadham, Olivia has ventured into the Oxford fashion scene with a bang - as well as the Gala this Trinity, they are also designing the costumes for Elspeth Rogers' fifth week play *The House*. However, Olivia has long been involved in fashion design; she tells me how she first picked up sewing as an after-school activity when she was younger, as it was the only alternative to the dreaded sports option. What started as a casual hobby rapidly became an avid interest. They would flick through magazines and be especially drawn to couture designs, which they then sought to emulate in their sewing.

The two dresses which Olivia made for the Gala, she tells me, were "based on 1999 Givenchy couture", with a distinctly "mid-summery, flowery vibe", fitting indeed for the warmer days we are enjoying now that we are in the sunniest term of the year. The long-term use of items of clothing is something Olivia takes to heart, as they explain that they try to maximise the wear of a garment before giving it away. Indeed, Olivia made one of the dresses from "some old bedsheets", explaining that she "really admired the pattern" of the bedsheets and so thought she "could not leave it to waste". And they put it to good use indeed. Her aim with the dress was to render it in some degree a piece of visual trickery, looking like it would be "impossible to make" (though she confides that it was "difficult, but not impossible"). Olivia's second dress likewise toyed with the notion of illusion, having found its inspiration in an unlikely place: their school library. There, amidst the bookshelves, Olivia became intrigued by the book roses which the school librarian made, and then sought to apply a similar technique to dress-making, experimenting with folding fabric to create an origami-esque effect.

## Lottie Oliver

After modelling in last year's Gala, Lottie became eager to bring a design of her own to this year's showcase. A third-year Chem-



istry student at Lincoln, Lottie is a proficient dabbler in the sartorial sphere, with an unconventional manner of designing; she tells me she does not "follow patterns when [she] make[s] clothes", but has a more free-style approach. Whether or not she plays by the fashion rules, her look for the Gala did everything right. Nodding distinctly to the aesthetic of fairytales and the magical, Lottie created an ethereal piece consisting of a pale blue two-piece with leafy strap sleeves and rose buds of yellow and red. The most impressive element of the design, however, were the wings, made out of real "twigs and flowers and leaves", a dazzling collage crafted from the materials of the natural world. Much like real fairy wings, Lottie's construction was delicate; indeed, she tells me she initially wanted to make the wings only out of sticks, but "structurally that was going to be difficult".

She cites pantomimes and the theatre as a point of interest to her and an influence on her dramatic style of design. Her fascination with the fairy aesthetic came partly from a book she read as a child, in which the fairies' clothes were made out of flowers. As well as this, Lottie found inspiration in the film *Maleficent*, especially the magnificent black horns of the eponymous character. Lottie explains that, like Maleficent's horns, she wanted the wings of her design to "look like they were almost growing out of my back", springing organically from the rest of the design.

Back over the COVID-19 lockdown, Lottie tells me, she transformed old curtains which her grandma offered to her "as a joke" into a piece which she recently wore to the Glitterball. Similar to Olivia's repurposing of old bedsheets, this rings true to the theme of the gala, "buy less, choose well", with its emphasis on using what one already has to create spectacular outfits. It is thrilling to see designers' creativity being fuelled by what seem nondescript, everyday items.

## Beth Eames

Outside her academic studies - she is working on an engineering DPhil at Balliol - Beth is known amongst her friends for making her own clothes. Whether for an Oxford ball, an evening occasion, or a work meeting, Beth tells me that her friends often come to her with requests for pieces for various occasions - and with good reason. Beth tells me that she has been enthused by clothes-making since she was a child, learning to sew as

a pre-teen and developing a soon-indulged "obsession" with having a sewing machine. A pattern-drafting course she took proved significant, as, she tells me, "making your own pattern felt very important" to her at that stage, "so that I could make stuff that I actually liked" as opposed to having to use pre-made patterns. Making her own year eleven prom dress was another exciting milestone for Beth.

At the Fashion Gala, Beth showcased a sophisticated ensemble of six of her "evening wear" inspired pieces. The women's looks, Beth tells me, are each made from "two metres of Liberty London silk". One of the dresses is "based on a commercial pattern", which Beth then altered and to which she added slits and other personalising details. The designs are made from "different prints that I have loved and gotten obsessed with", and from fabrics which are beautiful "to feel" as well as to look at. She also made a "matching linen suit", a piece which finds its inspiration in the smart stylishness of business wear. The men's look, a matte silk shirt, "looks more everyday", but this does not make it any less chic - Beth is an expert in the marriage of comfort and flair.

Indeed, comfort is one of Beth's priorities when making clothes. The urge to make occasion wear of her own came from the frustration of the difficulty of finding dresses for black tie events which both looked good and felt pleasant to wear. Making her own clothes means Beth can focus on creating pieces which are perfectly tailored to her own tastes and frame. The result are gorgeously original designs; she need not worry about arriving at a ball or elsewhere and finding herself in the same dress as someone else, nor fret about a too-low neckline or a sleeve which is too tight or too loose.

These five designers offered up a wonderfully varied range of pieces for the Gala. Each of them is at a different stage in their fashion journey, and it is pleasing to see that the Fashion Gala affords them a place to have their creativity showcased in Oxford. The guests on the night itself matched the designers' enthusiasm for fashion, arriving in an array of outfits of varying levels of extravagance and responding vivaciously to the catwalk event. The atmosphere was exuberant, rewarding indeed for the twenty or so designers who took part in the Gala this year.

Image Credit: Coco Cottam



# Between love and hate: The Strokes' guide to staying together

Joe Wald

Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll seem like the sorts of things that are best enjoyed with friends. Since the conception of the 'rock band' in the 50s, thousands of groups have passed in and out of rock's sizzling stir-fry of stars – some tossing and turning for decades, others burning to a crisp at once. However, fame, money and love on a world-size scale are harder to share than they seem, and very few bands make it out of the pan alive. US-based pop-rock band The Strokes have encountered just about all of rock's common killers. And yet, 22 years on from their first album, they are still here – and reportedly working on a seventh. What, if anything, can we learn from The Strokes about not just making it, but making it last?

