

Cherwell

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5TH WEEK, HILARY TERM



'Having sex with University Challenge on in the background': The Sextigation 2026

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'I don't like the idea of hope': An interview with Iya Kiva

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Oxford Union Librarian steps down following 'racist' comments



- Recordings of Brayden Lee circulated online
- Lee stated that former Union president had "siblings... in the Taliban"
- Senior Union officials demanded resignation

CHERWELL NEWS

CW: Racism, Islamophobia, strong language

The Oxford Union Librarian Brayden Lee, stepped down from his role on Sunday after making comments described as "racist" by Oxford Union officers. In an audio recording shared publicly, Lee is heard saying "I don't know of a time that a British person was running up against a non-British person and won", and describes the conduct of BAME committee members as "highly tribal".

Cherwell has exclusively seen Lee's resignation, sent on Sunday to the President Katherine Yang and the President-Elect. The Librarian is effectively the Vice-President of the Union.

In the recording, Lee remarks that

many senior figures at the Oxford Union come from ethnic minority backgrounds. When asked for an explanation for this, Lee said: "The way they see it, for hundreds of years we've fucked them over... we've tortured them, we've killed them, enslaved them, did all these terrible things."

"Why the fuck now they have some level of power [are] they going to give a shred of it to us, after everything we did to them? Of course, they're gonna look out for their own when the last time white people had power, look what [they] did to them. They need to make sure that white people will never have power."

Cherwell understands that the recording was made covertly. Lee stated on social media that someone was "deliberately trying to bait [him] into saying racist things" in order to blackmail him. He said: "I have said some terrible things, and I was totally wrong to do so. I am deeply sorry to everyone, especially those affected by what I said." Lee was approached for comment by Cherwell.

When discussing Indian and Pakistani members of the Union committee, Lee said in the recording: "They've got the entire fucking Raj behind them no matter what. Why

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Rusu, Farhan, Quan, Kola-Balogun elected to SU leadership amid low turnout

CHERWELL NEWS

The Oxford Students' Union (SU) announced the results of its 2026 election on Friday 13th February. Roxi Rusu, who ran unopposed, has been elected President for Communities and Common Rooms. Zaghham Farhan was elected President for Undergraduates alongside David Quan, who was elected President for Postgraduates. Catherine Kola-Balogun will be the new President for Welfare, Equity, and Inclusion.

The elections saw a turnout of 2,862 individual voters. Although this is higher than the turnout for last year's elections, which was 1,471, this year's turnout is significantly lower than the 2024 election, which had a turnout of 4,206. The SU represents 26,000 matriculated students at the University.

The incumbent President for Postgraduates, Wantoe T. Wantoe, who stood for re-election on a platform of continuity, was unsuccessful. Alisa Brown, the incumbent President for Welfare, Equity, and Inclusion, was elected for the unpaid position of Student Trustee.

The election occurred amid concerns about the SU's ability to carry out its democratic functions. At the end of last term, the Conference of Common Rooms - the SU's main representative body - was unable to pass a motion due to insufficient participation from college JCRs.

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Community raises objections to Wellington Square redevelopment plans

ANGELINA MIRRASLAVSKA

views were evenly split between neutral and positive at 20% each.

Objections raised at that stage focused on the significantly increased footprint of the proposed building, arguing that the overhanging design would intrude into Wellington Square, dominate Little Clarendon Street and reduce available pavement space.

Proposed public spaces in the design were criticised as clinical and perceived as an extension of the University estate rather than an integrated part of the street. Concerns were also raised about the loss of on-street parking, particularly for residents with limited mobility and for local businesses reliant on deliveries and short-term customer parking.

Further objections related to the

anticipated three or more years of construction. Respondents registered concerns around the impact of traffic, noise, and disruption on Little Clarendon Street and surrounding homes, alongside wider unease about the cumulative impact of recent university development on Oxford as a city.

Similar issues resurfaced following the submission of the redevelopment plan to the council in January. Councillor Susanna Préssel, who represents Jericho & Osney on the County Council, has publicly objected to the plans. She stated: "We must have an active frontage in this important little street, with shops, social spaces and cafes."

The planning application, published in January on the Oxford City Council website, invited public comment,

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WHAT'S INSIDE?

Oxford's poverty porn addiction is out of control

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Oxford Union Librarian steps down following 'racist' comments

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both getting rid of one of the few people that isn't a Taliban [sic] just to put another one? It's stupid." The Raj is an outdated colonial term used in the 19th and 20th centuries to refer to British rule in the Indian subcontinent.

Lee also made remarks about former Union President Israr Khan. In the recording, Lee stated that Khan is from Balochistan, "a part of Pakistan that the Taliban operates in", and alleged that "several of his siblings went on to be in [the] Taliban".

President-Elect Arwa Elrayess stated on her Instagram on Sunday that "Brayden has made the decision to step down from the Presidential race and will resign from his position". She "unequivocally" condemned racism and said that it requires "accountability and reflection". *Cherwell* understands that Lee was planning to run for President of the Oxford Union in the elections in Week 7 prior to the controversy.

The Oxford Union Rules and Regulations rule 38(b)(iv) states that officers who resign will be "succeeded by their immediate junior", which,

in the case of the Librarian office, is the Librarian-Elect as per rule 38(g), currently Prajwal Pandey. Pandey waived his right to succeed.

A number of senior Union officials publicly called for Lee's resignation. This included the current Librarian-Elect, who described Lee's comments as "openly racist". Some of them pointed out the "double standard", considering the backlash towards former President-Elect George Abaraonye following his remarks about Charlie Kirk's shooting and the fact that Lee supported the campaign against him during Abaraonye's vote of no confidence.

The Oxford Union has previously faced allegations of racism, including an incident in Trinity term 2024 when dozens of senior officials had called the society "institutionally racist" after disciplinary proceedings had been "disproportionately targeting individuals from non-traditional backgrounds", including the removal of, at the time, President-Elect Ebrahim Osman-Mowafy.

The Oxford Union declined to comment.

Image credit: David Hays for Cherwell.

County Council raises council tax by 4.99%, citing decreased funding



DANIELA BRAW-SMITH and RUBY BARENBERG

The Oxfordshire County Council's new budget includes increasing council tax by 4.99%, addressing a £5.4 million shortfall for 2026/27.

By 2028/29, funding to Oxford will decrease by £24.1 million as the government plans to redistribute funding to more deprived areas of the country.

The 2026/7 budget was approved on 10th February and allocates a total of £700 million. The budget includes reductions to an east Oxford development plan and some transportation services for "adult social care, children's services and home to school transport".

The proposition for the building of a new mortuary has been pushed back and a local school and leisure facility scheme has also faced a funding decrease. The budget also included funding for road developments, improvements to Wantage Market Place, flood prevention, and libraries.

Pointing to investments in highways, drainage, and libraries, County Councillor Liz Leffman stated: "We have not only been able to balance the budget for 2026/2027 but have included investments that will make a difference to the things which are of greatest importance to our residents."

A crucial part of the budget is the increased council tax. Oxfordshire also faced a 4.99% council tax increase in 2025/6.

County Councillor Dan Levy told *Cherwell*: "Obviously we would rather not put up council tax, but there isn't any choice, given the increasing pressures on budgets, including from increases imposed by central government via National Insurance increases, and decreasing support from central

government. All the other parties at County Hall proposed the full council tax increase allowable, like us."

Students are not subject to council taxes, but the changes will likely exacerbate the already expensive private rental market. Oxford has been ranked as one of the least affordable cities in the UK, with average private rents growing from £1,657 to £1,913 between December 2023 and December 2025, representing a 15.4% increase. In November, students queued for more than 48 hours to attempt to secure housing through property agency Finders Keepers for the next academic year.

The newly formed Oxford Renters Union has declared themselves open to students renting privately, as the collective believes they "face the same problems as working people concerning the cost, quality, and stability of housing". The union will not try to tackle issues with college- and University-owned accommodation at this time, citing their desire to prioritise problems affecting the majority of Oxford renters.

A spokesperson for the union told *Cherwell*: "We at the Oxford Renters Union believe it's deeply unjust that renters pay higher council tax based on the higher valuation of the property they happen to be living in. Landlords of HMOs [house in multiple occupation] often push high council tax payments onto renters - and where renters pay council tax directly, that's just one more favour they do for their landlord."

The Renters' Rights Bill, passed into law last October, also seeks to provide some protections for renters. Coming into effect in May, the law will forbid landlords from increasing rent more than once a year and without at least two months' notice. However, the new law does not set any limits on rent increases.

Image credit: Emiliano Compassi for Cherwell.

University raised concerns over proposed cuts to Oxfordshire fire service provision

BEATRIX ARNOLD

The University of Oxford has joined others in expressing concerns over Oxford County Council's proposed cuts to the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS). The proposals, which would see reductions in the number of fire stations, fire engines, and firefighter posts, follow a review of fire service resources and emergency response capabilities across the country.

The County Council's public consultation on the reforms was open from last October until 31st January. It was extended beyond an original deadline of 20th January to allow for more feedback. Since then around 1,500 responses have been received.

The University of Oxford submitted a response to the consultation, expressing concerns over the plans. A spokesperson from the University told *Cherwell* that the proposed cuts "will significantly increase response times to the areas of highest risk, undermining protection for the city's historic buildings, laboratories, and college estate, and reducing vital day-to-day fire safety engagement with the University".

The proposed changes include the

closure of fire stations in Woodstock, Henley, and Eynsham, and the removal of six fire engines. Fire stations in Kidlington and Rewley Road, near the city centre, could be merged and replaced with a new station in North Oxford.

The restructuring plan looks to prioritise the daytime availability of emergency fire services. *Cherwell* understands that, were the cuts to be implemented, there would be only five fire engines guaranteed to be available to cover all of Oxfordshire at night, leading to an increase in response times. Twelve-hour day shifts would be introduced for firefighters across the county, and 42 OFRS employees are at risk of being made redundant.

In the consultation, Oxfordshire County Council stated that the closures have been considered because many employees are "unable to commit to offering the hours that they once might have", leading to "persistent low fire engine availability". It is stressed that the changes "are forecast to have a minimal impact on overall response performance".

More than 150 firefighters from across the county protested the cuts

outside Oxford's County Hall on 9th December. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) have launched a campaign under the banner "Cuts Kill", including a petition to have the proposals withdrawn.

Jonathan Shuker, Acting Brigade Secretary for the FBU, told *Cherwell*: "No engagement with employees or the FBU was sought before these proposals were sent out to the public."

Anneliese Dodds, Labour MP for Oxford East, is among those who have declared their opposition to the cuts. She is urging Oxford residents to sign the FBU's petition. Numerous local councils, including West Oxfordshire District Council, have also voiced their disapproval of the proposed reforms.

The University of Oxford has seen several recent fires, notably in Reuben College offsite accommodation last November. On the 23rd January, fire services were called to Wadham College's main site after a blaze broke out. Shuker told *Cherwell* that these incidents "show exactly why OFRS should have city centre firefighting capabilities".

Oxfordshire County Council was approached for comment.

Oxford City Council publishes plans for covered market redevelopment

LILY GAGE

Oxford City Council has published its latest plans for the redevelopment of the Covered Market. The City Council invited the market's traders to discuss the next steps for the project, which began at the end of January.

The regeneration project will cost £8 million, and will involve essential revamps to the 250-year-old building. The Council says it still aims to respect the market's unique history, charm, and legacy throughout the redevelopment process.

The plans include upgrading the old infrastructure, improving layouts and routes, and making Market Street more welcoming and pedestrian-friendly. The Council stated in a press release that this will "enhance the experience for businesses, locals and visitors for generations to come".

Over the next few months, the Council aims to continue working closely alongside traders as the plans move to their next stage, with hopes of a new contractor joining the project early this year. This contractor will collaborate

with businesses as the project moves through its phases, and will also ensure safe access is maintained, and that any temporary internal diversions are minimised, in order to keep customers moving safely and efficiently through the building.

Plans for the project were approved in 2023, and construction is expected to take place in 2027 at the earliest. The Council predicts that the works will take about 18 months to complete, however exact timings are yet to be determined until on-site inspections begin.

The Covered Market will remain open throughout construction, and the Council has assured traders that none of them will be left without a space. They have also promised any trader affected by the works, including the layout changes, an alternative location within the market. Every trader has been invited to a full traders' meeting in February, where further details will be discussed with the businesses. Individual meetings have also been taking place with most affected businesses.

The plans involve the relocation of the existing toilet block, an increase in female toilet provision, the creation of a new open court to improve the market's

internal layout and atmosphere, additional retail space, and upgrades to utilities - including wiring.

In a press release, the City Council stated that "this is an exciting moment in the market's history and our best chance to make sure it gets the upgrades and attention it needs to last another 250 years".

The Covered Market was opened in 1774, and initially consisted of 20 butchers' shops. It was designed by John Gwynn, also known for designing Magdalen Bridge. It was later rebuilt and enlarged in 1834-40 by Thomas Wyatt the younger, and underwent several phases of building and reconstruction throughout the 19th century onwards. It was listed as Grade II in March 2000 and is located within the Central and City Conservation Area.

Since its inception, the market has become an iconic architectural and cultural landmark for the city of Oxford, attracting tourists from across the globe. It is a valuable building in its rarity as a covered market which has been in continual use for hundreds of years, and is still in use today.

Image credit: Emiliano Compassi for Cherwell.



Community raises objections to Wellington Square redevelopment

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support or opposition. The application invited feedback on various features of the plan, including building height, parking and open space provision, and public transport accessibility.

This consultation opportunity was promoted on Instagram by Common Ground, a social co-working café and community arts space which currently rents space at 25 Wellington Square. Common Ground has called for temporary premises during the redevelopment period, the opportunity to occupy a unit in the completed building, and meaningful consideration of community priorities within the new development.

One individual who commented on the application raised concerns about the scale of the development and its impact on existing community facilities and local ecology. They stated: “The businesses and venues currently in the building at street level are of very high value to the Oxford community and represent some of the few popular and successful community spaces for people of all ages. To lose these, without guarantee of a new space or a place in the new development once opened, would be very tragic.”

A spokesperson for OUD told *Cherwell*: “The proposals will deliver significant community benefits, including new active uses and commercial space on Little Clarendon Street, which will help support local businesses and increase activity in the area. We remain committed to creating a scheme that contributes positively to the neighbourhood and provides long term benefits for residents, students and visitors.”

“Public realm and streetscape improvements are a key feature of the application proposals, following the community feedback. This will include the use of a Construction and Environmental Management Plan, dust control measures, the Considerate Constructors Scheme, clear site hoarding, coordinated logistics planning, and a commitment to regular communication with the neighbours.”

Christ Church appoints Composer in Residence

ANGELINA WU

Christ Church has appointed American composer Nico Muhly as its first ever Composer in Residence. Based in New York, Muhly has been collaborating with Peter Holder, Director of Music of Christ Church Cathedral for several months. Previously Composer in Residence at Sidney Sussex College in Cambridge, and a collaborator with Magdalen College, Muhly is the first Composer in Residence in Christ Church's five century history.

The role of a Composer in Residence within Christ Church's community is still largely undefined. Reflecting on the unique position, Muhly told *Cherwell*: “There doesn't exist a handy document from Henry VIII's HR department saying what it is that I should get up to.” Muhly sees his role to be a provider of music, both in the form of a complete set of service music, and for festivals and holidays throughout the year. The

first of these musical contributions, *With Harte and Hande*, a carol inspired by a 16th century mystery play, received a performance on 17th January in Christ Church Cathedral.

Muhly's relationship to the cathedral's choristers has greater definition. He plans on introducing contemporary music to the music traditions of choristers, bridging the gap between the varying practices. Muhly told *Cherwell*: “I think my ability to speak their language can be useful in showing them music which wouldn't normally come across their desks or headphones.”

In honour of the College Cathedral Choir's 500th year anniversary, Muhly plans to premiere a new cantata this summer. Christ Church has long been a source of inspiration for Muhly, who has been “listening to their recordings since the beginning of time”. Muhly told *Cherwell*: “The goal is to write something that relates to the greater [Christ Church] community, but also something which will have, as the

saying goes, legs – which is to say that other choirs will want to perform it.”

Muhly's experience includes commissions by Metropolitan Opera, Carnegie Hall, the Tallis Scholars, the New York Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the BBC. He has also worked with artists including Sufjan Stevens, the National, and Paul Simon, and has scored screen productions such as *The Reader*, *Kill Your Darlings*, and *Pachinko*.

Muhly was nominated for a Grammy in 2022 for his composition “Throughline”, performed by the San Francisco Symphony.

Reflecting on his role with regards to current and future music undergraduates, Muhly said: “I find that it's often useful to have a composer Just Around [sic] the place, in the same way it's good to have the number of a reliable cobbler or seamstress or somebody who can reliably read hieroglyphs – we can do a lot more than you think.”

Image credit: Dman41689, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



Opening of Global Leadership Centre in former Osney Power Station further delayed to summer 2026

DANIELA BRAW-SMITH

The Saïd Business School's new Global Leadership Centre (GLC), located at the Osney Power Station, is set to open this summer after significant delays. The project was first mooted in May 2015, discussions with local residents took place in 2018, and the project was approved by Oxford City Council in 2019.

Plans resulting from the 2018 meetings set a target timeline for construction starting in spring 2019 and finishing in spring 2021. However,

construction only began in 2021, with the opening successively pushed to 2024, spring 2026, and summer 2026.

At a price tag of £60 million, the GLC has cost twice the amount Wafid Saïd donated to establish the business school in 1996. According to construction company GRAHAM, the GLC is intended as a “mini campus”, cultivating “close links between business and management research and practice”. Complete with more than 120 “hotel-style” bedrooms, various teaching rooms, leisure facilities, and a gym, the building will house “short-stay residential courses for company executives”.

GRAHAM explained how the business school's existing residential facility “no longer reflects its ambition”.

They claim the new site would “inspire the next generation of global leaders through a space that blends heritage, innovation and sustainability”.

Roger Goodman, Warden of St Anthony's College, asserts that the GLC will provide a model for the development of executive education programmes across other University departments.

The Osney Power Station, which opened in 1892, is a Local Heritage Asset and powered the first electric

lightbulb in Oxford. Located around a five-minute walk from the train station, the power station closed in 1968 and has since been used sporadically by the University's engineering department and for museum storage.

The GLC is among a series of new built additions to the University, some of which have attracted criticism. A proposed three-storey lab in Headington was decried by Headington Heritage and the Highfield Residents Association, who pointed to potential decreased “quality of residential living” due to flood concerns and light spillage.

Perhaps anticipating these criticisms, environmental consultancy firm RIDGE has claimed that the development of the GLC will “form part of the regeneration of the west end of the city of Oxford, creating jobs and opportunities for the local community”. Based on meetings with residents in 2018 and the Considerate Constructors Scheme codes of practice, no works, deliveries or waste removal are to be undertaken during the early mornings, evenings or weekends. In addition, the GLC will not allow for car parking, instead encouraging visitors to use public transit or walk.

The University has argued that bringing a historic building back into active use “will be securing its long-term future for the benefit of the city”.

Image Credit: Iain Tullis, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



NEWS SHORTS

Life, Mind, and Alcohol

The Life and Mind Building, which houses the University of Oxford's Departments of Biology and Experimental Psychology and the Ineos Oxford Institute, has applied for an alcohol licence to support “occasional internal hospitality”. Independent caterer BaxterStorey is requesting approval to serve alcohol on the premises from Monday to Saturday, between 12pm and 11pm.

Pumas and penguins

Pumas are back in Monte León National Park, and Magellanic penguins are paying the price. A new study involving researchers from University of Oxford estimates that more than 7,000 adult penguins were killed over four years, often without being eaten. While puma predation alone is unlikely to wipe out the colony, researchers warn that low chick survival and climate pressures could turn a natural comeback into a conservation headache.

The toll bridge that time (and inflation) forgot

The 18th-century Swinford Toll Bridge has gone viral after baffled users on Reddit discovered it still charges a cash-only 5p toll. Built in 1769 and governed by its own Act of Parliament, the privately owned bridge earns around £190,000 a year, and the fee can only be changed by Parliament itself, making it Britain's most stubborn anachronism.

Search continues for News Dep's coat

Deputy Editor-in-Chief for News Archie Johnston was left distraught last Wednesday after his leather jacket was taken from the Oxo bar on George Street. Johnston told *Cherwell*: “It's brown leather, and had a striped umbrella in the inside right-hand pocket. If you have it, please give it back.” An online campaign garnered Johnston several sympathetic Instagram messages, but the garment remains at large.

CROSS CAMPUS

'Is pegging gay?'

Big Red Moon, an official queer society at Cornell University, hosted a debate on whether pegging is gay, drawing more than 150 attendees. One side argued that labeling acts as “gay” can reproduce internalized homophobia and does not determine the identities of those involved. The other contended that if pegging between two lesbians is not “straight”, it is inconsistent to deny the label “gay” when it occurs between a man and a woman. The debate concluded that pegging is, in fact, gay.

Yale College staff to shrink by 7.5%

Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis said staffing has decreased by roughly 7.5 percent, about 20 positions, in response to a federal endowment tax hike under the Trump administration. The reduction, largely driven by attrition and unfilled vacancies, reflects a broader budget cut tied to a projected \$300 million annual cost to Yale.

Quarter of students at London state school receive Oxbridge offers

LILY GAGE

A state sixth form in north-east London has seen 62 of its students receive offers from Oxford and Cambridge universities this academic year, making up one quarter of its student body.

The London Academy of Excellence (LAE) is a free, mixed, selective sixth form and is one of the highest performing sixth forms in the United Kingdom. The headteacher, Alexander Crossman, says on the academy's website that the school "consistently delivers outstanding A-level results for all students". He adds that the sixth form "has achieved particular success helping students from less-advantaged backgrounds win places at the best universities in the UK and around the world".

Around half of the students with Oxbridge offers for this academic year come from disadvantaged backgrounds, including several with refugee status. Around half are eligible for free school meals, in the care of a local authority, or are young carers, and over two-thirds come from low-income homes with no history of university attendance in their

immediate family.

One student, Ismael, told the BBC that reading the email which offered him a place at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, for Philosophy, Politics, and Economics was "a very, very surreal experience".

Another student, Kami, who was offered a place at Selwyn College, Cambridge, said: "People aren't defined by their background or any circumstances that they've come from... I think it's allowing people to flourish and truly reach their full potential."

25 students from LAE's 2024 cohort took up places at Oxford and Cambridge, which is 60% lower than the number for this academic year.

LAE was ranked sixth by *The Times* in the top 50 sixth form colleges in the UK, based on exam outcomes from last year. A majority of the other sixth forms in this ranking are private, fee-paying schools. That year, 58.3% of LAE students received an A*, A, or B in two or more subjects.

The sixth form was founded in 2012, with the support of private schools such as Eton and Brighton College, which make annual donations. The two other partner schools are Caterham

School and Forest School. Each LAE house is associated with one of these partner schools, and students visit their house's school to make connections with their counterparts there. These partner schools also provide teaching, and many students play sports fixtures against them.

Pupils from low-income households are prioritised for acceptance, with the majority of students from Newham, Tower Hamlets, and Hackney. In order to obtain a place, students must demonstrate that they are on target to achieve at least eight grades of 7 to 9 at GCSE, including in Maths and English.

The school is located in Newham, which is the most deprived borough in London, according to data from the 2025 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Over 80% of residents were in the bottom 30% for income deprivation – a substantial increase from 66% in 2019. Unemployment rates are at 8.7%, and child poverty is at 45%, behind only Tower Hamlets.

Though 93% of the UK population attended state schools, only 66% of UK students admitted to Oxford in 2024 were educated in the state sector.

Sheldonian Series panel discusses the power and limits of activism

MERCEDES HAAS

A panel discussion on activism took place at the Sheldonian Theatre on 4th February as part of the University of Oxford's Sheldonian Series, prompting debate on the effectiveness, ethics, and democratic role of activism.

The event, titled 'The Power of Activism', formed part of the series' Hilary term focus on the theme of 'power' and was moderated by Dr Julius Grower, Associate Professor of Law at Oxford. Panellists included Shermar Pryce, the Oxford University Student Union (OUSU) President for Communities and Common Rooms; Professor of Political Science and International Relations Federica Genovese; Chief Executive of Civic Future Munira Mirza; and climate justice activist Dominique Palmer. Baroness Shami Chakrabarti CBE contributed via pre-recorded remarks.

Opening the evening, Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey said: "In our world, there is no shortage of issues to be passionate about", emphasising the relevance of activism in contemporary political life. The first audience question asked panellists to provide examples of where activism had been successful. Pryce

referred to the work of Fair Share during the COVID-19 pandemic, while Genovese highlighted global fossil fuel divestment, stating that "16,000 institutions" had stopped investing in fossil fuels, resulting in losses of "about \$40 trillion". Palmer cited the Stop Rosebank campaign, while Mirza pointed to recent farmers' protests, including demonstrations in Oxford.

Discussion then turned to examples of activism perceived as unsuccessful. Pryce cited the 2003 Stop the War protests against the Iraq War, arguing that they failed because they did not "change the incentives of institutions". Palmer questioned whether failure in activism could be clearly defined, while Mirza reflected on her early involvement in activism and argued that some forms of disruptive climate activism risk alienating the public. Genovese added that measuring success is difficult because it is often unclear which outcomes most people want.

Baroness Chakrabarti offered a broad definition of activism as "any form of political expression", while noting that the term can sometimes carry negative connotations. Mirza stressed that activism is not always progressive or left-wing, citing the British National Party as an

example, and argued that it is important to distinguish between activism grounded in persuasion and activism grounded in coercion.

An audience question later raised whether disruptive protests could be justified, citing farmers' demonstrations. Mirza responded that such protests had been organised and permitted by the police, while Pryce noted that movements such as the suffragettes were also criticised in their time.

Genovese shifted the discussion to activism in democratic versus non-democratic contexts, arguing that "democracies work best with incremental changes" and citing Brexit as an example of a rapid political shift that democratic systems struggled to absorb.

Toward the end of the event, an audience member interrupted to ask why Palestine Action had not been discussed, particularly in light of its designation as a terrorist organisation. The moderator stated that the question would be returned to later; however, although two further audience questions were taken, the issue was not subsequently addressed by the panellists.

Image credit: John Cairns for the University of Oxford, with permission.



Palestinian ambassador speaks to Oxford students

LEO JONES

The Palestinian ambassador to the United Kingdom, Husam Zomlot, delivered a speech at an Oxford Speaks event held at St Anne's College on Thursday 5th February.

Appearing before an audience at the Mary Ogilvie Lecture Theatre, the talk marked the end of the ambassador's tour around British academic institutions to publicise the work of UK Friends of Palestinian Universities. The ambassador recently appeared in speaking events at Cambridge University and the London School of Economics (LSE).

Zomlot's appearance was underpinned by a call to stand against "scholasticide", in order to protect academic spaces in Gaza and the West Bank. Experts at the UN have expressed concerns that educational institutions are being targeted by the Israeli military's "assault" in Gaza.

Zomlot has served as Head of the Palestinian Mission to the United Kingdom since October 2018. The Embassy of the State of Palestine was inaugurated in London on 5th January, after the UK government took the decision to recognise Palestinian statehood in September last year.

Zomlot opened by expressing it was "genuinely good to be back in Oxford". He went on to describe university environments in particular as spaces "where conscience is sharper, where power is questioned, and where young people refuse to accept injustice as normal". The ambassador's speech was tailored to its university audience, thanking students for "fighting to speak truth to power" and comparing recent protests about Gaza to student opposition in the United States during the Vietnam War. He said: "Your voices matter, I ask you to continue – to ensure that the arc of history bends towards justice, because it does not bend on its own."

Zomlot made reference to a raid by the Israeli military on his alma mater, Birzeit University, in the West Bank last month. Israeli soldiers fired live rounds and tear gas at students who had gathered for a planned screening of the Oscar-nominated film *The Voice of Hind Rajab*.

Portrait of Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai revealed at Lady Margaret Hall

SIYEON LEE

A portrait of Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Oxford alum Malala Yousafzai was revealed last week at Lady Margaret Hall. Yousafzai, a former college member, graduated with a degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) in 2020.

The artwork was commissioned by Lady Margaret Hall in collaboration with the Oxford Pakistan Programme, on whose advisory body Yousafzai sits.

The portrait was revealed at Lady Margaret Hall's annual Founders and Benefactors Dinner early this month. In the Lady Margaret Hall news update, Yousafzai said: "I am incredibly grateful to Lady Margaret Hall for commissioning this portrait and for the trust it represents. I accept this honour with the hope that it helps open doors for many others."

Yousafzai also hoped that the portrait would serve as an encouragement for other women: "More than anything, I hope it serves as a reminder that a girl from Swat Valley belongs here – and that the next girl from a village in Pakistan,

Eleven students were admitted to hospital for treatment. Having just returned from the West Bank, including a visit to Birzeit, Zomlot remarked that "90% of schools in Gaza have been damaged". He said: "What happens in Palestine does not stay in Palestine. The dehumanisation must end. That is peace."

Responding to questions about how Palestine is portrayed in Western media, the ambassador told *Cherwell* that "the media wants to deliberately strip things out of context". He drew parallels with the role Palestinian young people have played in reshaping public perceptions of the nation through social media.

Following the ambassador's speech, Oxford Speaks President Hussain Jeddy interviewed him, focusing on the subject of Palestine's future. Jeddy told *Cherwell* afterwards that he was conscious not to "regurgitate any of the talking points that [Zomlot] always combats". Jeddy brought up an October 2023 interview on Piers Morgan Uncensored, in which Morgan repeatedly asked Zomlot whether he condemned the actions of Hamas on 7th October that year.

Jeddy stated that organising the event was "quite difficult" due to security considerations. However, he told *Cherwell* that the event was ultimately "very orderly", reflecting the value of open academic discussion without having "people constantly trying to attack [Zomlot's] views". Reflecting on the value of the event, Jeddy told *Cherwell*: "Education is very important, because it helps people remember what has happened so that we don't repeat it again."

Questioned by a member of the audience about how to prevent radicalisation in Palestine and build a stable peace process, Zomlot dismissed the idea of deradicalisation through education alone. He repeatedly stated that the solution to political instability in Palestine was to "remove the core cause", which he argued was Israeli occupation.

"People are reawakening," Zomlot added. "Oppression has globalised, but so has resistance to it. That's why I still have hope."

Image credit: Oxford Speaks, with permission.





Rusu, Farhan, Quan, Kola-Balogun elected to SU leadership amid low turnout

Continued from Page 1

At the time, an Oxford SU spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “On this occasion, voting did not reach quoracy (30 common rooms) for this vote to be carried.”

Rusu ran unopposed on the promise of connecting Common Rooms, societies, the local community, and individuals through a shared contact list and calendar, and more informal social events. This is the first time in recent years that this role, which took over many of the responsibilities of

the abolished SU sole presidency, has seen a candidate elected unopposed. Last year, two people ran for this role.

Farhan, who ran his campaign with Quan and Morris, aims to “demand more” and promises to fight for a “serious external review into the sexual misconduct processes, greater disability support, [and] an online library capacity tracker”.

This follows the recent probes by the media into the University’s mishandling of sexual misconduct cases. Quan, whose manifesto is

built on the idea of “#OneOxford”, will undertake to advance “student food support” and “hardship transparency”.

Quan, Farhan, and Henry Morris ran in a slate called “Demand More”, as joint campaigns are now allowed by SU Election Regulations. Morris ran for President for Welfare, Equity, and Inclusion, and was not elected. The slate was supported by various student political groups, including Oxford Labour Club and the Oxford Students Liberal Association.

Kola-Balogun’s campaign aims to “push for welfare that works, equity that delivers, and inclusion that Lasts”. She has worked as JCR Access Officer at St Hilda’s, was the President of Oxford Law Society, and is a current Undergraduate Admissions and Outreach Ambassador.

Commenting on his unsuccessful re-election bid, Wantoe told *Cherwell*: “For me, this election was never about a title. It was about raising the standard of postgraduate representation. That work continues, and I remain deeply committed to it.”

Speaking about his successor, Wantoe added: “David is passionate and experienced, and I am confident he will bring energy and commitment to the role. I will ensure a smooth and comprehensive transition, sharing insight into ongoing committee work and institutional processes so that progress continues without disruption.”

A number of part-time officers, which are voluntary representative roles, were elected as well. Valerie Mann was reelected as LGBTQ+ Officer. Sthapatya Saketh Kotamraju was elected International Students’ Officer, alongside Regn Pooley, who was elected Disabled Students’ Officer, and Janet Wang, who was elected Societies Officer.

Apart from the International Students’ Officer role, all ran unopposed. The SU will hold by-elections for six roles, as no one was nominated to stand, including

Class and BAME Officers. These officer roles are the primary form of advocacy within the SU for underrepresented communities, following the SU’s decision to discontinue student campaigns as part of its transformation period.

Alisa Brown, Honcques Laus, and Isabel Hetherington were elected as Student Trustees, a two-year, unpaid position. The Oxford SU Trustee board oversees the SU and has overall legal responsibility for the charity.

This was the first set of elections for the four Presidential roles, who will take up their roles in July. Last year, the four positions were elected as Officers, and were later renamed ‘President’.

The SU leadership used to be comprised of six full time sabbatical officers. However, after a transformation period in 2024-25, this was replaced by the current flat structure with four sabbatical officers.