## Under Control: Drugs and Alcohol

The standard cause of collapse for a young, successful rock band is drink and drugs. Guns 'n' Roses ran on booze and heroin, Pink Floyd lost their greatest musical visionary to LSD, the Smashing Pumpkins had to fire their bassist over her abuse of crack cocaine. The nature of the job is late nights, afterparties, alcohol and hard drugs, and while this has no doubt helped to shape the sound of modern music, addiction invariably damages the quality of musical output as well as intra-band relations. Alcohol turned The Strokes' frontman Julian Casablancas into an "asshole" (in his own words), and by the late 2000s he was becoming

difficult to work with. Phil Everly smashed a guitar over his drunken brother Don's head for less, but Casablancas had the foresight to kick the drink in 2009, with guitarist Albert Hammond Jr. also beating a four-year heroin addiction around the same time. Casablancas told Rolling Stone magazine that he "felt hungover for ... five years", but the band have nonetheless made it to the middle-age of their rock career, bruised but not defeated.

## What Ever Happened?: The Decline

Perhaps the most impressive challenge that The Strokes have survived is the downward trajectory of their career. The band boasts six full-length albums and multiple EPs, but their first album, *Is This It* (2001), remains almost indisputably their finest work. Their ratings declined steadily across the following four albums, flatlining in 2011 with the chaotic and crumbling LP *Angles*. The years 2013-2020 saw only one EP, slipped out without ceremony on Casablancas' own label Cult, and fans broadly considered the band finished. However, the high standard and success of their 2020 return *The New Abnormal* demonstrated how the intervening years had been a chance to reflect and right the project. Early success is often a recipe for a messy end. The Smiths shot up but didn't last long, shoo-ins to the rock hall of fame despite being active for a mere four years due to poor management. Today, the easily distractible public sees the young and TikTok-famous picked up, exploited, and dropped at will by the world's biggest labels. The way of the meteoric rockstar is fraught with danger,

but credit must be given to The Strokes for riding out napalm stardom and a steady decline without ever completely fading into insignificance or exploding into flames.

## Take It Or Leave It: Life Beyond the Band

Often, the world wants a rockstar. And it picks one – Alex Turner has become synonymous with Arctic Monkeys, Freddie Mercury with Queen, Sting with The Police. Art is subjective, but money is concrete, and sometimes a band needs to give the world what it wants. One singer, one songwriter, one star, a formula which both made and broke The Police; for the rest of the band, it can be hard to take. Julian Casablancas writes The Strokes' songs. This has been the accepted order since *Angles* (2011), their only collaborative work, which was unpopular with fans and even more so with the band themselves. The other four members of The Strokes are musicians in their own right and yet have played peripheral roles in the creative process of their work. This has not held them back, though, and all of the band members have released music as part of other outfits and Albert Hammond Jr. has had significant success under his own name. Their interests stretch beyond music: drummer Fab Moretti has become an art dealer and Casablancas has invented the world's first ever pedal-less foldable electric bike. Obviously. The band must not be all-consuming, and self-worth is

best derived elsewhere. Bands don't always go down in a blaze of glory, and I believe that soon, The Strokes will simply stop. This should not be treated as a failure; they will leave behind one of the best albums of the last thirty years, a deep and varied discography, an adoring fanbase, and the still-falling debris of the indie rock revival which they kickstarted two decades ago. They have little more to achieve and yet less to prove. And while The Strokes' career cannot be called exemplary until they navigate how it ends, we can already celebrate a band who, in spite of everything, have stuck it out and spared us the dismal speculation over what could have been.

Image Credit: Roger Woolman via Wikimedia commons.



## Books

# Embracing the Echoes: The Significance and Allure of Literary Retellings

Rumaisa Khusru

The concept of reimagining an existing story is relatively new in the context of storytelling, emerging more prominently in recent years. And while some people love retellings, others may find them unnecessary or redundant. They believe that the original stories already hold timeless value and don't require reinterpretations or adaptations. I may also have been apprehensive at first, but over the years, I've grown fond of many retellings and have seen and appreciated the beauty of looking at classic stories from a new and fresh perspective. Retellings can be a celebration of those original stories, breathing new life into them and allowing them to resonate with a contemporary audience.

Here are some retellings that have altered my perspective on the genre and, hopefully, will help you do the same:

Tiger Lily was the first retelling I read. It puts a spin on the classical Peter Pan story and narrates the plot from Tiger Lily's perspective. The retelling made me realize how misunderstood a character can be when portrayed in a slightly different light. It opened my eyes to the beauty and complexity of retellings and how they can challenge previous-

ly held opinions and beliefs.

Jodi Lynn Anderson skillfully weaves a tale that explores the complexities of love, identity, and societal expectations. Through Tiger Lily's eyes, we see the challenges she faces as a member of a marginalized indigenous community, her fierce loyalty to her people, and her love for Peter Pan. By shifting the narrative perspective, Tiger Lily confronts preconceived notions and offers a fresh depiction of the characters we thought we knew.

The Song of Achilles remains one of my all-time favorite books! A vast array of Greek mythology retellings explore the realm of magnificent gods and glorious wars, and The Song of Achilles is a beautiful narration of the Trojan War from the perspective of a young-prince-turned-exile, Patroclus.

What sets the novel apart is its poignant and intimate portrayal of the Trojan War through the eyes of Achilles' closest companion. Madeline Miller's exquisite prose brings forth the emotional depth of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship, capturing the tenderness, sacrifice, and tragedy that unfolds amidst the backdrop of the war. Through this retelling, Miller delves into the intricacies of the characters, exploring the motivations and vulnerabilities of Patroclus and Achilles. The story humanizes

these legendary figures, peeling away their divine status by shedding light on their inner conflicts and desires in ways the Iliad never portrayed.

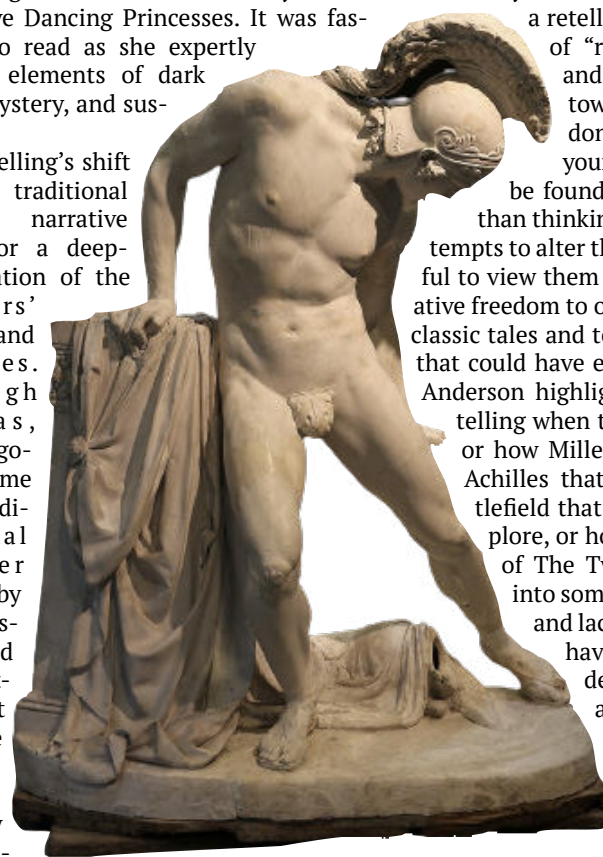
A House of Salt and Sorrows strays the furthest from the original version of the three books. Erin A. Craig adds a layer of twisted horror and gore to the children's fairy tale of The Twelve Dancing Princesses. It was fascinating to read as she expertly combined elements of dark fantasy, mystery, and suspense.

The retelling's shift from the traditional fairy-tale narrative allowed for a deeper exploration of the characters' emotions and incentives. Annaleigh Thaumás, the protagonist, became a multi-dimensional character haunted by grief, suspicion, and a relentless quest for the truth behind the mystery surround-

ing her sisters' deaths. While it may have deviated significantly from the original tale, the novel stood out as a bold and ingenious retelling. It pushed the boundaries of the source material, giving it a distinct essence that will resonate with those who enjoy darker narratives.

If you remain hesitant about reading a retelling because you are afraid of "ruining" your perceptions and nostalgic attachments towards the original works... don't be! I'm sure some of your new favorite novels will be found among retellings. Rather than thinking of these retellings as attempts to alter the original texts, it is helpful to view them as authors exercising creative freedom to offer a fresh perspective on classic tales and to reveal unexplored facets that could have existed. Similar to the way Anderson highlights Tiger Lily in the retelling when the original cast her aside, or how Millar illustrates the parts of Achilles that existed beyond the battlefield that Homer's Iliad did not explore, or how Craig turns her version of The Twelve Dancing Princesses into something much more sinister and laced with horror – retellings have the ability to dig into the depths of secondary characters or reinvent settings and themes in ways the original tales couldn't.

Image via Wikimedia Commons



**The story humanizes these legendary figures, peeling away their divine status...**



# ‘Bugs Are Cool’: In Conversation with the Cast and Crew of ‘The Metamorphosis’

Kobi Mohan

One cloudy Saturday afternoon this term, I met with the cast and crew of *The Metamorphosis* to find out about Matchbox Production’s latest show.

**So, what is *The Metamorphosis* about?**

**Lily Berrel (Director):** The protagonist is Gregor Samsa. He is a travelling salesman in the cloth trade who has been worked to the bone and suffers under the pressure of his family, who rely on him financially. At the beginning of the play, he wakes up to discover that he has transformed into some repulsive and unhuman creature. He is unable to communicate with his family and continue his normal life, although the audience remains aware that he thinks the same. At first, his younger sister Greta takes on the responsibility to care for Gregor, but the family are increasingly repulsed by his state and begin to move on with their lives. Once the father gets a new job, the family imagine a future without Gregor, who is left to suffer in his room in complete isolation.

**Why did you decide to put on *The Metamorphosis*?**

**Lily:** *The Metamorphosis* is my favourite book. I decided to come to Oxford to be able to study Kafka specifically as part of my German degree. My dad was a big Kafka reader and got me into the books when I was in sixth form. *The Metamorphosis* was the first Kafka book I read and once my German improved enough, I started to read it in the original language, and made me think about the differences between the two and the difficulties with translation. To make things even more complicated, I thought it would be interesting to see how Kafka’s work can be depicted visually, so this project has become a sort of three-way

translation.

**What were your inspirations for dressing Gregor and the cast in general?**

**Izzy Kori (Costume & Set Design):** I was really inspired by The Royal Ballet’s adaption of *The Metamorphosis*. For Gregor there is the use of this tar-like, viscous fluid that he becomes smothered with, which I’ve tried to recreate. Similarly I’ve used expanding foam all around Gregor’s room and other parts of the set to show the spreading of his infection, indicating where his presence has been and how it slowly infects the stage.

**What is your process going into a set and costume design project like this?**

**Izzy:** I usually read the script/book a few times and get down some initial ideas and drawings and then talk through with the director how they want to adapt the play so we’re on a similar wavelength. From that point I have quite a lot of creative freedom, there’s lots of charity shop visits and Ebay purchases involved. It’s hard to really know how the vision will come together until it materialises on stage, which only really happens during show week, so it’s an exciting but nerve racking experience.

**How does your approach to sound design differ to previous productions of *The Metamorphosis*?**

**Alva Orr (Sound Design):** The entire audience will be wearing headphones throughout the

show - this is a listening format known as binaural sound. This allows us to create sonic experiences that are extremely visceral and intimate. If you have ever listened to an ASMR video, you’ll know exactly what I am talking about! It also allows us unprecedented control over the sound, letting me warp time and space as I please in the show. I’ve been wanting to do a project using binaural sound for quite some time now. When I saw the script for *The Metamorphosis* I knew it was just a perfect fit for the technique and I just went for it!

**Have you had any memorable moments during rehearsals?**

**Joe Rachman (Gregor):** When you’re crawling around on a table and making crazy soap ASMR, rehearsals are never unmemorable! This project has been so different from everything I’ve done before and it’s been great fun experimenting with all the different aspects of the show. I’ll certainly never forget becoming a human microphone and having everyone eating food right next to my ears, that was definitely a new one for me.

**How similar would you say you are to your character?**

When we first meet Gregor in the play he’s already a bug, so I guess in that regard we’re not too similar, although I have started sitting in bug positions because they are way more comfortable than they look!