A spokesperson for the SU told *Cherwell*: “We have been delighted to see so many students engaging with the SU Leadership elections and thank all students who took the time to run for and vote for all roles, at a time where democracy and representation matter more than ever. We look forward to welcoming the President Elects to their roles in July 2026.”

Reporting by Mercedes Haas, Archie Johnston, Arina Makarina, Gaspard Rouffin, and Stanley Smith.

Image credit: Lucie Fellwock for Cherwell.

INVESTIGATIONS ‘Curly quote marks’ and ‘Americanisms’: How does Oxford detect AI use?

AMELIA GIBBINS

It was announced in September last year that Oxford would be the first university in the country to offer ChatGPT Edu to all students. Earlier that year, a survey by the Higher Education Policy Institute found that 92% of students had used AI in some form at university, with 88% reporting to have used generative AI in assessments.

These figures have surged since 2024, when only 53% of students admitted to having used generative AI in assessments. The survey only shows the picture from students themselves across the country. How is Oxford, an institution renowned for intellectual rigour and world class academia, keeping up with the AI revolution?

The increase in cases

Between July 2023 and January 2026, there were a total of 33 cases of suspected AI misconduct handled by the University. 30 of these cases relate to coursework, while the other three were for examinations.

As would be expected, the number of suspected AI misconduct cases has increased drastically in the past year. There were only three cases reported in 2024, whereas the following year saw 28 cases, marking an increase of 833%.

The highest number of cases received in one month is four, which has happened four times. Between August 2023 and July 2024, there was not a single case of suspected AI use reported to the Proctors’ Office. Since the release of ChatGPT Edu, there have been eleven cases.

Interestingly, AI in itself is still not classed as a separate category of academic misconduct when handled by the University. Instead, these cases are classified as ‘plagiarism’, according to a freedom of information (FOI) request by *Cherwell*.

By contrast, another FOI request sent to the University of Bristol shows far higher numbers of AI cases at other

universities. In the 2023/24 academic year, Bristol issued 526 penalties for suspected AI misconduct, dwarfing Oxford’s figures by some margin.

Tell-tale signs

Cherwell’s Freedom of Information request also shines a light on the indicators used in determining whether academic work is the product of AI.

Indicators like fake quotes, factual inaccuracies, and prompts left in text are considered the most obvious indicators of suspected AI misconduct. Other indicators, however, are more up for debate. For example, students would “not normally have been taught” to use em-dashes in their writing.

Another indicator of potential misconduct is the use of ‘americanisms’. The guidance does note that international students are more likely to have learned American English, though mixing British and American English in the same text is considered a sign that AI may have been used. Other indicators include curly quotation marks, unusual levels of repetition, poorly argued prose, highly polished text, and bland statements.

The internal guidance is prefaced by a disclaimer that the indicators “may not provide definite proof that the student used AI without permission”, and urges the Proctors to consider each case holistically.

833%
increase in cases of AI misconduct in 2024-25

The accused

Though the data relates only to cases of AI misconduct in officially assessed work – rather than in tutorials or collections – *Cherwell* spoke to students who have faced accusations of AI usage by their college.

One modern languages student, who

graduated last year, was accused of using AI in collections in his final year. He explained that he was called into a meeting and that his tutor wanted to escalate the complaint further. He told *Cherwell*: “I was very scared that, if she thought I had used AI when I hadn’t, how is it going to go in my finals?”

He told *Cherwell* that their way of checking was putting the essay question into ChatGPT, and it came out with a similar answer. He explained that this approach “is not a valid way of checking if someone used AI at all.”

When asked whether the ordeal changed the way he approached academic work, he said: “It didn’t change the way I approached it because I am really stubborn and I love an em dash.”

Another student that *Cherwell* spoke to, however, has been more inclined to approach academic work differently following accusations from tutors of AI usage. She explains how the discrepancy between different tutors’ attitudes towards AI may leave students without a clear answer as to when, if at all, AI use is acceptable in academic work.

She told *Cherwell* that she “lost all confidence” when she stayed behind after a tutorial to ask questions about a topic which she was curious about, but her tutor instead questioned if she had used AI to collect notes and plan the essay.

However, in tutorials with younger tutors, she explained that they tend to be more open to using AI tools to break down a question and understand difficult concepts. She told *Cherwell*: “I often wonder whether, if I had more time to break down and review the information for my essays, I would have a more sufficient understanding of the topic and be able to write a coherent essay without needing to cut corners by using AI.”

What the experts say

Thomas Lancaster, Principal Teaching Fellow in Computing at Imperial College London, told *Cherwell* that, although guidance regarding the use of AI in universities exists, the biggest challenge is that it isn’t always consistent or up to date. The key issue, he explains, is that “so much of it assumes that every academic discipline operates in the same way”.

One way in which some universities have attempted to cope is by increasing the number of closed book, handwritten exams. Oxford made this change for its modern languages in May 2025 because of fears over AI, though the move



sparked debate from students at the time who would have to adapt to a form of assessment that they had not anticipated.

However, when asked whether a blanket shift to in-person, handwritten examinations would be a viable solution to the AI misconduct conundrum, Lancaster told *Cherwell*: “I think that would be completely inappropriate. Most universities in the UK just aren’t set up for an exam based curriculum, and frankly, handwriting just isn’t a skill that people have. This also limits what people can accomplish, which is very different for preparing students for an AI-first world.”

“**Indicators like fake quotes, factual inaccuracies, and prompts left in text are considered the most obvious indicators of suspected AI usage**”

“The Oxford deal with OpenAI really showed the University being at the forefront of AI adoption, although the educational sector has moved on since then... There’s nothing wrong with an assessment testing the ability of students to work with modern technology, but the assessment has to be phrased in those terms. Similarly, there’s nothing wrong with AI free assessments. It’s all about creating a balance.”

Ben du Boulay, Emeritus Professor of AI at the University of Sussex and

Editor of the Handbook of Artificial Intelligence in Education, also has ideas for how assessments can adapt to the challenge of AI. He told *Cherwell* that, in some cases, “it may be advantageous to allow students to use a large language model (LLM) but require them to submit both the LLM’s answer as well as their improved version of that answer, highlighting and explaining the changes that have been made”.

Boulay also advocates for more student training, telling *Cherwell* that it should make clear what it means to be a student, how an assignment develops understanding and skill, and that being a student means improving metacognitive understanding and regulation.

A spokesperson for Oxford University told *Cherwell*: “The University is committed to encouraging the ethical, safe, and responsible use of AI and it has published clear guidance on this for students who use AI tools to support their studies. Unauthorised use of AI for exams or submitted work is not permitted and students should always follow any specific guidance from their tutors, supervisors, department or faculty.”

“Oxford’s teaching model emphasises the importance of face-to-face learning and requires students to clearly demonstrate subject knowledge, critical thinking and evidence-based arguments. Together with clear guidance on responsible use of AI for study, and policy on AI use in summative assessment, this helps to safeguard against inappropriate or unauthorised use of AI. Where concerns about unauthorised use are raised, cases are reviewed via established academic misconduct processes. All policy and guidance is under constant review, in response to rapid changes in the AI landscape.”

Image credit: Stanley Smith for Cherwell.

OPINION

We need summer resits

DAVID WEISENBERG

When I was studying for exams in Trinity 2024, I broke my glasses. I needed an entire new frame and lenses, and my current prescription was about to expire, so I realised I could save money by getting a new eye exam first. I was unprepared for the result, though: I had a detached retina and needed surgery urgently, or I could go blind in my right eye at any minute. Since NHS waiting lists were too long, I had to return to the U.S. to get treatment, which caused me to miss my exams. As such, I had to take them in Trinity 2025. This forced me to postpone an excellent PhD offer.

My plan was to tutor for a year while continually reviewing the material so I would be prepared to ace my exams when I returned to Oxford. This was a good plan ... until the night of 7th January, when wildfires ravaged Los Angeles. While I survived the Eaton Fire, my house was one of thousands that burned down. Needless to say, my life was thrown into turmoil, and it was months before I was truly able to get back into a studying routine. I managed to eke out a Pass in June and even get a Merit on two exams, but it was rough.

Moral of the story: we need summer resits.

Currently, Oxford offers summer resits for Prelims students – but no such provision exists

for the following years. The reasons for this might seem to make sense; it maintains high expectations for students and disincentivises failure. Plus, it reduces the workload of administering exams. The system already grants departmental Boards of Examiners flexibility to consider a student's extenuating circumstances. Namely, in fringe cases, if a student does well on most exams but fails one because they were ill that day, then the examiners might decide to disregard the exam they failed.

However, when extenuating circumstances cause a student to miss too many exams or perform too poorly, the examiners' hands are tied – they might decide to remove the cap on the students' resits for the next year, but that still forces the student to wait a year to progress. For example, when my detached retina caused me to miss all my exams, there was simply nothing to go off of. A year later, the stress of having one chance to take six exams despite how overwhelmed I felt was more than I could handle. I was scared that if I failed too many I'd have to postpone my PhD offer by another year or even lose it entirely. The anxiety of the situation would have been greatly reduced if I'd known that I could resit the exams later that summer if needed.

To prevent students from finding themselves in these situations, Oxford should guarantee summer resits for anyone unable to progress due to their exams being affected by serious extenuating circumstances. Furthermore, different students might have different timing needs – for example, a student entering a PhD or DPhil programme might need the resit sooner, such as early or mid-August, while a student dealing with a longer-term crisis might need the exams later. To handle this, Oxford should give individual departments flexibility to decide on timing in consultation with affected students. I understand Oxford might wish

to disincentivise failure and minimise its workload by not offering summer resits to everyone who fails, but offering them to those prevented from passing by external hardships is simply the just thing to do.

For Prelims courses, both Trinity exams and resit exams are set and checked at the beginning of the academic year. This could be done for Part A through C courses as well. Furthermore, if Oxford decides to make resit exams only available for students with extenuating circumstances, then if a certain resit exam isn't needed, they could just not release it and use it next year, which would reduce faculty and staff workload. If serious extenuating circumstances really are so rare, then the burden of marking resit scripts will also be minimal. On the other hand, if they're not so rare, then that only strengthens the case for offering them, as this policy would be negatively impacting a large number of students. Oxford's lack of summer resits puts it in a minority among universities in the UK – that must change.

I don't hold this against the department and I am grateful for the support of my advisors and lecturers. However, while my experiences are hopefully among the worst, other students have also been affected by this. I knew someone who lost their PhD program offer after also missing exams in 2024 due to illness. Furthermore, as Cambridge Student Union president Sarah Anderson points out, a lack of resits particularly affects disabled students at risk of having their exam performance derailed by a poorly timed flare-up.

The current system is both unfair and unnecessary, it's time to change it for the better. Oxford is already deliberating on this issue at the University level and engaging in dialogue with individual departments.

Let's hope they will do the right thing.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Have an opinion on something we've published? Email editors@cherwell.org

Got the blues for Mods

As a Classicist, we have the exact same problem in the opposite way ('Lawyers are weird. Mods are (partly) to blame', Week 1). Instead of having exams so soon after matriculating, we wait over a year and a half before being bombarded with 7-10 papers in two weeks. Then, we wait two and a half years to sit eight, sometimes nine papers (and maybe a dissertation too). I can only pray that by this time next year I'll remember anything I was taught in my second year. To the point the author makes about feeling lonely, I can certainly relate; I've never sat an exam at the same time as any of my friends, and there's nothing more annoying than wanting to go out and have fun while my friends are locked in and revising, and vice versa. Four years of this, just to graduate without a Master's or a year abroad?

Emma Heagney, *Classics, Merton College*

The corporate grind(ing of your soul)

We ought to be careful about encouraging students to become internship-processing robots ('In defence of the internship spreadsheet', Week 3). Sure, money makes the world go round, but listening to the people who do have internship spreadsheets (and are probably going to land a far more well-paid job than I am) simply makes me ask: what is the point of cramming one's brain for Oxford interviews, prelims, Mods, and finals, if trying to reach such lofty intellectual heights, if you aren't that interested in your subject and in the game purely for the love of money? Antonio Reis is, yes, correct to point out the danger of putting down aspirant working-class students – Oxford is egregiously middle-class. It's true, more money is always nice, especially for those who did not have much of it growing up. But is it always worth becoming so shallow? I have my doubts. At the end of the day, I want to talk about something fascinating on a date – not your week reading numbers on a screen at BlackRock (unless you have any office gossip).

Marvin Somersfield, *French & Philosophy, Magdalen College*

THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts

Read Kissinger you pansies; we must fight this gynocracy! Men join together Pakistani or White! To the stars! (Oxford Union Librarian steps down following 'racist' comments)

hlmencken_ via Instagram

This sounds like it was written by an historically illiterate imbecile. Marx himself acknowledged the benefits of colonisation. ('How not to decolonise a museum')

Richard McCarthy via Facebook

We accept it in sports & music because they are excellent ends in themselves: a career is not. ('In defence of the internship spreadsheet')

oliver.haythxrne via Instagram

Its quite simple, have a meritocracy as the Union does and then whoever comes at merit man, woman, dog, should be in the Union. Now if this is the case where women are 25 per because of not being able to come to merit, then this isnt gender equality it is simply the most pragmatic form of selection that is meritocracy. ('Only 25% of Oxford Union speakers are women')

muhammad_khizarr via Instagram

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Image credit: James Morrell with permission.

College stereotypes are a barrier to belonging

FREYA ROBSON

Each college at Oxford University has a reputation that extends far beyond its stony, history-entrenched exterior. With this reputation comes a label that every student is burdened with until the day they don their graduation caps. The stereotypes of each college have become just another light-hearted Oxford tradition, accepted as an endearing quirk of the University experience. But there is a fine line between tradition and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes – a line that is currently being crossed.

As it goes for many self-contained micro-societies, the Oxford community is divided into groups; your college is your clan. Whilst the college system gives students a chance to get to know one another on a more personal level, the independent nature of each college gives rise to the build up of preconceived ideas about the students attending neighbouring colleges. What should be an environment of unity quickly becomes one of division as we perpetuate nonsensical stereotypes. How have we become so ridiculously closed-minded?

The first step is formation of the stereotype. It only takes one impression – a chance encounter with someone who quickly becomes the representative for their entire 350-person college – and the damage is done.

The next step is confirmation of the stereotype. The labels given to each college are unavoidable, and many of us have fallen into believing them at one point or another; perhaps after a particularly quiet

visit to Merton, or an extremely in-depth description of a Christ Church student's recent skiing holiday. Judging a collective solely based on an individual is not just an Oxford issue, it's a detrimental characteristic of human nature – but this does not excuse the behaviour.

The final step is that of the assumptions made. The unofficial labelling system that has been adopted is subsequently put to use in our judgement of those we have not even met by the fabricated personality that every member of a particular college is supposed to possess. Putting people into boxes is restrictive and suffocating, leaving no space for self-expression or deviation from the status quo. In a society rife with so much division, why do we choose to reinforce an us vs them dynamic within our university, our supposed safe haven? This is the environment fostered by the college system.

Calling the process of stereotyping students based on their college old-fashioned would be an understatement. It appears the only noticeable difference in the college system between Oxford now and the Oxford of long ago is the use of college puffers in place of tweed jackets. The need for exclusionary titles affixed to each student by default of which college they decided to apply to has well and truly passed – should choosing to tick 'University College' over 'St Edmund's Hall' on a UCAS application really be the determinant of an individual's perceived persona for the following three years? Or worse, is the random assignment of a student's college through the pooling system truly a substantial basis for forming a

complete judgment of them?

To simply pass off college stereotypes as a tongue-in-cheek practice that is being taken too seriously if seen as anything other than light-hearted would be to diminish the very real power that they hold. Having preconceptions, no matter how seemingly laughable they may be, leaves us with a lens through which we examine others. No matter the true political leanings of an Oriel student, or the financial status of a Christ Church one, their words may constantly be analysed through an assumption of a right-wing undertone or a wealthy background. This archaic labelling practice must be abandoned.

The damage that is left by the stereotyping process can also be seen by its aftermath. These preconceived ideas of how a certain college's student body functions have a lasting impact on the character of young adults, and can actually cause the stereotypes come true. Whilst this may seem harmless when we speak of notions such as being stuck up, or a little more right-wing, the general culture of fitting into stereotypes of a particular group is incredibly harmful. The college-labelling process seems to be embedding within us the instinct that we must mould ourselves into the roles that we are given – is this really the message we want to be headlining as a university training young minds for the future?

So the next time you turn your nose up when walking past a certain college replacing the RAAC in its walls or even consider uttering the words "where fun goes to die", remember that a system of stereotypes is easy to build but impossibly complicated to tear down. Rather than widening contemporary divides with labels, let us close down our preconceptions in order to open our minds.

Course culling is a threat to us all

It is not just the humanities under attack, but education everywhere

TI-JEAN MARTIN

I almost did a degree in Music. I've been involved in music-making for as long as I can recall, drawn to its capacity to create beauty from complexity. Ultimately, I chose History for a similar reason: the satisfaction of drawing interpretation from abstract overlapping narratives. If I'd applied to Oxford Brookes, or the universities of Kent, Wolverhampton, or Nottingham, however, studying Music wouldn't have even been an option.