**In three words, why should Cherwell readers go and see *The Metamorphosis*?**

**Joe:** Bugs are cool.

***The Metamorphosis* is on during Week 6 from 30th May – 3rd June at the Pilch.**

Image via Wikimedia Commons

## What’s On...

### IN THE PENAL COLONY

2-3 June, Moser Theatre (Wadham College)

In the Penal Colony is a strange tale of torture and suffering. The play revolves around a conversation between the resident Officer and visiting Explorer on a far-flung penal colony. The Officer wishes to preserve the punishments that were formally a “feature” of his way of life, refusing to abandon his fiendish and diabolical machine. Part fantasy and part allegory, Steven Berkoff’s adaptation of Kafka’s short story is a timely and relevant look at injustice.

### PLACEHOLDER

30 May-3 June, BT Studio

After the death of an ex-girlfriend, Sophie begins to re-evaluate her life, career and relationships. Facing her own mortality, she decides the best option is to become a nun, despite being an atheist. It’s a decision which proves unpopular with her friends and particularly her boyfriend.

### A NIGHT OF QUEER MUSIC

30-31 May, Holywell Music Room

A *Night of Queer Music* is a dramatic music concert taking place at Holywell Music Room, presenting songs from musical theatre, opera and jazz with a queer slant, and also featuring settings to Sappho’s poetry. It’s a way of taking work which had always been imagined a certain way, and being able to see ourselves and our stories within it.

Film

## Meeting the President’s Husband: An Interview with Peter Kessler

Gregor Gajic

Peter Kessler is the creator and curator of Magdalen Monday Movies, which features a different film theme each term. It’s free, it’s open to everyone, and over the last two years it’s become one of Oxford’s cult hits. I meet up with Peter Kessler on a Wednesday morning. He is an affable fellow and immediately offers a cup of coffee. The rays of sunlight flicker over the various artefacts scattered around the Magdalen presidential lodgings. Peter’s study is not untidy, but it shows signs of a mind at work. His BAFTA is proudly displayed on the cabinet of his own make and a signed poster of *The Wicker Man* is hanging on the wall. We are periodically joined by the several four-legged occupants of the flat. They trample over my recording equipment, but I am just able to reconstruct fragments of this cinematic conversation...

**Do you remember the first time you went to the pictures?**

I can remember the first play I went to see because I didn’t know how I was supposed to behave in the theatre. It was at the Southport Little Theatre and at one point, Noah was having an argument with his wife on the ark

and went “I can say what I want on my own boat, can’t I?” And I just went “Yes!” And he went “Thank you!” And my mother had to explain that you’re not necessarily supposed to just reply to the actors on the stage.

**How did your relationship with film evolve through the years?**

I read English at Merton, 1982 to 1985. But I’m fascinated with everything else about our culture, apart from English literature, such as theatre, film, TV, comics, and graphic novels. I’m a very slow reader so it’s easier for me to consume cultural output that does not have to cover hundreds and hundreds of pages. A film or a play takes the same amount of time for everybody to consume, so I think I’ve gravitated towards these things because they are, in terms of audience response and reaction, “levelling” and that appeals to me.

**What was the idea behind Magdalen Monday Movies?**

I became more and more interested in cinema since I retired in 2005. I found myself exploring it in the reverse chronological order which was an interesting way of discovering where ideas have come from. I began to feel that there was an extremely accessible and exciting world of culture unknown to most people. I’d show these films to my family and friends, and everybody would become

completely dedicated to it because they loved being shown things which made them go “That’s so brilliant, why didn’t I know this existed?”

So you could say there are two intentions. One is to give people an outlet which gets them away from their studies, especially since students nowadays work much harder than we did in our day. Secondly, I think it’s astonishing that the university doesn’t have any way for undergraduates to study film. But the overwhelming response to MMM demonstrates that there is a desire to look at film. I’m in the process of creating the university’s first film research programme.

**What is the story behind the German silent film season?**

I’d always heard of these famous films like *Nosferatu* and *Metropolis*. When I started to look at other films by Murnau and Lang, I found that some of them were, in my mind, much better than these two most famous ones. I also started to see things that I felt I’d seen in American films from much later, especially with Lang whose *Metropolis* has inspired an awful lot of science fiction films. Before these people came around, cinema had had no accessible language that we all understand. Simple things like what does it mean when the camera moves? They were

creating an art form, and all of them set off for America and ended up in Hollywood. And so, what they started in Germany effectively ended up becoming the language of cinema as propagated via American money to the rest of the world. If they hadn’t all been effectively chased out of Germany with the rise of Hitler, then Hollywood might have been Hanover. You’d never know, would you?

**Why should people come to see documentaries this season?**

Documentaries have provided some of the most thrilling films ever made. At their best, you almost can’t believe that what you’re watching is actual reality. We screened *The King of Kong* and it’s hard to believe that the world of competitive vintage arcade game playing could be this microcosm of society, but it is. Every single one of these documentaries make you reflect on what it is to be a human being.

**Any final thoughts?**

Come to Magdalen Monday Movies. You will not regret it. And whatever happens, you’re not getting your money back.

Magdalen Monday Movies take place in the Magdalen College Auditorium. Free tickets, including free popcorn, are available on Eventbrite.



# Whatever floats your boat: Leo Buckley on the realities of the river

Freya Jones

I agree to interview Leo Buckley about the realities of living on a houseboat with a certain amount of trepidation. In my opinion, any student who volunteers to move out of town and subsist in a barge on the River Isis must be slightly mad. However, the sun is shining and Buckley is smiling as he greets me on the towpath, welcoming me into his floating home.

The barge is dark green and pretty dilapidated, with fallen leaves and empty bottles littering the back deck.

“Let’s start with a glass of rosé on the roof and then I’ll give you the Grand Tour,” Buckley declares, pulling back a heavy tarpaulin from the boat’s entrance and springing off into the galley.

I remain on the makeshift wooden gangplank, watching and waiting. As someone with bad motion sickness, I look at the river and wince inwardly.

“Here we are!” Buckley’s back, brandishing a bottle of cheap alcohol. He clambers onto the roof and spreads out a picnic blanket, before offering a hand to help me up.

“How long have you been living on the boat?” I ask, pulling out my notebook and getting to business.

“About a month, since the beginning of Trinity.”

“And what made you decide to leave college?”

Buckley sips his rosé and tells me the story: he was asked to leave college accommodation last term after throwing one too many parties in his room. Disliking Oxford’s high housing prices and the prospect of finalist digs next year, he decided to “seize the moment” and opt for this waterborne alternative.

“Do you rent?” I ask, still deeply unconvinced by the wisdom of his decision.

Buckley nods, telling me that his landlord – or “boatlord” – is himself a former Oxford

student who now lives and works abroad. “He lets this boat to me for a mere £440 per month. I also pay an extra £40 for one of those big canisters of gas to keep the kitchen going, but all in all, it’s very affordable.”

I raise an eyebrow and take more notes. You get what you pay for.

At that moment, we’re interrupted, as a crew of rowers slices past on the river and almost crashes into us.

“Don’t worry!” Buckley cries, as the boat rocks from side to side. “Barges like this are very stable and hard to capsize. I’d say it’s unsinkable.”

I try to smile, feeling queasy. “Famous last words.”

“You get used to the rowers,” Buckley tells me, as they pull away and the cox cycles past us on the towpath, hollering. “They’re my community out on the river. I’ll be selling Pimms from my boat at Summer Eights and I’ve told the referee he can use my roof to plant the finishing flag!”

After that, Buckley shows me inside. Thankfully he’s had the houseboat’s small windows open, but the place still smells musty. Maybe you get used to it with time.

First my eyes are drawn to a cushion with Tony Blair’s face on it, grinning up at me from a scruffy green couch along the galley wall.

“As you see, I have all I could possibly need,” Buckley says with a flourish. He then proceeds to show me the kitchen: it’s well-equipped, but a pan of... something... is



congealing on the stove and the wooden worktops look like they haven’t been cleaned properly in years. Instead, they’re covered in crumbs and vintage issues of Playboy Magazine.

“Do you miss having a scout?” I ask.

“No, I think the scout system is morally questionable at best, and highly invasive at worst,” says Buckley, answering seriously this time. Then he smiles: “Besides, I love vacuum cleaning!”

I find this hard to believe, and my eyes widen in surprise as he produces a small handheld vacuum cleaner from a cardboard box. The device is filled with a bird’s nest of hair, debris, and something which looks like sawdust, but it does appear to have been used recently - and quite possibly for the last time...

Next comes the bathroom. Before I know it, I’m staring at Leo Buckley’s porta-potty.

“The toilet does work,” he assures me, “but it’s best left only for emergencies.”

As far as I’m concerned, the porta-potty is tantamount to an emergency in its own right, and I’m relieved when Buckley turns round to show me the shower.

This is actually a hose which pulls out of a tap in the tiny basin behind us. Meanwhile, a plughole is ingeniously uncovered when Buckley lifts the floorboard below. Nonetheless, he confesses that he’s never actually showered on the boat, wisely outsourcing his ablutions to the showers back at college or in nearby gyms.

“Do you find that life on a barge is

conductive to work?” I ask.

“No,” Buckley admits. “Although it does force me to get out into town, to college, libraries, and the Union, where I usually write my essays.”

“How does it compare to life in college overall?”

Apparently there are advantages and disadvantages.

“The worst thing is honestly working out where to hang my suits,” he tells me. “As you can see, I have very limited options.” He pulls out a coat hanger bearing at least a dozen ties and holds it up for me.

Another concern was whether he’d be able to stand up in the boat. At the height of 6’4, Buckley wondered if he’d end up with a bad back, but tells me he was pleasantly surprised to find he could stand up fully.

“Do you ever wish you were living back on land?”

He shakes his head. “Not at all. While I don’t spend too much time on the boat, it’s infinitely better than college and personally I think you’re doing Oxford badly if you spend too much time at home. I’ve also become surprisingly self-sufficient and I finally have the chance to live out my true Brideshead fantasy.”

I take a deep breath. The view across to Christ Church Meadows is certainly beautiful on a clear day, but barge life would never be for me.

Still, Buckley can’t recommend it highly enough. “I can sleep and I can host, and that’s all I need. I’m a happy man.”

As he shows me out, he invites me to “Barfters”, the slightly dubious name of his famous boat after parties. I’m personally immensely thankful to be back on terra firma, and think I’ve spent quite enough time onboard Buckley’s boat for one day, but as to whether or not I’ll return for “Barfters”, we’ll have to see.

*Image Credit: Freya Jones. More images from the houseboat available on [cherwell.org](http://cherwell.org).*

Aries

21 March - 19 April

Be optimistic this week. Things might be a lot – but they might also have a silver lining. Try to find it.

Capricorn

22 Dec - 19 Jan.

Creativity comes easily to you this week as Jupiter moves into Taurus. See where it takes you.

Aquarius

20 Jan. - 18 Feb.

Family matters for you this week. Give them a call or catch up with your found family. Quality time is key.

Pisces

19 Feb. - 20 March

Things are busy this week! But that’s okay, because you’re well equipped to deal with it. Just face it one thing at a time, and fifth week will be done before you know it.

Taurus

20 April - 20 May

Change direction, Taurus, as Jupiter moves into your sign and brings you passion for pursuing your goals this week.

Leo

23 July - 22 Aug.

You have new and exciting opportunities coming your way this week, Leo, reminding you that working towards your long-term goals pays off.

Cancer

21 June - 22 July

This week, be with your people. Work might be hard, but you’ll get through it by finding balance rather than keeping your head down.

Libra

23 Sept. - 22 Oct.

Take some time for self-reflection this week. Let yourself have the space to go slowly if you need to, and know what you can and can’t do.

Scorpio

23 Oct. - 21 Nov.

This week, your close relationships are growing. This might mean you’re going on dates or bonding with friends, but let people in this week either way.

Sagittarius

22 Nov. - 21 Dec.

You’re doing so well this week! Work is being handed-in on time and the fifth week blues aren’t hitting too badly. Enjoy it!

Virgo

23 Aug. - 22 Sept.

Be optimistic this week! Let yourself see the best and hope for the best in everything and everyone – and it might just pay off.

Gemini

21 May- 20 June

Slow down and take time for yourself in fifth week. It’s okay to be feeling a bit emotional, so remember to be kind to yourself.

Horoscopes

Things each sign should keep in mind for fifth week...



Cherpse



## ANT

**First Impressions:**

Very smiley and overall a positive person. We both admitted we were kinda nervous and it was really easy to talk to her.