All of these institutions have closed their Music courses in the last few years. This comes alongside course cuts and staff redundancies in the arts, humanities, and languages across the country. It reflects a worrying trend in government policy and public discourse, targeting 'Mickey Mouse' degrees but ignoring their economic, social, and intellectual impact. These decisions are an injustice to the intrinsic value of education, across all disciplines, and risk tarnishing Britain's reputation for academic and cultural excellence.

Nottingham's suspension of all Music and Modern Languages courses is the poster child for this trend. But it is not alone – Kingston University, for example, scrapped English, Philosophy, and International Relations last year. Financial uncertainty has driven these decisions, with universities facing deficits as high as £60 million after years of government cuts. This leaves them reliant on student and alumni funding, forcing the prioritisation of economic, rather than intrinsic, value.

Economic value is often equated with the 'usefulness' of certain degrees, a term that has become synonymous with successive governments' denigration of the arts and humanities. This rhetoric reduces a subject's utility to its earning potential, which is seriously flawed. The difference between humanities and STEM graduates is marginal – the British Academy found that STEM graduates only earned £6,000 more annually after ten years of employment. A 2023 report found that eight of the ten fastest-growing sectors in the UK employ more humanities graduates than any other discipline, demonstrating the value of the transferable skills that humanities degrees develop.

Fixating on 'usefulness' also ignores the cultural and economic value of arts education. It sustains a vibrant set of creative industries, which contribute £59.4 billion to the economy each year. Britain's cultural exports – The Beatles, Harry Potter, and James Bond, to name a few, are "disproportionately large for a country of relatively small size," according to Arts Council England CEO Darren Henley. Ironically, a government calling for the prioritisation of "useful degrees" has frequently waxed lyrical about the importance of British film, music, and literature.

Beyond this, both arts and humanities are central to shaping individuals. Many of us don't know who we'd be today without the musical instrument we played, or the performing group we joined as a child. There is a freedom of expression and breadth of knowledge within them that produces the leaders, thinkers, and creatives of the world. To limit access to education in these areas is to close the door on the successors to these luminaries. Last year, the University of the West of England's drama department was forced to close the undergraduate programme that produced Olivia Colman and Patrick Stewart.

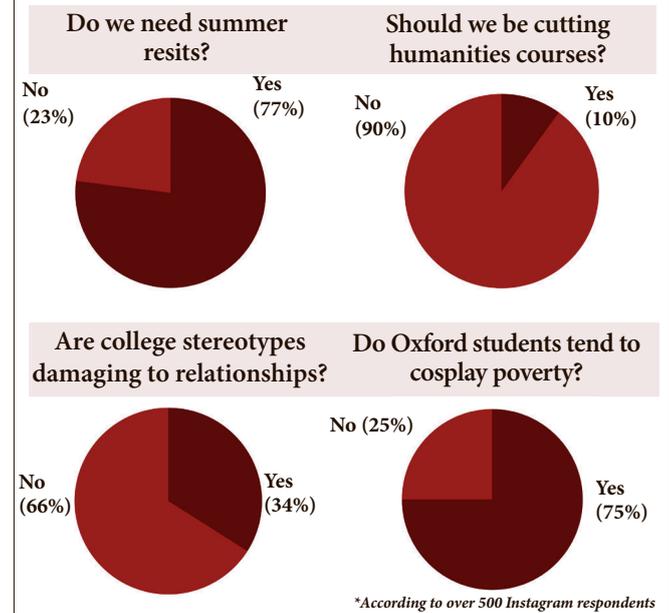
“*Fixating on 'usefulness' also ignores the cultural and economic value of arts education. It sustains a vibrant set of creative industries which contribute £59.4 billion to the economy each year*

The arts and humanities are not the only victims of these course cuts. Recently, Brookes closed its Mathematics department, and Bournemouth and Reading no longer offer Engineering, despite such courses seemingly coming under the government's definition of "priority courses that support Labour's industrial strategy... to renew Britain". If subjects framed as economically 'valuable' are also being cut, it is not the worth of individual subjects that is causing this crisis. Instead, it is a system that forces universities to operate for profit rather than prioritising what people used to call learning for learning's sake.

There is a serious risk of long-term inequality. If universities continue to be pushed into course culling, education experts fear a 'postcode lottery' will come to limit access to a full range of university degrees by location. Students in educational 'cold spots,' and those to whom higher education is less affordable, are already disadvantaged amidst the cost-of-living crisis, according to the BBC.

It is becoming impossible for ever-growing numbers of students to live away from home, pricing students out of course choices. Cuts and enforced 'specialisation' at newer, less well-funded universities risk entrenching both this and the problem of educational elitism. In ten years' time, it could be only Oxbridge and its wealthiest Russell Group

THE VERDICT



contemporaries offering a full range of subjects – there are only 24 of these, and they are not renowned for their affordability.

Course culling is 'unconscionable vandalism' of British university education. Such vandalism is not accidental, but the product of a marketised system that treats universities as businesses and ignores education's inherent value. Unchecked, the combination of funding cuts and 'usefulness' rhetoric will harm students beyond the arts and humanities. In the long term, it will strangle Britain's cultural and intellectual life, reduce the employability of graduates, and entrench educational inequality.

Amidst the rise of artificial intelligence and the attacks on student protest movements across the Atlantic, human creativity and critical thinking are more vital than ever. The trend of culling the courses that foster these skills is therefore a threat to us all. We must defend the benefits of arts and humanities education, support the students and teachers taking action to resist cuts, and pressure the government to solve, not encourage, this crisis.

Oxford's poverty porn addiction is out of control

The loudest conversations about class and hardship are increasingly led by those performing struggle, not living it

LEO JONES

It was an overcast day in October when I arrived, Ikea bags in-hand, for day one of Oxford Fresher's Week. High hopes? Sort of. Having just spent two weeks recovering from Opportunity Oxford (OppOx) – a fortnight-long residential which brought with it enough drinking and clubbing to kill a small horse – I felt that I had already found a place for myself in the city. I'd frequented the Swan and Castle, studied in the Radcliffe Camera, experienced a night at Bridge – what more was there to it? Little did I know what awaited me.

Perhaps fuelled by the implications of participating in an outreach programme like OppOx, I took comfort in being surrounded by people who were broadly like-minded, and whose lives had resembled my own. I had, of course, braced myself for the inevitable Evelyn Waugh or Saltburn-esque stereotypes I expected to encounter; I knew that the Oxford I had come to know – shaped by 250 students from disadvantaged backgrounds – was about to look very different. Yet nothing could have prepared me for what I would come to recognise everywhere, lurking in every corner of the city.

I had been conscious not to allow the judgemental mindset of class categorisation to impact my social interactions, aware of the quickly-developing chip on the shoulders of my OppOx peers. The great clash of private and state school had been long-anticipated. Nobody knew what to expect, there was a morbid fascination with 'the other,' reinforced by the insulated nature of the programme.

None of this mental preparation could predict the reality of Oxford, however. It is a city of art, culture, music, intellectualism, but most significantly, privilege. But not in the traditional sense. No, it did not come plastered with family crests, donning a Barbour jacket, and a signet ring. Privilege in modern Oxford is illicit, disguised as something it is not.

So, you can imagine my surprise as I discovered the truth about even the most self-styled subversive, 'anti-establishment' Oxford students. They may be some of the loudest voices in condemning nepotism,

entitlement, and inherited advantage – but many of them were products of just that.

After mentioning this to friends from home, I began to question what about it I found uncomfortable. What's wrong with playing dress up? Can people not style themselves however they like? I probably wouldn't carry around a sign saying "Look at me! I come from centuries of generational wealth and privilege" either. Privilege can, of course, mean lots of different things. But something still did not sit right with me, as I realised that their arguments about unaffordable mental health support, class discrimination, and the difficulties of breaking into (especially creative) industries were constructed on perceived struggle, not lived experience.

“*Privilege in modern Oxford is illicit, disguised as something it is not*

It's worth asking: do you really need to have had a direct encounter to comment on these societal problems? They were still ultimately drawing invaluable attention to important social issues, no? Oxford is undoubtedly an echo chamber. One could easily go weeks here without thinking about the rest of the world. Was it not understandable that in the "UK's least affordable city", discourse would look this way?

But, still, it was the deafening volume of their discussion that just did not sit right with me. Solidarity was becoming substitution, those with lived experience quietly edged out. It became clear that empathy and allyship are not the problem – replacement is. The impact of such "performative poverty" – the adoption of the language, aesthetics, and grievances of disadvantage by those who have never had to live with its consequences – was drowning out some of the class debate's most underrepresented voices.

I first began to see this within Oxford's artistic circles, after multiple friends told me that they



were scared to speak up about their experiences of growing up on Universal Credit, of bereavement, of being in care. If they weren't able to contribute, then what actually was the art seeking to depict and challenge those issues really doing? My friends originally joked that it was a kind of fetishisation, employing the "my culture is not your costume" line often used in debates around appropriation.

But soon I began to see this pattern everywhere. It exists in the overly sympathetic sighs of 'solidarity,' the overexaggeration of comparatively minor and mundane inconveniences, and most egregiously in the conversational spaces which so loudly claim societally subaltern status.

I write this midway through my second year as an undergraduate here, after debating back and forth whether writing this piece would merely contribute to a similar culture of class tribalism. However, as the dial on these appropriative voices continues to

be turned up, I realised that this was not a debate around exposing imposters, but about encouraging conversation in context. Oxford is at the forefront of providing both life-changing academic and personal support to disadvantaged students. But with a fluctuating national economy and constantly dynamic discourse, institutions cannot be expected to keep up if they are unable to connect with those most deeply and genuinely impacted.

It may take work – it goes against the very foundations of a contemporary society drunk off short-term gratification and performative, trend-based discourse.

But I hope that with awareness can come true diversity, as we realise that the loudest voices in the room might not always be the most representative – or the most in need of being heard.

Image credit: Emiliano Compassi, with permission.

FEATURES

‘Having sex with University Challenge on in the background’: The Sextigation 2026



The fifth annual Sextigation is officially here! Cherwell’s one and only investigation into the sexcapades of Oxford students. From college family incest to banging behind the bins on Ship Street, we’ve heard it all

CHERWELL FEATURES

CW: *Unwanted sexual contact*

Shagging, making love, doinking: there’s many names for it and many ways to do it. Here at *Cherwell*, we’ve made it our business to find out just exactly how, when, and with whom Oxford students get their freak on. Welcome all to the fifth annual Sextigation. Just like the boyfriend you need to get rid of, it’s a little late for Valentine’s Day.

How much and with whom

A whopping 464 Oxford students responded to our form, giving us a nice sample of the (mostly) undergraduate body. It appears students here fit the stereotype of being more interested in books than each others bodies, all in all Oxford students aren’t very promiscuous. Whilst the mean average number of sexual partners since arriving at Oxford was four, this was mostly the effort of a few randy individuals. The most common answer was one and the median average was two. Last year we pointed out Oxford’s shag-inequality, and 2026 is much the same; the top 1% of Oxford’s students had 16% of all of the sex. Don’t tell Zach Polanski.

Perhaps more interesting than how much sex Oxford students are having is who they are having sex with. According to our polling, the number of gay/lesbian, bisexual and pan-sexual Oxonians is greater than that of the straight students. Polling places estimates only 30% of Zoomers identify

as LGBTQ; either this figure is way under or *Cherwell* has a particularly queer readership.

A W for Worcester

Worcester put in a good shift this year, proving to be the college with the highest average body count. They topped (wink wink) the ranking with a self-reported mean Oxford body count of 7.2. Credit where credit’s due though – this was mostly the work of 1 particularly industrious individual who reported an Oxford shag count of 92, the highest of all respondents. Lincoln and St John’s closely followed, getting hot and heavy with an average of 6.1 and 6 people, respectively. Less strong contenders included Regent’s Park and New, coming in joint second-last position with a mean of 2. It was Merton, though, that had the worst case of performance anxiety. They reported an average of 1.9 Oxford sexual partners, the lowest of all colleges that responded. This only confirmed pre-

“*This was mostly the work of one particularly industrious individual who reported an Oxford shag count of 92, the highest of all respondents*”

conceptions – Merton was voted by the most people as having the least sex.

However, this was based on only self-reported hookups. Respondents also answered which colleges they had slept with. According to this metric, Balliol and Christ Church were the most promiscuous. 45 people reported hooking up with someone from these colleges, equating to 13.2% of all respondents. Jesus (12.6%) also had a steamy year and took second place on the podium. Keble and St John’s (both 12.3%) then followed. Across the road from St John’s, however, things weren’t quite so raunchy. Only one person reported getting with someone from Blackfriars Hall, officially making the PPH the most chaste of Oxford’s institutions Campion Hall and Wycliffe Hall weren’t far off this though, both having two reported hookups. We wonder why...

Sex or study?

History and Modern Languages appeared to have the highest body count average – 10.3 – but this was skewed by the small sample size. Excluding this, Geography students hiked up to the summit, putting themselves on the map with a 7.9 average body count. It appears they were more focussed on getting frisky than on their fieldwork. Less dedicated to the cause were Human Sciences students. They seem to have been more focused on the science than on the human. Our sources revealed that they have an average of 0.5 sexual partners at Oxford, officially making them the least horny course.

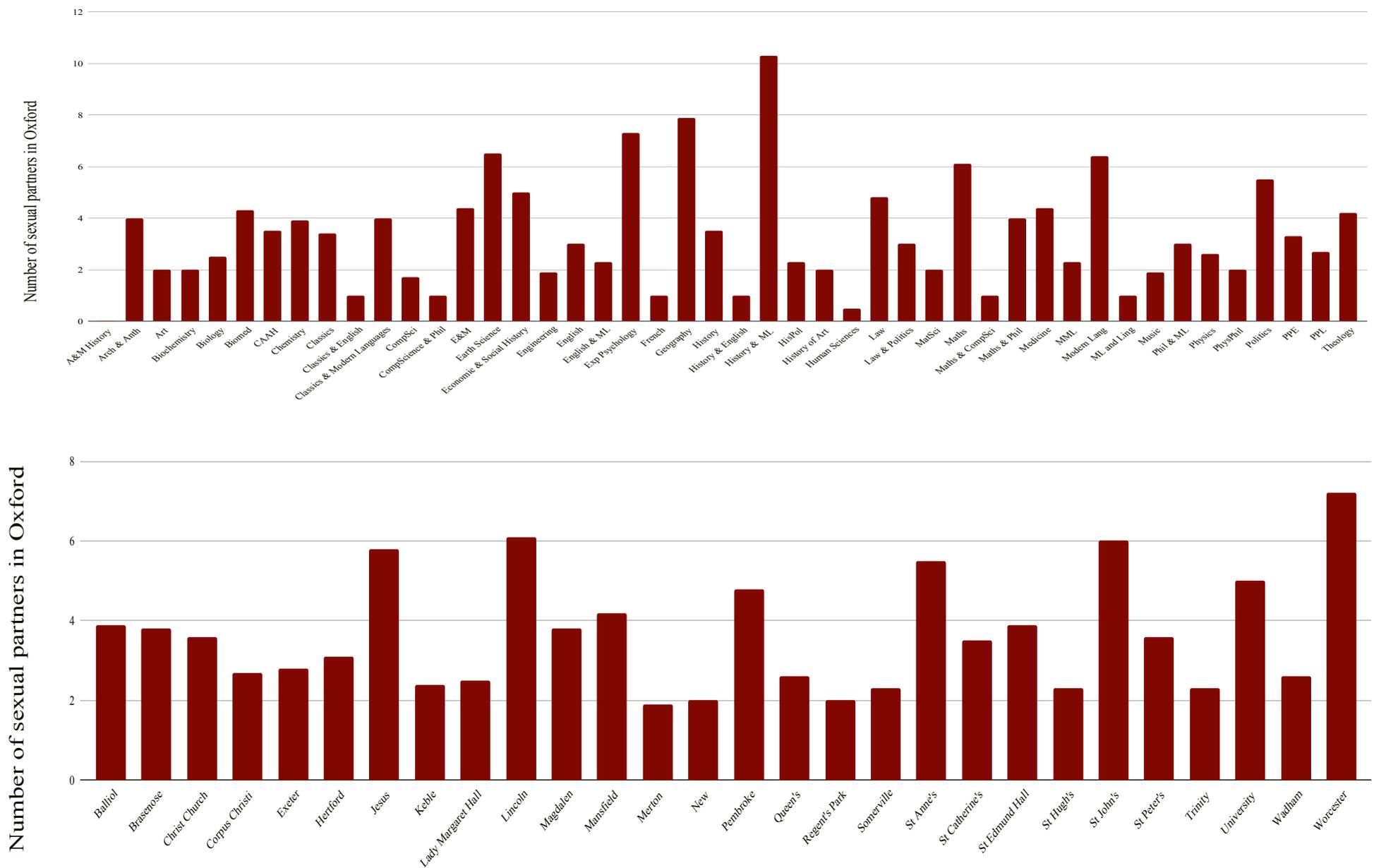
Promiscuity, however, did not correlate to good

“*Only one person reported getting with someone from Blackfriars Hall, officially making the PPH the most chaste of Oxford’s institutions*”

looks. To be or not to be attractive was the question and English students did indeed come out on top. 22 people voted this subject as the one with the most eye candy. Humility though was not their strong suit; the majority of these respondents were themselves English students. At the other end of the spectrum, people were quite vehement in their responses; answers included ‘not physics’, ‘not PPE’, and ‘anything but engineering’.