**Did it meet your expectations?**

I thought it was gonna be hard to find conversation, but we had a lot of random things in common – talking about how bad Chelsea are doing was perfect common ground.

**What was the highlight?**

Getting asked to go on a pub crawl by a random group of 30 year old builders – we were both very confused. Also, finding out that she lives 2 minutes away from my ex...

**What was the most embarrassing moment?**

I completed aired her as a walked into the pub, so it was awkward going back when I realised that she was my date. I also went up to some random other girl who insisted that I wasn't her date.

**Describe the date in 3 words:**

Lacking loose game

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

In the words of Jay from Inbetweeners: "completed it, mate!"

## DEC

**First Impressions:**

Super nice! He dressed up for the occasion, and had lovely warm and welcoming vibes.

**Did it meet your expectations?**

Yes! We had a great time and great chats, very thankful to have been paired with someone normal.

**What was the highlight?**

When he told me about his embarrassing Spotify wrapped – Lizzo in Top 5.

**What was the most embarrassing moment?**

Not for me but for him – he couldn't find me and asked a random girl if she was there for the date to which she replied: "I'm here for a date but not with you."

**Describe the date in 3 words:**

Boozy, banter, vibes

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

We did go on a second one! Wasn't feeling the romantic vibes but nice to have made a friend, and got some new pub suggestions courtesy of him!

## Looking for love?

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

# How to make the most of eight-week terms

Nina Naidu

There's nothing that irks me more than non-Oxford students complaining about a ten week term, weekly lectures, and measly seminar reading. It's not like they even go to those anyways. And let's not forget about the reading week spent skiing in the Swiss Alps. So when my non-Oxford friends ask me whether I've 'caught up on my lectures' (not that I have any), I really need to spend some quality welfare time with the college cats. Let me put it this way: we have a different lifestyle over here at Oxford. A lifestyle that I can barely even keep up with myself.

I am often told how lucky I am to only have eight week terms. I'm not even here for half the year, so what's the big deal? I had no idea that at other universities, summer terms are spent for revision and exams. I remember only too well the stress of juggling Prelims revision and Italian language classes hoping for even a moment to sit in Gail's and contemplate life. We may have 0th week – but it's hardly the same when you're busy moving back in and cramming collections revision. The work is compressed into two months in which you find yourself jumping over essay hurdles, praying that your chatterbox tute partner diverts the conversation away from that pesky

reading you never got round to doing. There is not enough time to do so many essays, and sometimes I feel like I come away from tutorials knowing nothing. Yet, I have friends from home with only two essays a term. Two! And here I am with two essays a week if I'm lucky. The mental marathon that is expected of you far outweighs a genuine interest in your reading list, for that information will have to be stored deep within the recesses of your brain until those final exams. Whether or not that's a good thing, I couldn't say. Somehow I just know that I have been conditioned to the Oxford lifestyle.

But maybe other universities have it right. At my boyfriend's university for instance, their Uni glossary includes words such as 'academic calendar' and 'collusion', whereas we have to define the word 'Commoner' and 'Bulldog' (which I myself still don't really understand). And don't get me started on the College family system. While I have found Oxford's collegiate system to be a welcoming support bubble, I have been met with some serious side-eye when discussing 'college parents' and 'sub fusc' to my friends back home. College families are a sweet welfare idea in your first days as a fresher, but once you mention how your college made you marry your own college sister...it does get just a bit too ridiculous. Even the Oxford bubble is constricted between colleges. Our lives are

incongruous to each other. I couldn't imagine life at another college, let alone another university. Since we all slaved so hard to get here, we might as well romanticise it. The only thing universal about university is the struggle. But at least I get an Oxford degree out of this, right? All this hard work will certainly be worth it.

The university experience is one bound by the restrictions of time. If only we had the time to enjoy the weekly formals, college bops, and annual balls (though this is still a sore subject for my fellow Hughsies) maybe I would not feel bittersweet jealousy when I see others living an 'easier' university life. We have found ourselves in a place where we are surrounded by tradition and glamour, yet we cannot always enjoy it. Certainly, one could say that such pressures exist at all universities, but given the distinct experiences presented to Oxford students, it's almost a shame that participating feels like a guilty pleasure.



## Alcoholism at Oxford: A perspective

I can still remember the first time I got drunk. I was around 13 years old. A friend had stolen some of his dad's whisky, and we got through half a bottle together. The experience wasn't particularly extraordinary, apart from one thing: even then I was astonished, terrified, by just how much I enjoyed being drunk. The rush, the feeling of the alcohol coursing through my veins, the way it made my worries and anxieties dissipate for a few blissful hours. I subconsciously realised something that, years later, I would spend countless hours grappling with; whatever joys I could experience sober, they would be even better with a bottle in hand.

The next few years went by relatively normally. The lack of independence borne from still living at home meant my alcohol use was kept in check. All that happened was that every week or two when me and my friends were out drinking, I'd always end up getting absolutely shitfaced – far more than anyone else.

Then I arrived at Oxford University. It only took a few weeks for my alcohol use to absolutely soar. I was 18 at this point, and without my parents breathing down my back, I was free to drink as much as I pleased. In the Michaelmas and Hilary terms just gone, I drank an average of around 100 to 150 units a week. I drank virtually every day – and I mean drank, enough that almost every night ended with me stumbling up the stairs to my accommodation and collapsing in bed, drunk out of my mind. I spent well over a thousand pounds on alcohol, leaving less than half of my money for other expenses.

There are probably very few environments worse for would-be alcoholics than Oxford University. The atmosphere of constant stress, the omnipresent 'work hard, play hard' undertone, the fact that almost every society runs countless boozy events, combined with virtually every college having a cheap

and accessible bar, meant that I stood little chance. It's true that, regardless of where I went, alcohol problems would have probably arisen. Of the three factors often leading to alcoholism – a family history of alcohol abuse, beginning drinking at a young age, and past mental health problems – I tick every one.

But Oxford undoubtedly exacerbated my issues. It doesn't have much of a drug culture (in my experience, at least), but it has one hell of a drinking culture. Very few people seemed to notice how out of hand my drinking was getting. In a society where getting drunk regularly is a common occurrence, it's hard to differentiate between someone who likes to drink and someone who needs to drink. When I finally began the long and painful process of seeking sobriety, the lack of support provided by the university was shocking. My addiction advisor suggested I seek out alcoholic support groups within the University. As far as I can tell, no such group presently exists.