A tour of Oxford

We surveyed Oxford’s sexiest places as well as people too. No stone was left unturned, from Teddy Hall graveyard (a good place to bone, if you will) to the Mansfield theology library to the Oxford-Gatwick coach. An attempt on the back of a Voi was also reported. One person boasted an incredible roster. They confessed: “Behind the bins on Ship Street, train station, Glink, Worcester lake, Gloucester Green market, New College mound, All Souls chapel, Sheldonian



“*Cultural discourse in Oxford surrounding sex remains problematic. Many commented on the gendered nature of this slut-shaming*”

cupola, Westgate, Maths Institute, Radcliffe Science Library, and my tutor's office.” We'll never look at these locations in the same way again.

Someone else also reeled off their achievements. They reported: “I had a cheeky threesome with my best friend and her boyfriend, caused incest in my college family, and am currently sleeping with a 45-year-old.” In fact, threesomes proved to be a major theme of this year's Sextigation: 17 people reported having had one while at Oxford. Another person recalled that, having been invited to go home with a guy from St Hugh's, they later discovered that he had already had a threesome that same night. Nor did it end there. The highest number of people someone reported having sex with at one time was an astounding 14.

Most other amusing stories revolved around sex playlists, such as one reporting being “treated to ‘The Combine Harvester (Brand New Key)’ during sex” and another describing “regularly hav[ing] sex with University Challenge in the background for ambience”. Only in Oxford.

How to hook up

In terms of how to find hookups, people were generally despondent. Oxford's clubs didn't prove so great for matchmaking: 36.2% answered that they “couldn't say” which provided the best opportunities for casual sex while 10.8% bluntly answered “none”. Aside from this, Plush and then Bridge proved most popular for these purposes.

Dating apps are also not that promising. When asked if the apps had improved the dating experience, 42.5% voted “probably not” and 32.7% voted “definitely not”. People wrote that

they are “superficial”, “soul draining” and, using a rather unusual simile, “like going to a pigsty to try to find a unicorn”. Overall, only 22.3% reported getting into an official relationship with someone they met on a dating site. Despite all this bad publicity, 70% of Oxford students still use dating apps to find sexual partners.

For LGBTQ+ respondents, however, dating apps got less of a bad rap. 73% of those who responded that dating apps had “probably” or “definitely” improved the dating experience identified as queer. One person explained: “When you are queer, it can be hard to get out of the friend zone. Dating apps make it clear what you both want.” Yet beyond this, the pool seems more shallow in the LGBTQ+ community than the heterosexual one. Queer respondents described it as either “non-existent” or “incestuous” – a scene where “everyone knows everyone and is interconnected so it can be difficult to start fresh with someone”.

“*I had a cheeky threesome with my best friend and her boyfriend, caused incest in my college family, and am currently sleeping with a 45-year-old*”

For those who are in a relationship though, things are generally looking good – excluding the 13 people who admitted their relationship would only last until the end of term. The majority of people have sex with their partner multiple times a week (52.2%) and believe that their relationship will last all their life (55.8%). Over-achievers. This is a particular feat for the 55.4% of students whose main dating goal at Oxford is to find a lifelong monogamous partner. In fact, the future for our peers is looking fairly traditional: 72.4% want to get married and 57.8% want to have children someday.

A pervasive problem

Cultural discourse in Oxford surrounding

sex remains problematic. In response to the question of whether there is an issue with slut-shaming and judgement surrounding casual sex, the majority of Oxonians answered either “yes” or “maybe”. Many commented on the gendered nature of slut-shaming – of the “double-standard between men and women”, that “women tend to be scrutinised for dating multiple people but for men it's not a big deal”, and how “crewdate culture can be more judgy about women”.

Yet there also appears to be the inverse issue. 63.4% replied that they believe there is a pressure to not be a virgin at university. One person wrote about the pressure surrounding hook-up culture and how casual sex is used as social currency: “There can be a strangely competitive element to it, especially if your friends are regularly getting with people in clubs and you're not.”

Other issues within Oxford's sex scene include

those of consent. 85 respondents reported experiencing unwanted behaviour during sex, including slapping and strangulation. 80% of these identified as female. Also, 117 people reported having been pressured into sex.

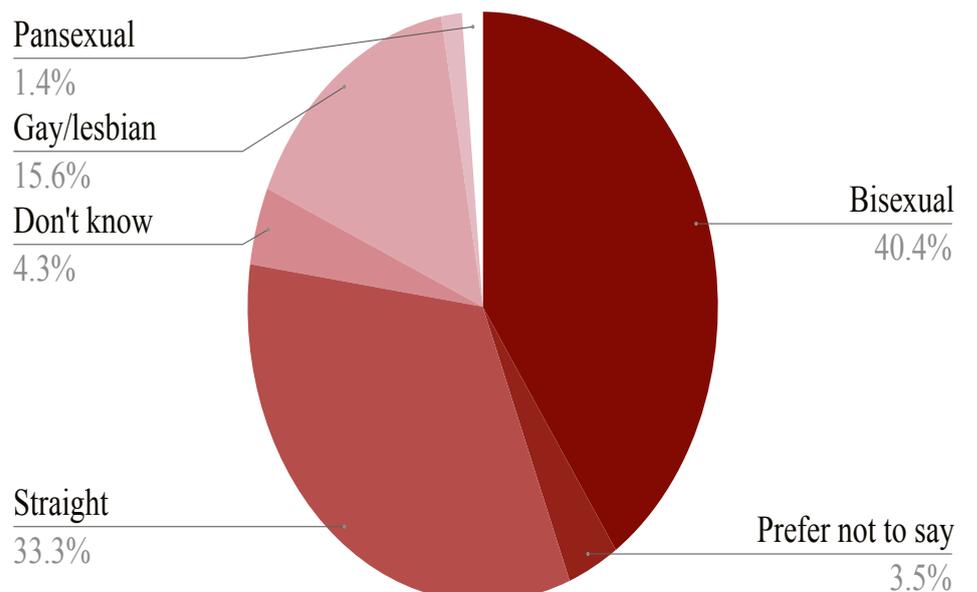
Until next year

Well that's it folks, our annual, entirely rigorous, and Pulitzer-worthy deep dive into the sex lives of Oxford students is done for this year. It's all just a bit of fun, so please don't come at us with comments about sample size, P-values, or statistical significance; we took the same Q-Step class you did. Until next year, have fun, stay safe, and maybe keep it out of college.

Image credit: Emiliano Compassi, with permission.

Graph credits: Stanley Smith for Cherwell.

Sexuality of Oxford students



Who owns net zero? Climate action in a collegiate university

Oxford's central sustainability strategy sits uneasily alongside the autonomy of the collegiate system. Can a decentralised university meaningfully deliver climate action at the scale its ambitions demand?



ANISH VEDANTHAM

Oxford University's sustainability ambitions are increasingly visible. At the central level, strategic commitments articulate ambitious targets, governance mechanisms, and investment frameworks. In built form, newly completed University buildings such as the Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities and the Life and Mind Building are presented as low-carbon exemplars of Passivhaus design and biodiversity integration. Yet these institutional ambitions coexist with a plural collegiate system in which individual colleges retain autonomy over their estates, governance, and environmental policy. The resulting architecture of sustainability across Oxford is not a unified programme, but a patchwork of strategies, practices, and priorities. This raises a fundamental question: in an era defined by climate urgency, can a decentralised collegiate system deliver coherent environmental outcomes across an institution of global standing?

The University's central strategy

In March 2021, Oxford University's Council approved the Environmental Sustainability Strategy, which sets two core institutional targets: net zero carbon emissions and biodiversity net gain by 2035. The strategy's scope extends well beyond estate engineering, encompassing research, teaching, resources, and investment. The Environmental Sustainability Subcommittee, a formal governance body, is tasked with integrating sustainability into institutional decision-making, and the University have established long-term financing through a major Sustainability Fund intended to support decarbonisation and systemic change.

These commitments are embodied in flagship capital projects. The Schwarzman Centre has been certified as Europe's largest Passivhaus building and is presented as an exemplar of low-energy performance through high-performance insulation, controlled ventilation, and integrated renewable systems. Similar principles inform the Life and Mind Building, whose design documentation emphasises reduced energy demand and enhanced thermal efficiency relative to typical higher education construction. In central estates planning, then, environmental performance is not an afterthought but a design parameter.

At the same time, the University's central carbon planning recognises that buildings are only part of the story. In its carbon management plans, it lays out detailed goals for electrifying heating and reducing residual emissions. These technical frameworks signal a level of corporate coherence and ambition that, in principle, could extend across the University's broader estate.

The collegiate system

Oxford's colleges, however, are not centrally managed. Each college is an autonomous charitable corporation responsible for its own buildings, finances, and internal governance. This autonomy

extends to environmental policy: colleges may choose whether to adopt central targets, publish emissions data, or allocate governance resources toward sustained environmental planning.

Some colleges have developed structured approaches that align closely with the University's strategic targets. Merton College has publicly adopted carbon net zero and biodiversity net gain by 2035, integrating those targets into its institutional framework. St Edmund Hall, too, has published multi-year sustainability objectives and governance arrangements intended to monitor and improve its environmental performance with a goal of being as close to carbon neutral by 2030. Other colleges have instituted sustainability working groups, educational events, and operational measures without formal targets or transparent reporting. Many other colleges, such as Christ Church, Corpus Christi, and Exeter however, have net zero targets after the University's goal of 2035 or have failed to release targets at all.

The Oxford Student Union's sustainability demands, first articulated in 2022, set three expectations for colleges: adoption of net zero targets at least as stringent as the University's, publication of an actionable strategy with annual emissions reporting, and formal governance structures with student involvement. The SU released a traffic light assessment grounded in these demands, which showed significant variation across the collegiate landscape, with only a minority of colleges meeting all three demands, and many showing minimal progress on any of them. This divide is supported by work done by the Climate League of Oxford and Cambridge (CLOC), which has published a ranking of Oxford colleges on their sustainability efforts. CLOC found that in 2023, only five colleges (St Antony's, Kellogg, St John's, Trinity, and St Hilda's) received passing marks on their metric, while two colleges (Oriel and St. Hughes) received scores of zero. The resulting institutional patchwork contrasts starkly with the central University's unified strategy.

A problem of institutional design?

The institutional dynamics at Oxford reflect a core public policy dilemma: how to manage collective action in a decentralised system. The University's central strategy provides a coherent blueprint and sets ambitious targets, yet lacks mechanisms to ensure uniform adoption across autonomous units. Colleges, meanwhile, face differentiated constraints, whether that's heritage, finance, governance turnover, student politics, or institutional blockages that shape their capacity to act.

This can be conceptualised as a principal-agent problem. The central University (the principal) sets goals and governance structures, but colleges (the agents) exercise discretion in how they interpret, implement, or even ignore those goals. Without aligned incentives, binding standards, or transparent accountability systems, variability in environmental performance is predictable.

The absence of formal enforcement mechanisms – such as linked funding conditional on environmental

reporting or central planning approval requirements for college estates – means that sustainability alignment across Oxford relies on voluntary coordination, peer networks, and institutional norms. While these can generate pockets of excellence, they also produce uneven outcomes that complicate claims of cohesive institutional progress.

Variation in the capacity of colleges

Collegiate variation is perhaps most evident when viewed through the lens of student governance. At Oriel College, the JCR Environmental Officer occupies a role that is simultaneously advisory and promotional, yet constrained by both student preferences and administrative caution.

According to Libby Rees, the Oriel JCR Environmental Officer, there is genuine high-level interest in sustainability within the college's senior team, including the Provost. At the same time, proposals for visible interventions, like green walls or rooftop solar panels, have been subject to prolonged internal debate. Funding sources, precedent, and reputational risk all shape the calculus of institutional decision-making. In one illustrative case, concerns about alumni perceptions influenced proposed sustainability investments, highlighting the complex interaction between donor relations and environmental planning. Specifically, Libby discussed how donors may have been less willing to support environmental planning while Oriel is celebrating its 700 year anniversary in 2026. While only one case, it highlights issues concerning the framing and timing of sustainability issues at colleges.

On routine matters such as recycling and composting, operational and organisational constraints matter. While there is glass recycling in the kitchens, the logistical implications for scouts and the local council's contamination policies limit what can realistically be rolled out. As Rees explained: "The [Oxford City] council apparently doesn't like when recycling isn't clean, so they'll throw away recycling if there's [leftover] milk in the bottle or other contamination." She continued: "Some scouts have the time where they're environmentally conscious and they want to think about that and clean up the recycling, yet some of them don't have the time." These micro-operational frictions point to a broader institutional reality: sustainability interventions are negotiated within a lattice of labour practices, regulatory frameworks, and organisational norms.

Student-level governance similarly introduces variability. The JCR at Oriel has in the past rejected proposals such as vegetarian nights, not for ideological reasons per se, but as expressions of aggregate student preference. This means that environmental officers must navigate shifting student opinion, use informal polling, and manage expectations within a short tenure of often just nine months. The result is that even straightforward initiatives can become entangled in processes of negotiation, temporal impermanence, and institutional inertia.

Rees also identifies coordination deficits across student bodies. While JCR presidents meet regularly, there appears to be no structured forum for environmental officers to exchange strategies, share best practices, or build cross-college momentum. A predecessor reportedly mentioned the existence of such a forum, yet today it is no longer visible. This absence mirrors the broader governance pattern: without formalised mechanisms for intercollegiate environmental coordination, progress remains segmented and contingent.

Wadham College presents a contrast, in which sustainability is more deeply embedded within institutional planning. According to its sustainability strategy, its estate spans seventeenth-century listed buildings, twentieth-century additions, and contemporary facilities, producing complex and uneven thermal performance. Rather than relying solely on major retrofit projects, the college has invested in detailed analysis of room-level energy behaviour to inform prioritisation and sequencing of interventions.

Heritage constraints – often cited across Oxford as barriers to change – have instead shaped the form of intervention. As Frances Lloyd, Director of Sustainability at Wadham College, explains: "Where there is a need to improve the thermal performance of our listed buildings and the works require listed building consent (LBC), we work closely with a heritage-skilled professional team and adopt a staged process involving early discussions with Conservation Officers before formally submitting for LBC." An example is a reroofing project in one of the College's oldest quads, where reclaimed stone slates were paired with hemp insulation and

secondary glazing. Such interventions illustrate how environmental improvement and preservation can be negotiated rather than treated as mutually exclusive.

Governance structures further differentiate Wadham's approach. Sustainability is integrated into the college's medium-term strategic planning and aligned with the University's 2035 targets, while participation in sector-wide networks enables the exchange of technical knowledge and operational practice. Targeted interventions – including boiler optimisation, thermal upgrades, renewable energy generation, LED replacement, and occupancy-sensing energy management – have produced measurable reductions in energy use in recent years.

Yet even at Wadham, institutional actors are conscious that the largest component of the college's environmental footprint lies in Scope Three emissions: supply chains, travel, and other indirect sources. Frances explains that while water and waste CO2 have been calculated and reduction targets set, the complexity of measuring embedded emissions in procurement and travel remains a persistent challenge for both planning and governance.

Though Wadham appears to excel in sustainability, its trajectory may reflect favourable institutional conditions rather than a universally replicable model. Financial capacity, governance continuity, and sustained strategic commitment shape the feasibility of such interventions. Within a collegiate system marked by uneven endowments and administrative priorities, the transferability of this approach remains uncertain. Wadham therefore illustrates not the resolution of Oxford's coordination problem, but its asymmetry: meaningful progress is achievable where capacity, stability, and prioritisation align, yet such alignment cannot be centrally assumed.

Limits of structural critique

Institutional analysis alone does not capture the full landscape of sustainability activity. Even in the absence of formal net zero targets or divestment commitments, most colleges participate in some form of environmental engagement. Initiatives such as Green Impact awards, Fairtrade campaigns, and awareness programmes are often dismissed as symbolic. However, symbolic action can shape behaviour and social norms in ways that aggregate beyond institutional boundaries.