The solution isn't, however, some sort of puritanical clamp down on drinking among students. The vast majority of you reading this article will be perfectly capable of drinking healthily and in moderation – and I am deeply envious of you. College bars and drinking events provide most with a hugely enjoyable social space. Some alcohol free alternatives would be nice, but that's all. Instead, the University needs to do more to assist those students who are struggling; and we all need to be more ready to look out for the warning signs of alcohol dependency. There's nothing wrong with wanting to drink; but when we start noticing that ourselves, or others, need to drink, alarm bells should be raised.

The writing of this article marks the two

month anniversary of my sobriety. These past few weeks have been tough, much tougher than I could have ever expected. But they've also been incredibly rewarding. Getting over an addiction requires a complete life reset; it requires reconnecting with the friends and passions that you lost to booze. The constant urge to drink still hasn't left me, if it ever will. Knowing that you can't under any circumstances do the thing you want to do more than anything else is torture. But finally, for the first time in many months, I'm able to appreciate the beauty of our world, the simple joys of friendship, without the distorting lens of the bottle – and that makes it all worth it.

But if there's one piece of advice I want

anyone who relates to this article to take to heart, it's this: don't go cold turkey. Alcohol is one of the few drugs whose withdrawal can be fatal. For me, it was so bad that I was rushed to the John Radcliffe emergency unit, suffering from delirium tremens – a condition arising from alcohol withdrawal with symptoms like tremors, delirium, hallucinations, and even seizures which could potentially lead to death. Talk to your doctor, or any other NHS resources, so you can withdraw with the help of medications to protect you.

Drinking in moderation can be great fun, but if you notice yourself or anyone else unable to put down the bottle, becoming dependent on alcohol to get through the day, it's time to take a break. And if that's too hard, speak to a pastoral adviser or counsellor. Alcohol nearly ruined my life. For many years to come, I think, I'll still be grappling with its consequences. I don't want it to ruin yours.

“  
**Oxford undoubtedly exacerbated my issues. [...It] has one hell of a drinking culture.**”



DOUBLE TAKE:

“I’m in love with my college husband! What should I do?”



**H**a p p y Week 5 everyone, and to start it off right, we’ll answer a serious question. Unfortunately, this breaks the number one rule of college marriages – don’t get with your college spouse, which is part of a fairly weird tradition that can tie you to someone you might not be friends with later.

The way that you approach this depends on a number of factors, primarily: how long have you been feeling this way? Whether or not your spouse is single, college marriages often end up causing people to *literally* act as though they are married. This can be sweet, like when your spouse brings care packages when you’re sick, bitches with you for hours or makes dinner with you a couple of times a week. As lovely as this is, it can lead to you view this other person as a real-life partner because you begin to rely on their presence and comfort around you. One thing to ask yourself is: would you be acting like this around each other if you weren’t college spouses or are your feelings for them generated by this strange tradition? If this started after you got engaged, these feelings may have been sparked by your

recent betrothal, and you could have fallen in love with the idea of having a tentative spouse rather than your college spouse. If this is the case, then it’s probably not worth jeopardising your friendship just yet, especially given exam season and a twelve-week vacation imminently approaching.

If this has been a long-term problem, then maybe we should think about sorting out – your affection for your spouse might extend beyond the illusion of marriage created by the Oxford spouse tradition. Obviously, you can decide if this is the right time. Maybe you’d like to wait for the long vac to be over before you say anything. But if you don’t want to waste time, take them aside and tell them how you feel. It may just end up in a really sweet relationship that stemmed from an innocent proposal in first year.

Even if they don’t return your feelings, I want you to congratulate yourself for your courage. Learning to communicate with someone about how you feel about anything is a valuable skill, and you’ve done yourself proud. It might also help for them to know that if they don’t return your feelings, they should give you some space so that you can process your emotions and hopefully rekindle the friendship that you had before.

Whatever the case, I hope it goes well for you, my dear, and hang in there! Week 5 can be difficult even without dilemmas of love, but I have faith that you can get through it!

Lots of love,  
Auntie Alice x

**W**e LOVE a messy situation! Whether it’s flatcest, subject-cest or catching feelings in a college marriage – I live for drama, so thank you very much for your question.

I really hope you’re not a first year because there are so many people out there, and just because you’re married to this one person, doesn’t mean everyone else has disappeared. It’s like falling in love with your love interest in a play – not only a bit cliché, but you’re also gonna be stuck with that bugger for a while.

Whilst I love being the wise advice giver, it is true that you aren’t made of wood, and what’s life for if not some turbulent relationship drama? If the lust that you feel is really taking over, then go for it. We might take a slow-burn approach and entice them in until they fall in love with you:

- Start taking your marital duties seriously. It’s summer, so buy them some flowers, make them a cup of tea when they get home, or ask them about their day.
- Leave little notes in their kitchen/door/lunch bags (extra points goes to the clever chicken who writes it in cut-out magazine letters).
- Make flirty comments about how they are your spouse (“I hope you’re not seeing any other people” etc., and if you’re feeling really scandalous, joke about their marital duties).
- Play hard to get whilst doing all of these other things – you don’t want to look

desperate now, do you?

Though there may be potential accusations of manipulation and displaying unhinged behaviour (which are obviously nothing more than exaggerations), there’s no way that they won’t express their undying love for you after this.

If all else fails, you can always just get pissed and have a drunken expression of your feelings on your next night out – that’s the best way to do it, and you can easily blame it on the booze if it goes badly.

Alternatively, if they don’t fall for you after all of that extremely healthy lack of communication and cleverly thought-out ways of getting them to fall in love with you, then clearly they are too unobservant to be a good partner. Don’t just let them go romantically, divorce them and find another college spouse. There are plenty of platonic fish in the sea.

Whether or not this ends in happily ever after, at least you’ll have a great story to tell, and an extra suicide scone in the bag.

Best of luck,  
The Mad Hatter x



To: My Ever-suffering Tutors

From: Aaliyah Khan

Aaliya(rg)h!