Engagement programmes aimed at influencing consumption, travel, and daily practice correspond to a significant share of national emissions tied to household and consumer activity. Cultural change within collegiate communities may therefore constitute a meaningful – if indirect – dimension of environmental governance. While such measures cannot substitute for structural decarbonisation, neither are they negligible within a broader ecology of climate action.

Reconciling collegiate autonomy and collective responsibility

Oxford's sustainability architecture combines a strong central strategy with a highly decentralised collegiate system. This institutional arrangement has produced both notable progress and pronounced variation. Central governance frameworks articulate clear long-term targets and provide financial and technical resources. Colleges, in turn, pursue sustainability through a combination of strategic planning, operational optimisation, student-led initiatives, and informal networks of collaboration.

The question facing the University is not whether it should abandon autonomy or central ambition, but how the two can be reconciled more effectively. Formalised mechanisms for intercollegiate coordination, transparent reporting standards, and aligned incentives could reduce fragmentation without eroding collegiate discretion. At the level of student governance, durable forums for cross-college exchange and capacity building could strengthen institutional memory and sustain progress across leadership turnovers.

Ultimately, the University's challenge mirrors a broader organisational question in contemporary climate governance: how can complex institutions with distributed authority systems manage collective responsibilities that demand coherence and scale? The answer will shape not only Oxford's environmental performance, but its institutional credibility as an epicentre of research, education, and global engagement in a climate-constrained world.

Image credit: Emiliano Compassi, with permission.

Cherwell

HT26

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In this fifth Act of Hilary term, Prince Hamlet was struck by a poison arrow. Caught in a secret recording, his curious choice of words has merited no reaction whatsoever outside of Oxford, which I am sure is totally consistent with every other similar drama recently. Funny how that works.

Inside Frewin Court, hack relations resemble a binned episode of *Jeremy Kyle*. In CC, the Deputy Ambassador struggled to find the words to denounce Hamlet – clearly just an avid Shakespeare fan, I hear. Other hacks scrambled to find the emptiest words possible to describe their feelings on the matter. Really moving stuff.

With Hamlet's impromptu departure from hack world, and deliverance into the hands of dodgy Tory columnists (work in progress), a power vacuum appeared. At least for a split second, before HackGPT generated enough meetings to sweep up Hamlet's ghost train. Yet what of Resignation Queen, the natural inheritor of Hamlet's fortune?

As the saying goes, when the going gets tough, the tough... drop out. There is clearly far too much in a name. Resignation Queen has resigned before even submitting her nomination pack. Fearing a "certain side" attempting her cancellation with forgeries, she has withdrawn. The dearly departed leaves her slate of three guys and a half-eaten Freddo.

The Librarian's chair sat empty, with no hack literate enough to assume it. Crashouts A and B both waived with seconds to spare, leaving the books-and-words role in the hands of a mathematician, and ironically, Rule 33's Best Friend has been left in charge of finances.

Elsewhere, President Prada has deemed Minecraft Steve's ball theme cringe. She has replaced it with her own idea, the Book-Tok Ball, which is evidently ten times cooler. This ball is in fact so cool that it didn't even need to be planned. Alas, when forced to delay, why accept accountability when you can just blame Hamlet? This fell sergeant, death, is strict in his arrest.

Editorial



Arina Makarina Editor-in-Chief Hilary

This week is Maslenitsa, an Eastern European pagan holiday which involves eating pancakes for a week and burning a scarecrow made of old things. But pancake day will do as well, I suppose. Most importantly, despite the fact it's freezing as I am writing this and that it has been raining every day since the start of the year (or something ridiculous like that), it is a reminder that spring is coming. Maslenitsa is great, not just because you get to eat a number of blini (or pancakes, if you must) that verges on triple digits, but also because it is the time to let go of all the regrets, mistakes, and fights you had by metaphorically burning them down.

This edition also follows Valentine's day. The first half of my Valentine's day involved having back to back meetings with hacks followed by staring at my macroeconomics textbook struggling to form a thought. But, hey, working on breaking news on Valentine's day, especially involving the Union internal repeated backstabbing, is every girl's dream right? Despite all this, I like Valentine's day because it lets you take time to appreciate the people you love, whether it is your best friends, flat mates, or

partners. I am glad that I managed to spend the evening with the person I love, and it definitely helped to get my head out of the gross internal dealings of the Union.

Sunday in Maslenitsa is a day when you ask for forgiveness from your close ones, a great tradition that lets you leave all the grudges in the past and appreciate the people you love. I'd ask the people I love to forgive me for being constantly busy, annoying, and not providing enough attention at times. This print will come out the day after my mom's birthday. I am sorry for being argumentative at times and for not being attentive enough. I hope that you forgive me. I love you very much, and I am glad I will spend time with you over this weekend. In the meantime, this print is made with a lot of love, and I hope you enjoy it.



Beatrix Arnold Culture Deputy Editor

After months of being mocked for writing about tortoises and dating apps in Lifestyle, I'd hoped that switching to Culture might, at the very least, see a greater degree of gravitas in my journalistic output. I pictured myself churning out endless pieces on grandiose themes – "Whither art? Whither literature? Whither culture?" – all composed in the knowing 'dear reader' style that so often marks the superficially profound.

ARCHIVES

Societal Injustice

1988

As we all know, lawyers are honest, trustworthy, and straightforward people. So imagine, dear reader, my shock when I found a *Cherwell* emblazoned with the headline 'Law and Disorder', and my horror when I read the allegations from the Treasurer of the Law Society against its President.

Law students are thought to be bad at maths. Perhaps that was the President's only fault here. Yes, the Society managed to spend £800 on a champagne evening for 20 people. But maybe he missed a zero somewhere. Okay, a dinner at the Randolph went £250 over the limit, following a large injection of cash from the next term's budget. But that could have happened to anyone. Buying 20 opera tickets with Society money, then selling them all privately to friends? We've all been there, right?

Going hand in hand with financial fiddlesticks in his own favour, the President showed a healthy disrespect for democracy. He refused to distribute nomination forms and advertised the wrong date for the election. When confronted by the President-Elect, the President replied innocently: "You're sticking too much by the constitution."

The inquiry wasn't looking for a resignation: the President had already thrown in the towel, citing 'factionalism'. Of course, when you cancel the meetings designed to hold you to account, your officers are likely to be unanimous in their opposition.

It might appear from this that the President-Elect was a brave whistleblower calling attention to flagrant abuse of power. The only problem with that was the President-Elect's next move. He had decided to stand in the elections for a bastion of integrity and financial responsibility: the Oxford Union.

After all, culture is classic literature and art-house cinema. It's high-end paintings and orchestral music. Yet in what I found myself writing, the frames of reference I repeatedly fell back on were those of pop culture. Social media trends, TV shows, celebrities: these form the new lightning rods of our cultural consciousness.

There is so much discourse about the death of culture: there is no more value in art, streaming has ruined cinema, no one reads these days. It is, to be sure, very difficult to find an original thought in a sea of over-saturated, remixed, short form video content. Our attention spans have been whittled down and co-opted as a purchasable commodity (even this editorial feels too long – should I add an AI overview?). There is, I acknowledge, much to alarm us in all this.

But culture is not absolute; it's a nebulous concept, its parameters ever shifting. At its core, it covers the collective creative output of a society; its definition holds no moral weight. Love Island is culture. The Bad Bunny half-time show is culture. Even Fennell's "Wuthering Heights" (I hate to admit) is culture. Our idealised view of some kind of Golden Age of culture misleads us into thinking that age confers quality, creating a false dichotomy of then vs now. Culture is in constant evolution, and this is by no means a bad thing.

Culture has always encompassed a spectrum of quality, and of media. Each successive generation loves to indulge in doom-mongering, but there's no need for us to join in just yet. In the meantime, I'll keep writing about Pinterest and Letterboxd (with the occasional joke about the French).

PROFILES

‘From very early on you realise you that you’re treated as a second-class citizen’

Haleh Blake: A vessel for the voice of Iranians



GAVRIELLA EPSTEIN-LIGHTMAN

Haleh Blake was always told she was worth half a man. “As you grow up as a girl, from very early on, you realize that you’re treated as a second-class citizen”, she tells me.

Blake is a British-Iranian human rights activist who lived in Iran until she was 14. She is co-founder of United4Mahsa, a non-partisan social activist group which works to bring attention to human rights issues in Iran.

We begin our conversation by discussing her childhood in Iran. “In the morning at schools [sic], they make you chant, death to America, death to Israel, death to England”, Blake recalls. “Everything was controlled.” Musical instruments, TV shows, Disney movies – all were banned. Morality police patrolled busy areas, arresting women who did not comply with modesty rules. Blake’s first memory of the morality police was when her brother and aunt were arrested while walking together in the street and were questioned about their relationship.

Iran was once on a path towards progressive

expansion of women’s rights. From the 1930s to the 1970s, under the Pahlavi dynasty, Iranian society underwent a profound modernisation and secularisation even as the Pahlavis maintained a monopoly on political power. In 1963, women earned the right to vote. By the late 1970s, Iran had female politicians, judges and diplomats. Family Protection Laws in 1967 and 1975 increased the minimum age of marriage for women from 9 to 18 years old. But in 1979 these advances were sharply reversed. The Islamic Republic, headed by Ayatollah Khomeini, overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty in the 1979 Revolution and introduced Sharia Law, rewriting the role of women in Iranian society. Mandatory hijab laws were introduced and gender segregation returned in a new era of state-imposed ‘modesty’.

“This is so personal to me”, Blake says. “I’m a feminist, first and foremost, and the reason for that is because of what happened to me.” It is evident in her words that she carries with her the experiences of her past – the memories of being worth less as a woman, of being controlled in every aspect of life. It will never leave her. Now, it is these memories that propel her forward, urging her to speak out for those

who have no voice.

Blake was 14 when she moved to the UK with her family. “Coming to the UK, I was striving to be equal”, she says. Blake gained opportunities she would never have had in Iran. Having grown up under authoritarianism, Blake does not take for granted the life she leads. “All I want is for Iranians inside, Iranian girls, to have the same opportunities, because I’m essentially the same as them”, she says. “I was born there, and I just had an escape route. My parents didn’t want their daughter to grow up in Iran.”

“
I was born there, I just had an escape route”

It was in 2022 that Blake became a leading advocate for human rights in Iran. On 13th September of that year, Jina Mahsa Amini, a young Kurdish woman, was detained by the morality police for failing to wear the hijab properly. Eyewitnesses say that police pushed her into a van and beat her severely. She died three days later in hospital. A UN

fact-finding mission later found the Iranian state responsible for the physical violence that led to Amini’s death, which sparked a nationwide protest movement united under the slogan “Woman, Life, Freedom”. Iranian authorities responded with force, firing live ammunition and tear gas into crowds of largely peaceful protesters, leading to an estimated 550 deaths.

Blake was compelled to act. “What I realized is there’s a whole network of lobbyists for the regime that are paid from inside Iran, who are running the regime’s narrative globally”, she says. Indeed, the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) is widely viewed as a de facto ‘Iran lobby’, due to its endorsement of positions which align with the interests of the Islamic regime, including opposition to sanctions on Iran and objection to the designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation. To combat this misinformation and propaganda, Blake posted daily updates on the situation in Iran on social media.

Blake was among a group of protesters who decided to collaborate on social media to raise awareness collectively rather than individually. They

founded the advocacy group United4Mahsa. It aims to provide information on the Islamic Regime's repression of its people by providing English updates, translating reports that British-Iranians like Blake were receiving in Farsi from inside Iran. United4Mahsa quickly created its own press release to direct journalists to this information, sharing and verifying information for *The Guardian*, *The Times* and other news outlets.

Speaking to people inside Iran is a crucial aspect of Blake's activism. "I don't come from a monarchy-loving family. My family revolted against that", she says. Yet it quickly became evident to her that many Iranians were supportive of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, son of the deposed Shah. "If those inside Iran are telling me that they support him and they don't trust anyone else, then who am I to say anything else?" Indeed, the anti-regime protests which gained momentum last month saw widespread support for Pahlavi. Videos showed masses chanting "Javid Shah", meaning "Long live the king".

Blake emphasises that her role as an activist is not confined to promoting her own specific viewpoint. "I see myself now as a vessel", she emphasises. "All my personal views are on hold until Iran is free." This duty to faithfully represent the views of Iranians stems from Blake's conviction that she must use her platform to speak for the tens of millions who have no voice. She views herself as connecting Iranians to the rest of the world; personal preference is a privilege to be gained upon democracy's ascent.

Blake and I turn to the most recent anti-regime protests in Iran, which started on 28th December 2025. The protests originated in the bazaars – the commercial heart of Iran's economy – as the Iranian rial plunged to a new low against the US dollar. Demonstrations proliferated in Tehran and other cities across the country in ensuing days. The focus of the protests quickly became political, as demonstrators began chanting anti-government statements such as "death to the dictator". By 4th January, videos emerged showing security forces shooting indiscriminately at protesters. Four days later, the government imposed an extensive internet blackout which aimed to prevent details of the

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I want to get to the ballot boxes. I want to see that people have the choice to decide their own fate

regime's crackdown being beamed to the world.

The 8th and 9th January were two of the bloodiest days of the protests. The Crown Prince called for protests on both days and "millions came out". Intelligence suggests that at least 1.5 million people took to the streets in Tehran alone on 8th January. "The accounts I'm getting from people is that it was a sea of people", Blake tells me. "The first thing that everyone said is that everyone's out, we won." Yet any illusion of victory was shattered once the regime started shooting.

"Some of these stories I have been translating, honestly, I don't wish anyone to hear them", Blake says quietly. I sense that she shares with Iranians across the globe a feeling of helplessness, watching on from afar as the regime's oppression continues unabated. What remains in her power is remembrance: ensuring the stories of those killed are never forgotten.

Blake is keen to emphasise that the protests were not motivated *solely* by a concern for women's rights. It was not simply a feminist movement. "Men are very much also a victim of this regime", Blake observes. Ultimately, people were protesting for so much more than human rights *within* a theological framework: they were calling for an end to the Islamic regime

entirely. It is a regime viewed by many Iranians as an occupying ideological force which cannot be modified and requires dismantlement.

Amidst the 'Women, Life, Freedom' protests of 2022, Blake says she was "bombarded with requests" from western media for information. Many interviews were particularly interested in the feminist angle. Earlier this year, she received media requests during the height of the protests, but with their brutal suppression the media coverage quickly died down. Undeniably, the Western media has been restrained in its coverage of the government crackdown in Iran. Blake tells me she reached out to hundreds of journalistic contacts to implore them to cover the protests, only to be rejected. An expression of despair crosses her face as it's clear that she feels many have not truly recognised or supported the bravery and sacrifice of the Iranian protesters.

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Some of these stories I have been translating, honestly, I don't wish anyone to hear them

The regime's crackdown killed an estimated 36,500 people in just a few days. Why, then, has the political left been so conspicuously silent about these human rights abuses? Blake points out that many of those who were so outspoken about the humanitarian situation in Gaza were markedly muted about the Iranian regime's crackdown. Tom Fletcher, the UN Humanitarian Chief, for instance, has been silent on the killing of protesters in Iran. This, she says, is the latest iteration of a years-long trend of progressive figures turning a blind-eye to the regime's crimes. She recalls in 2016, when Jeremy Corbyn accepted £20,000 to appear on Press TV, the Iranian state broadcast network, a channel banned in the UK for its part in filming the detention and torture of an Iranian journalist.

"In the last few weeks, I have been trying to engage with left-wing political parties, and they're not engaging", Blake says, her head lowering in disappointment. She observes that the left sees the Islamic Republic as a victim of imperialism, oppressed by America and Israel. This worldview means that many "can no longer deem them as oppressors of their own people", she notes. "It comes from a place of privilege for some of these people, where they sit in a higher moral ground of ideologies, but actually don't understand what it's like to live under some of these dictatorships. They are so removed from the realities of the Middle East."

I end my conversation with Blake on an optimistic note: her vision of a post-regime Iran. Imagining what Iran could become brings a small source of comfort amidst the grief and trauma which lingers a month on from the government crackdown.

"My dream is to be able to work with Iran, work for Iran", Blake says. She envisions an Iran which is "prosperous and friendly to the world", with a thriving economy, burgeoning trade, and good relations with other countries. "I want to get to the ballot boxes. I want to see that people have the choice to decide their own fate", Blake emphasises. She does not care whether the outcome is constitutional monarchy or republicanism, only that a true democracy with genuine checks and balances emerges.

As my conversation with Blake draws to a close, I'm reminded of the principle guiding her activism: true solidarity is not about speaking *for* others, but rather ensuring they are heard. Her message is clear: listen to Iranians and stand with them in their fight for freedom. It is a promise she upholds in every social media post, every television appearance, and every protest. She will never give up.

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

OXFORD SPOTLIGHT



Larry Sanders spoke to Isaac Gavaghan about Trump, climate change, and moral conviction

Sitting in his kitchen in East Oxford, Larry Sanders, local Oxford politician and brother of Bernie Sanders, speaks with honesty and conviction. His powerful rhetorical ability is a refreshing contrast to the sound-bite politics that dominates Westminster today.

Nowhere is Sanders' honesty and conviction more clearly appreciable than on Trump. He is unequivocal: "Not that long into the future, people will look back on him as probably the most successful mass murderer, and he has good competition. He will outdo Hitler and Stalin, because the number of people who will die because climate change [action] was slowed down even further is incalculable, is in tens of millions, hundreds of millions perhaps."

What life experiences led to the development of this view? The answer begins in the Brooklyn Jewish community into which he was born in 1935. The Sanders' lost family in the Holocaust, and the shadow of the Nazi's atrocities influences Larry's politics. He describes how "even as a child I thought, 'I don't think the Germans are that different'". Reflecting on the rise of the far right in Europe and America, Sanders warns that "if we don't manage to have a decent successful political organisation in most countries, things will get viciously worse. It may turn out the Nazis were not the exception".

The controversial use of the Nazis as a comparison for Trump reveals the unflinching principles that are the throughline of Sanders' politics and personality. I ask where this fiery politics began. The excitement is still palpable in his voice as he recounts his sudden immersion into the politically charged student government at Brooklyn College. Yet tragedy was about to strike. The President of Brooklyn College, Harry Gideonse, planned to overhaul the student government to reduce political discussion within it. Sanders recounts: "I had seen my future, and he was taking it away!"

Gideonse planned to make the student government consist of a representative from each club at Brooklyn College; the haven of political discussion that had so excited the young Larry Sanders was disappearing. Sanders' response was typically principled and entirely ineffective. With his friend, Arthur Steier, Sanders prepared, published, and distributed a pamphlet entitled *Common Sense*. 74 years later, he is clearly still proud of the quality of the opening lines, which he quotes: "Student government at Brooklyn College is undemocratic in principle, deceptive in practise, and totally inconsistent with education in a

free society." Sanders draws out the story, a sparkle in his eye as he builds the tension.

After the pamphlets were handed out, Larry and Arthur were called into a "very high-powered meeting" with the dean, who had flown overnight from Chicago to Brooklyn because of the severity of the emergency. Larry remembers that also in the meeting were "a couple of very odd-looking people there who I'd never seen before. It turned out they were FBI". The FBI investigators asked the young Larry a question: "Do you realise in New Jersey there's a fascist group called Common Sense?" Larry cannot stop from joining my laughter at the punchline of his story.

Larry's friend Arthur continued to campaign against the lack of student representation until his battle against Brooklyn College President Harry Gideonse got him expelled, and, after a series of appeals, his case was dismissed by the US Supreme Court. The story, and Larry's attitude to it, serious and principled yet amused at the absurdity of politics, is an apt amalgam for his later career.

Sanders had always been guided by his belief in following moral principles, but the unbending nature of these principles has sometimes left him unable to enact the change he wished to see. As Sanders himself says of his time as a local Green Party politician in Oxford between 2005 and 2013, "in terms of success there's not a lot". Rather like Arthur Steier attempting to take on Brooklyn College, Sanders admits the limits of the principled approach to political action: "As a very minority party, you don't succeed a lot." However, Sanders does not reduce his experience down to a simple story of failure. He recalls his success when he worked with Conservative county councillors to expand the availability of continuing healthcare provision in Oxfordshire, bringing in millions of pounds for the elderly who were in need. Sanders is an unusually non-partisan politician – listening to him, it seems that he is explaining so that I can understand, rather than to try and convince me of the accuracy of one political viewpoint or another.

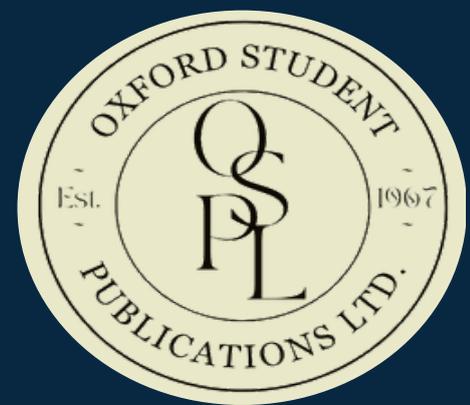
Before Sanders was a Green councillor on Oxfordshire County Council, he was a member of the Labour Party. Active in the Party in Oxford from the 1980s, Sanders quit Labour in 2001 over Tony Blair's shift to the right. It is hard not to see the parallels with today's political moment.

[Read the full article at cherwell.org](https://cherwell.org)
Image credit: Polina Kim for Cherwell.

Journalism WORKSHOP

Intrigued by student journalism but haven't found your way into it yet?

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Behind the scenes of Pecadillo Productions' 'Brew Hill'

Written and directed by Kilian King, 'Brew Hill' combines techno, tragedy, and medieval monologues

CHARLIE BAILEY

Oxford's student drama scene has plenty of original writing based on fractured relationships, but none quite this random. Kilian King's *Brew Hill* watches the deterioration of the romance between Nat (Trixie Smith) and Gordon (Jem Hunter), two broke former art students. Their romance is unusual in more ways than one: Gordon has an anxious condition which he comforts exclusively by checking flights to Berlin. The onstage action is interrupted by the presence of Flemish Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel (Hugh Linklater), who appears in Nat's 'visions'. As the play progresses, the lines between the couple's story and Bruegel's become blurred. *Cherwell* went behind the scenes to find out more about what audiences can expect.

I watched the latter half of a full run of the script, sat behind a busy stage management team (Matida Lambert and Lucy Davis) taking notes on scene changes. Though outside of the performance space, the actors were highly energised. At points they leapt out of their seats to mimic the onstage blocking. The scenes I watched were highly comic, with Hannah Wiseman (Kirsty) especially making the mini audience (myself and the crew) laugh. Audiences will be surprised by how easy the cast makes it to crack up at the word 'mmm' alone.

After this light-hearted run had finished, the rehearsal turned to a more serious scene, exploring Nat and Gordon's relationship. The jokes from before were laid aside and the cast became highly focused. The differences between Smith's joyful, chaotic portrayal of Nat and Hunter's quietly insufferable Gordon became evident. King's feedback was both emotion-based and vibes-based, asking for a "little bit more

deflation" in their tone, and later explaining one moment as "this is them when they've reached flow state".

The cast have been active participants in creating the final product. Co-producer Marlene Favata explained that the script was only finalised about two weeks ago. *Brew Hill* has been with King for much longer. He told *Cherwell* that the historical aspect of the plot first wedged itself in his head a year ago, as while visiting family in Berlin he resolved to turn his love of Bruegel's artistry into a play. The idea has now developed into an unusual mixture of techno and tragedy, with a side of medieval monologuing. Delving deeper into the metaphor behind the inclusion of Bruegel, King explained that, while the artist's paintings look bucolic at first glance, "there's a lot of darker, nastier stuff" revealed when one looks closer. This parallels the imperfections in the play's central relationship.

Viewers may wonder what breweries have to do with a Flemish painter. The answer is nothing, but King thought Bruegel and 'Brew Hill' sounded close enough to work a brewery plotline into the script. Once he realised they actually sound pretty different, he was undeterred: "I thought 'that can still work if the character is as dumb as me'."

Such self-deprecation doesn't hold given his cast's evident excitement towards his concept. There were points where cast members directed questions at King themselves, equally as curious to understand his starting intentions. On their reasons for getting involved, Smith cited her love of art, and Hunter told *Cherwell* he was "very interested in dreams". These themes are reflected in the set, which aims to capture the play's modern, naturalistic and historic, abstract elements. The back half of the stage holds the couple's flat, and the thrust arrangement allows the front part of the stage to incorporate a variety of settings.



In answer to the question of why King cast each actor, he mentioned the chemistry between Smith and Hunter as well as Linklater's strong monologue skills. The workshopping process seemed to have given the cast a charming closeness. Wiseman remembered lengthy discussions, one about Gordon's character for "four hours" which brought up "every relationship trauma". Much emphasis was placed on how much Hunter hates Gordon, while remaining convinced that he is a 'self-insert' from King. King was cautious to comment on whether Gordon bears his likeness.

The question of what the audience should leave thinking was difficult. The play can be interpreted in so many different ways. King joked that he'd like the audience to start their own breweries. Linklater wanted them to high-five (as one does after a good play). More seriously, King explained that the audience can reflect on the unease created when "one person wants to stay and one person

wants to go". For Favata, this reminds her of school friends left behind when she moved to Oxford. Wiseman also related it to friendship. Hunter's idea was most poignant: his takeaway from playing Gordon is that "just because you have good intentions doesn't mean you can't hurt someone".

I'd already been partially convinced by Assistant Director Roselynn Gumbo's promotional coasters (ingenious, given the play's focus on beer). Spending time with Pecadillo Productions made it even clearer that their work is something unique. The play is a nod to Renaissance artistry that stays on the right side of pretentious. In one word? After some scrambling, different cast members suggested "community", "escape", and "techno". Without a doubt, something good is brewing.

Image credit: William Schwabach with permission.

A day in The Sun: St John's Drama Society's 'Ink' in review

BEATRIX ARNOLD



Ink, written by James Graham and directed by Georgina Cooper with the St John's Drama Society, dramatises Rupert Murdoch's acquisition of *The Sun* in the 1960s, tracing its astonishing surge to unprecedented popularity. Perhaps it was an awareness of the slightly meta aspect of reviewing a play about journalism for a student publication that drew me to the auditorium in St John's – in any case, by the end of the evening, I was not exactly reassured in my choice of vocation.

The plot follows Larry Lamb, an editor filched from *The Mirror* by Rupert Murdoch in his self-aggrandising effort to reboot the failing tabloid, *The Sun*. Overcoming an overwhelming lack of funding, resources, and staff, the limited editorial team see *The Sun's* steady rise to success, and are in turn faced with the complications that form the inevitable corollary to this.

Rohan Joshi carried much of the show's vivacity in his role as Larry Lamb, careening over the stage

with an infectious nervous energy as he recruits and then manages his hastily-assembled team. The 'boardroom' scenes were a particular highlight, with the editor waxing increasingly passionate about the minutiae of newspaper formatting (an episode which, I'm sure, would have felt familiar to all *Cherwell* staff). Other standout performances included Inaya Chaudhry as an increasingly disenchanted Stephanie Rahn, portraying the model with just the right balance of elegant naivety. Zach Kapterian gave an endearingly awkward performance as Beverly, with effective comedic timing that consistently raised laughs.

Laurence Skinner portrayed an erratic Murdoch (for better or worse, there was no attempt at an Australian accent). The businessman was intimidating and unpredictable, sporadically erupting into outbursts of hysterical passion, or profane vituperations. He delivered his lines in an abrupt, barking manner, which conveyed the requisite impression of volatile intensity, but made it somewhat difficult to understand his enunciation.

The play's idiolect was characterised by a brand of dry and sarcastic Britishness, replete with lewd innuendos, passive aggressiveness, and awkward

pauses. It was gratifying to see copies of *Cherwell* being used liberally as props – although the criticism of its front page in lieu of *The Mirror* was less than flattering. The two levels of the auditorium's stage were put to inventive use: in a particularly memorable scene, the reactions of the rival papers to the news of *The Sun's* unexpected success were staged simultaneously on the separate layers. The sound design, although a little farcical at times, was impressively extensive, particularly the echoing effect in the church scene, transforming the otherwise simplistic *mise-en-scène* to reproduce the reverential sombreness of the projected location.

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The play's idiolect was characterised by a brand of dry and sarcastic Britishness”

The play as a whole felt unbalanced. The first half breezily follows the early stages of publication, leaning heavily into the comedic aspects, and drawing out each distinct character with energy and wit. In the second half, however, the scrappy underdog narrative was displaced by an abruptly

grim kidnapping story: rapid banter gave way to hushed anxiety, the pacing slowed down palpably, and the lighting became ominously tenebrous. Yet the established emotional valence of the preceding action meant the tonal shift was less than cohesive; the discrepancy was, overall, too drastic and too sudden for it to feel natural. Lamb morphs startlingly from enthusiastic and likeable, to sinister and brooding, playing up the contrast to such an extent that the two halves felt like different plays. As a result, it formed a slightly facile 'debate' structure, examining the tabloid first in a positive and then a negative light. Graham's scrupulous avoidance of sermonising on press ethics came across here as convoluted – it would have been more effective were he to have come down on one side or the other.

The darker scenes veered on the side of the melodramatic: red paint is splattered across a white canvas, leaving the stain lingering for the rest of the play in a less than subtle visual metaphor. A soundscape of ominous thunder formed the sonic counterpart to this, investing the drama with a Gothic exaggeration that sat in problematic juxtaposition with the naturalism of the first half.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

ART Art is an argument, so we should argue back

Maxim Vorobev discusses how the veneration of subjectivity frustrates artistic criticism

Oxford supposedly trains critical thinking skills. After all, what's the point of our degrees if we can't think? Yet all too often, this part of our mind switches off the moment people look at art. Unless you are an art historian or an artist yourself (neither of which I am) there is often a fear of critiquing art. After all, I lack an encyclopaedic knowledge of art movements, I do not exhibit work, nor do I (much to the annoyance of my *Cherwell* bosses) write much about art. It's easy to fall into the trap, especially when visiting a gallery, of letting it wash over you, walking from room to room just looking and moving on. Perhaps you'll read the occasional exhibition label, but that's as far as it goes.

All too often, how much we like artwork comes down to 'vibes', the initial gut-reactions we have, and then quickly negate by stating that surely it's all about taste. The primacy of subjectivity is common in contemporary expression. It is often at the centre of debates online sparked when modern and contemporary art are presented with their absurd prices, alongside commentary from various political accounts on its justification. Yet this reflexive reliance on taste all too often closes down reasonable critiques of art.

The fact that art challenges uncomfortable realities or assumptions does not mean it should not exist. Frequently, art that is difficult to understand is lampooned from the perspective that only precise artistic expression is permitted – this is not what I wish to argue. The fact of taste and its subjectivity should not make you scared to critique art. Don't let your supposed lack of qualifications limit your ability to talk about what is being argued in front of you. Yes, argued. Art

makes a barrage of criticisms about society and the way in which we live our lives. It must not become a lecture, so return fire.

This is most commonly found in critiques of the claims of historical art. Every tour or discussion of a work will always point out historical inconsistencies, propagandist efforts, or the financial interests at play, particularly with works such as the famous *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (1801). Yet, outside of obvious examples, art is often simply accepted. Our earlier default approach to art – gliding through rooms looking for something that catches the eye, or for a famous piece, and quickly moving on to the next one – keeps us outside of the actual art and the discussion it brings forth.

The little placards, or website descriptions, are not simply explaining the artwork, they are making claims about it. Artists are just like any other producer of work – they are not immune to waffle, flaws in execution, or deception. Artists can lie – don't trust them. Or, at the very least, they can deliver less than claimed.

“*Art makes a barrage of criticisms about the way in which we live our lives. It must not become a lecture, so return fire*”

Take, for example, Sara Sallam's recently exhibited work in the Pitt Rivers: *Suturing Wounds*. Her artwork takes facsimiles of late antique Egyptian burial textile fragments, stitches them together (“suturing” the wound of their



separation from their burials) into a tunic that is then worn by Sallam outside the V&A Museum storage where the original cloths are contained. She is photographed wearing them in an act of “embodied protest”.

These are the basic premises of her work. Yet, these claims should not be so readily accepted. To protest their use as a merely visual item, does stitching facsimiles of them together (irrespective of their unique and highly personal nature) into one photographable outfit actually liberate them? I would argue it merely places them back in the visual space. Is photographing them outside a storage site truly a protest? The blank space on the tunic seemingly emphasises her performance, rather than the imprisoned artefacts. Frankly, I don't believe that her claims were well executed in the artwork produced.

Certainly, to the stereotypical British politeness, critiquing art is difficult when the feelings of the artists are so entwined with the work. Much of contemporary art is not designed simply in relation to society, but as a broader expression of the artist's life and emotion. Emotional vulnerability is fundamental to the creation of powerful art. However, emotional vulnerability requires actual vulnerability, and that means actual challenges to what is expressed, rather than the mere praise of vulnerability.

Next time you visit an exhibition, or visit a gallery, don't just glide past it. Certainly art is highly dependent on taste, but that does not mean your taste should be kept quiet. Often you, and perhaps the artist, would benefit from some truly critical perspectives.

Image credit: CC0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Red soles, red flags: Celebrity takeover of high fashion FASHION

VICTORIA CORFIELD

Red is the main character of the stories that we tell.”

This is how the first ever Men's Creative Director for Christian Louboutin, Jaden Smith, describes his debut collection. Emerging red-faced (he literally painted his face and torso red) onto the catwalk at Paris Fashion Week, Smith's debut collection has been controversial to say the least. His appointment to the position last September caused waves in the fashion community for several reasons.