Send

This is a pastiche of Arvind Krishna Mehrota’s ‘Aligarh’ – again, a poem I emailed to my tutor in first year to apologise for a delayed essay:

At the intersection I ask  
if there’s a fleeting chance I’ll be on time?

I’m told there is one but it’s left already  
so has tomorrow’s and the day after’s.

Somewhere in the pages, printed in  
black and white, the clauses

mocking me, a plan begins  
to reluctantly form. I ask myself

Why have I done this again? At night,  
my words become tired, barely awake.

I jolt them alert where I can,  
I try - but for now, please forgive

this late essay. Thinking’s derailed here,  
for my trains keep to no time.

Double Glazing

Flynn Hallman



in a strip of window light the sun  
chases tree-branches  
in phases of a stream that shift  
sequentially, with fading sight.  
i fancy if a bird were there  
i’d watch it perch  
to catch a fish, and glinting sit,  
in that space of othered sky.  
and when it flew away  
its simpler life would scare me.



# Okra With Miso Onions

Angus Beazeley’s second recipe comes from his favourite restaurant in Rio, Chanchada. To find the okra, hed to the Thursday fruit and veg market on Gloucester Green!

Serves 4  
INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound fresh okra – tops trimmed. 1 large onion, sliced
- 2 tablespoons miso paste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Handful of chopped parsely

1. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the sliced onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are caramelized and golden brown, about 15-20 minutes.
2. In a small bowl, mix together the miso paste, honey, soy sauce, and rice vinegar.
3. Once the onions are caramelized, remove the skillet from heat and add the miso mixture to the skillet. Stir to combine with the caramelized onions.
4. In another skillet fry the okra in a small splash of oil until starting to take colour on each side. 5-7 minutes should do.
5. Return the onion mixture to a medium heat and cook for an additional 5-7 minutes, or until the miso mixture has thickened and caramelized.
6. Season with salt and pepper to taste and top the okra with the onion mixture and a sprinkle of chopped parsley.

# Food News

Things are busy as ever in the Oxford food scene, so here are a few highlights for the week ahead!

**Bleinheim Palace Food Festival:** This weekend, world-leading chefs and restuarants are coming to the Palace. Expect demonstrations, tastings, and lots of food!

**Tap Social in the Covered Market** are well up and running now. The beer is great, but the highlight for me? The pastries! Their almond croissants are outstanding and the donuts come in different flavours every weekend (this time, it was a gorgeous peach bellini and chocolate and marmalade.

**Cherwell** favourite **Salsas del Sol** is now 30% off after 14:00 and open until 21:00. One hell of a deal!

# Burnout BBQ - Wings, ribs, and hot rods

Oliver Hall

There’s something uniquely indulgent for me about American BBQ. It is one of those things that seems almost impossible for restaurants to execute away from the United States. It might be that the ribs are too tough, the wings don’t taste quite right, or that the brisket just isn’t smoked the same. If not the food, then the atmosphere is almost impossible to capture with everywhere seeming either tacky or sterile. Burnout BBQ in Summertown, though, is one of the only places I have been in the UK that finds solutions to all those problems. The décor is typically ridiculous, the dishes are meticulously authentic, and the atmosphere is buzzing. This isn’t haute cuisine, it’s over-the-top indulgence and it’s a bloody fun place to spend an evening.

Chatting to the co-founders and owners, Thomas and Malcolm, the key philosophy here is to offer everything American that you could ever dream of in an atmosphere to fit. Things started off during the COVID-19 pandemic as a street food business. The pair took the crazy decision to saw a hot rod in half and serve brisket burgers and other BBQ dishes out of the back. The result was more successful than they ever could have expected and when a chance to buy a permanent site came up, they didn’t hesitate for a second.

The result is an interior that at first glance you might want to discard as tacky and classless. Look closer though, and every last detail is thought out. That car that makes up the bar? 100% real with the seats serving as chairs at one of the booths to prove it. This place is perfectly set up to create a fun and relaxed atmosphere.

That fun and relaxed atmosphere fits the food on offer perfectly. Although the menu is extensive with offerings of everything from burgers to hot dogs and loaded fries, the full experience is only got



inevitability of loaded fries in general: they were just too soggy. I passionately believe that the best bit about a fry is just how thin and crispy it is and when doused in meat, cheese, and sauces, that is inevitably lost.

Desserts are just as ridiculous as the rest of the menu. The brownie sundae is loaded with brownie pieces, ice cream, cream, Oreos, and all manner of sauces. I don’t ever want to know how many calories are in this but as a sharer, you can’t go far wrong.

There are big plans going forward for Burnout. Already here, with no more than 30 covers, this is destination dining for people across Oxfordshire and beyond. Going forward though, Thomas and Malcom are thinking bigger. For now, this is undoubtedly the place to go in Oxford for an authentically fun evening of American food. Just be sure not to park too far away – you might not make it back to the car!



from the barbecue trays. Available after 5 PM, the sharing tray is £45 for two people and comes with everything you could possibly want.

The brisket is smoked in-house for nine hours and you can really tell the difference from what you normally get in the UK. Pulled pork is maple smoked and melts in the mouth just as you would want and ribs are appropriately sticky.

Burnt ends are there too and soaked to kingdom come in barbecue sauce. Corn, slaw, and beans bring an attempt at healthiness with the strong taste and greasiness that is only really acceptable somewhere like this. Normally, I’d tear it apart along with the onion rings that are far more batter than onion. Really though, you don’t come to Burnout for light dishes and calorie counting.

Wings are the next highlight and there are three different varieties. The honey seasoning was probably the best and there is a good variety in spice across the board. More than enough sauces are on hand at all times too to chawngce things to your liking.

Chilli cheese fries are quite the dish and were our choice of the loaded options. The house chilli itself is good and the fresh jalapenos balance the creaminess of the melted cheese well. For me though, these were let down by the counterintuitive





[illegible]

1. I stick to a little house (5)
2. Stage in competition is circular (5)
3. The sum of the first six integers gets multiplied always (5)
5. Mac becomes an upturned saucepan friend (6)
7. The sound of a tired exhale and dog hair is something difficult to decode (6)
9. This month the edge of my dress causes chaos (6)
11. Attractive tailor (3)
12. Attractive tailor...? (4,2)
14. Former lover on island is banished (5)
15. On the back burner (5)
16. Apathetic green stones (5)

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