To begin with, it's the first time that Maison Christian Louboutin has ever had a Creative Director. Moreover, this role was bestowed to someone best known for starring in *The Karate Kid* and being the son of the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air. It's only natural that Smith's appointment would raise some serious questions about the extent to which nepotism and celebrity is superseding artistic talent in the fashion industry at present.

To simply discredit Smith on the basis of being a 'nepo-baby' is unproductive. After all, the fashion industry is one that has long been deemed dynasty-driven, with many of the most famous houses starting as family businesses and being passed down from fathers to sons, such as Hermès or Gucci. Nonetheless, in the last five years there has been a wave of high-profile and celebrity-adjacent, non-traditional appointments to creative director roles in

fashion. Whilst celebrity endorsements have long been common in fashion, what we are seeing now is different: this is not simply the role of a brand ambassador, rather Smith is a celebrity being granted sole creative direction of a brand.

One of the first, and perhaps the most significant example of this was Pharrell Williams' appointment as the Men's Creative Director of Louis Vuitton in February 2023, with a stated goal to bridge the gap between luxury fashion, music, and pop culture. While Williams had been involved in the fashion world since the early 2000s, founding his streetwear brand Billionaire Boys Club in 2003, and later a subsidiary line named ICECREAM in 2004, he notably lacks any formal design training.

Many would argue that this kind of formal education is no longer a requirement for creative direction – you can't be taught to have creative vision, so to speak, and streetwear designers frequently have less formal fashion education than traditional luxury designers, falling back on self-taught skills and hands-on experience. But while creativity certainly doesn't require a diploma, skill, or at the very least a basic knowledge of working with textiles, is essential to understanding craftsmanship in fashion. This is attested by the prevalence of the apprenticeship as a popular form of education in fashion. Consider Alexander McQueen and the emphasis the brand still places on quality tailoring, honouring the late designer's start as a tailor's apprentice on Savile Row.

While Jaden Smith does have previous experience in creative industries, ranging from collaborations with established brands, to his streetwear label MSFTSrep, his debut collection exposes his lack of hands-on experience and limited traditional design training.

His debut collection for Christian Louboutin, unveiled during Paris Fashion Week 2026, was met with mixed reactions. Louboutin contends that Smith's appointment was driven by a desire to inject a modern vision into the brand's men's line. Hence Smith, a multifaceted artist with previous experience in streetwear, seemed like just the person to embody this new brand direction.

“*Appointments like Smith's perpetuate the notion of fashion as a meaningless and shallow art form, exploited for status and lacking real artistic substance*”

However, rather than modern, his designs ranged from the uninspired (I would hardly call a red leather sneaker the height of innovation) to the frankly ridiculous, prompting a stream of memes expressing concern that Smith had skinned beloved *Sesame Street* character Elmo for a pair of £2,300 boots covered in vibrant red goat hair.

Another personal highlight of the collection was the harness-inspired bag, which looked less high-fashion and more like the result of a bizarre collaboration between Go Outdoors and Ann Summers, producing practical hiking attire for the BDSM enthusiasts among us. This is not to say that avant-garde design hasn't been subject to ridicule throughout history – if you're going to push the boundaries of any medium it is bound to be met with some resistance. But where Smith's 'Well Red' vision truly falls flat is that this 'boldness' feels hollow and superficial. The only thing that feels truly luxurious about the collection is the price tag.

Once the internet trolls have had their fun, we are left with the glaring realisation: a 27-year-old with limited experience can't handle the mammoth task of crafting collections across everything from Louboutin's iconic red-soled footwear, to leather goods and accessories. While fashion has never been a field fuelled by meritocracy, perhaps it's time that we stepped away from the pattern of blindly granting celebrities creative direction.

It's about time we started spotlighting creatives with actual experience and expertise in the field. Appointments like Smith's perpetuate the notion of fashion as a meaningless and shallow art form, one simply exploited for status and lacking any real artistic substance. If we are to save the status of fashion we need to shift the emphasis back toward the garments at the heart of this medium, not the creative directors.

Don't dismiss the silent film

Willow Jopp discusses how the use of silence can enhance the viewing experience

Not speaking does not necessarily mean having nothing to say. As much can be said with an image, movement, or glance as with a word. Since film is an inherently visual medium, the concept of “show, don't tell” is precisely what differentiates it from literature, which relies on the memory and the intrinsic and inefaceable meaning to be found in language.

Words are clumsy; they carry presupposed connotations and histories, and can allude to what is not present, while film images belong to a concrete “now”. The “silent” film (a film which uses silence as a filmmaking tool), then, can be seen as film in its purest form, and the form which requires the most attention, intuition, and interpretation from its audience.

Silent images do not explain themselves. We do not hear what Chow Mo-wan whispers into the wall at the end of *In the Mood for Love*, or what Bob Harris whispers to Charlotte at the end of *Lost in Translation*. Nor do we need to – images speak only for themselves. Silence allows for anything to be said; it contains infinite meaning.

It is when the film trusts its audience to come to their own conclusion, and to feel things without being told what to feel. Silence is therefore an act of restraint and respect – the refusal to translate feeling into language, when language would only limit it. It expresses the inexpressible, and acknowledges that language is sometimes inadequate.

The final shot of *Call Me by Your Name* depicts emotion expressed without articulation, and while *In the Mood for Love* or *Lost in Translation* could tell us anything, this shot

tells us everything. In silence, the concepts of joy, loss, and memory can coexist – concepts which existed before words and which can exist without them.

Silence makes you aware of what is usually silenced, or what we have subconsciously tuned out. The bomb detonation in *Oppenheimer* is silent in a way which makes you realise that your heart is racing, and the silence and isolation of space in *Gravity* reminds you of your own breathing, and your presence sat wordlessly in a cinema surrounded by people.

“*Through silence, cinema stops addressing the mind and instead speaks directly to the body*”

Through silence, cinema stops addressing the mind and instead speaks directly to the body. It is a tool which makes the spectator aware of their own presence, disrupting passive immersion. It also makes them aware of what is absent, what they have taken for granted: music, company, life. As a result, the elements which were once silenced by the speaker – expression, gesture, costume, set, music – gain a new expressive power. They now are equals with the speaker, sharing in silence. It is in the traditional silent film in which this idea finds its most concentrated expression.

The Last Laugh, an underrated gem from the German Expressionist movement, and a true ‘silent’ film because of its lack of intertitles, communicates everything to its audience

through body language, emotional and evocative facial expressions, camera movement, and framing. It is able to transcend language barriers and we can engage with it on a purely visual and instinctive level, as film is boiled down to its essence – images which create meaning through their construction and arrangement in sequence.

Because “silent” images rely on their filmic construction to create meaning, they demand our constant attention. Movies in recent years have been criticised for the “dumbing down” of scripts, such as through dialogue which overexplains, with the assumption that films are being watched by people who are also scrolling on their phones.

Silence allows for dedicated attentiveness, or even scrutiny, towards what is being shown to you, rather than passively accepting what you are being told. Films may therefore feel harder to understand, but it is the role of the filmmaker to risk being misunderstood in order to preserve the integrity of the image.

“Feelings are intense, words are trivial”, as the Depeche Mode song goes. Choosing silence, then, is to preserve the emotional complexity that language so often flattens. If silence redistributes responsibility from film to spectator, it also demands a different mode of viewing. Appreciate the pleasures, emotions, and pains which films can bring without words. Take back responsibility as a viewer, allow yourself to come to your own conclusions, engage emotionally with what you see. The world is noisy enough; people are ceaselessly telling us how we should be thinking and feeling. In times like this, the most meaningful form of escapism is to put on a film, and enjoy the silence.

FILM AND TV

What's Oxford watching?



Supernova

Hattie Anne recommends *Supernova* (2020): “*Supernova* is quietly devastating and cinematically gorgeous and never fails to make me sob from the get go. What always gets me the most is how deeply human it feels. There are no grand speeches about illness: just two people trying to hold on to each other as everything changes around them. The music also makes for a brilliant, if depressing, study playlist.”



His Girl Friday

Beatrix at Wadham recommends *His Girl Friday* (1940):

“Howard Hawks’ classic screwball is a quick-witted comedy with compelling performances from Rosalind Russell and the inimitable Cary Grant. A reminder of a bygone era when journalism was cool.”

Image credits: 'Supernova' and 'His Girl Friday' via imdb.com

‘Cathy naur’: Emerald Fennell’s ‘Wuthering Heights’

NORA MILES



You have a problem with *Saltdrop*? Shhh. Quiet luxury,” says Tina Fey during her 2024 appearance on the *Las Culturistas* podcast, “because what are you going to do when Emerald Fennell calls you about her next project... where Act Three takes a sexually violent turn and you have to pretend to be surprised by that turn?” Did “*Wuthering Heights*” turn out to be as predictably mindless and gratuitously pornographic as we expected? I paid £13.50 and sacrificed three hours of my life to give you the answer.

Although my Yorkshire identity and love of 19th-century novels make me inclined to defend

Emily Brontë with all my might, I really did give this film a chance. I told myself that an adaptation can stand apart from its source material. I let myself be reassured by the fact that “*Wuthering Heights*” was written in quotation marks in the film’s title, and that this meant that Fennell had a new vision to offer. I tried to withhold judgement until I could fully understand what that vision was. But after what felt like an eternity of trying and failing to find anything of merit in the film, it was the entire audience bursting into laughter as soon as the credits rolled which reassured me that a negative review was both acceptable and appropriate.

I just have no idea what Fennell was trying to achieve. The only question she succeeded in answering was: “What if *Wuthering Heights* looked like the batcave?” Monolith to boot, I’m not joking. It felt like Fennell’s adaptation was constantly trying to reinvent itself mid-movie. She spent half an hour

producing trite Netflix original romance, the next actually committing herself to depicting the complex emotion of the novel, then quickly slip into her comfort zone of camp surrealist slop, and as soon as you’d got used to that she pivoted towards slapstick comedy.

In this last iteration she had the most success; Martin Clunes and Alison Oliver deliver incredible comedic performances. The issue is that alongside them, Robbie and Elordi seem like they too are giving comic interpretations. Nate Jacobs pronouncing his love for Cathy in a half-arsed Yorkshire accent while Charli XCX plays in the background is, in fact, very funny. The only thing more hilarious is to remember mid-viewing that Jacob Elordi is currently nominated for an Oscar for *Frankenstein*. In “*Wuthering Heights*”, however, he was outacted by 16-year-old Owen Cooper. In his defence, I can’t help but feel like it was the script that hunkified one of literature’s most complex anti-heroes, not necessarily Elordi’s uninspired portrayal.

My two cents on the discourse surrounding the choice to cast Elordi: it is representative of a systematic disregard for any theme in the novel more complicated than the tragedy of Cathy and Heathcliff’s unconsummated affection (which is itself discarded, since their romance is very much consummated in the film). It goes without saying that Fennell’s defence of this casting as being simply the version of Heathcliff that she imagined in her head is incredibly problematic when the book in fact describes his (pointedly not-white) appearance.

Moreover, at the risk of weighing into 200-year-old discourse, even the tagline of “inspired by the greatest love story of all time” makes me think that

Fennell did not fully grasp the source material. As the decision to cast Elordi demonstrates, as well as the inexplicable decision to give Isabella Linton a masochist kink, she was not interested in producing a film that retained any of Brontë’s nuanced portrayal of vicious cycles of generational abuse. What the film ultimately illustrates is that Fennell read the book with her eyes closed and her hand down her underwear. The uninspired casting and screenplay follow suit.

I’m being incredibly harsh here and I recognise it. But if I’m disappointed with the film, it is not out of tribal loyalty to a dead author; it is because I mourn the thoughtful adaptation that could have been produced with Fennell’s budget. There were sections of the film that were exhilarating, landscapes that were beautifully depicted, and romantic tension that did feel buzzy, for lack of a better word. But the greatest tragedy of the film was that these glimpses of hope were quickly replaced with something altogether less interesting. Having said that, my theatre was packed, and no doubt Fennell’s polemic creative choices help to drive people to the cinema.

To return to Fey’s prophecy about the film, it doesn’t completely match the sensory nightmare of a period drama that Fennell ended up producing. If I were to be gracious, I would accept that almost two centuries after the novel’s release, society has sufficiently developed to allow her to insert some of the raw sexuality which the original could never be permitted to include. However, my instinct tells me that this kind of film should sound warning bells for a dire media-literacy crisis.

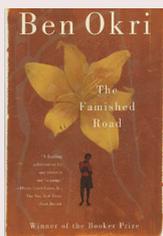
[Read the full article at cherwell.org](#)

Image credit: 'Wuthering Heights' via IMDb.



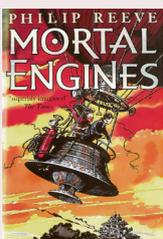
BOOKS

What's Oxford reading?



Ivett at Hilda's recommends *The Famished Road* (1991) by Ben Okri:

"One of the most stellar magical realist novels I have ever encountered. Azaro invites us into a liminal realm where the roads, pathway, and forests of Nigeria gain layers upon layers of meaning beyond their everyday familiarity."



Archie at Wadham recommends *Mortal Engines* (2001) by Philip Reeve:

"Is it a children's book I brought to uni [sic.] for a comfort re-read? Or is it a searing science fiction critique of militarism, accumulation, and the environmental consequences of industrialisation? I'll leave the reader to decide."

Image credits: "The Famished Road" and "Mortal Engines" via amazon.com

In defence of academic writing

BEN O'BRIEN

In my year out before my postgrad, I made the momentous decision to start writing fiction. I'd recently got back into reading novels, and thought becoming a novelist would be an ideal way to commit my name to posterity. I started with short stories. I wrote about a man who moved to France and discovered that French milk was tastier than English milk. I wrote about a man who hated growing up and so spent his days playing with his miniature toy truck, 'Little Truckie'. I wrote about a man who wanted nothing more than for his thesis supervisor to think he was the cleverest person in the world, though, in the end, said supervisor could never remember his name. Who said that fiction never strays far from autobiography? None of my stories got published. Shocking, I know.

I say I 'wrote stories', but what I really mean is that I spent my spare time vomiting a few paragraphs onto the page before losing all faith in it. Writing fiction turned out to be one of the hardest things I've ever done, a kind of self-inflicted torture rather than anything enjoyable. I began story after story, each time convinced that this would be the one that would make me famous, before running out of steam and lamenting the worthlessness of 'making stuff up'. Not long after starting postgrad, I gave up altogether. No Nobel Prize for me, then.

So naturally, I was ecstatic when I discovered that there's a ready-made explanation for my struggles: namely, Oxford. Susan Sontag, in an interview, once asserted that academic and creative writing are "worse than incompatible. I've seen academia destroy the best writers of my generation". Once you've heard this kind of damnation, you start

noticing it everywhere. Steven Pinker tells us that academic writing is antithetical to writing comprehensibly, let alone writing with style. Creative writing programmes are accused of being mere production lines for generic writers who go onto churn out generic novels – the very opposite of creativity. Humanities and arts degrees are being closed down everywhere in the name of preparing students for the 'real world', for which they supposedly must have a STEM degree. Given all this, it's difficult to escape the idea not only that a university education sucks all creativity out of you, but also that creativity itself is worthless.

"It's difficult to escape the idea that a university education sucks all creativity out of you"

I couldn't help being pleased with all this because, even if it turns out that the institution which was supposed to make me better at everything has in fact been depriving me of my chances of greatness, it's always nice to have something to blame for my own failings. In any case, there's something intuitive about the idea that academia drains creativity. It's surely not a complete coincidence that I put away Little Truckie altogether once I'd come back to Oxford after my year away. When there's so much pressure to do well in your degree, not to mention all the things that might get a job once you graduate, it's hard not to tell yourself that any pastimes that conceivably come under the heading of 'fun' must

be forgotten. And if creative writing is about putting 'thinking' aside and instead just letting the words flow, then in many ways a university education seems the opposite of that. After all, we are taught to define our terms at the outset, identify the hidden premise of the essay question, and signpost our argument every step of the way – in short, to 'think'.

But the more I've thought about it, I've come to think that, maybe just this once, we're being unfair on academia. For one thing, many highly-successful novelists have been academics. More to the point, the idea that academic and creative writing are incompatible misunderstands what they involve in the first place. It's easy to imagine that great writers, when they find the voice which makes them great, do so only because they put thinking to one side and let their true selves out onto the page. Yet take a look at how writers produce their best books and you'll see just as many abandoned starts and agonising over the futility of it all as I experienced in my own short-lived career as a novelist. In other words, just as much thought goes into creative writing as it does into my thesis – and probably a whole lot more.

With hindsight, a large part of why I found writing so hard was because I'd bought into the false dichotomy of academia versus creativity. I had the idea that writing fiction should be the opposite of a tutorial essay; when it turned out it wasn't, I gave up. Ironically, if I'd put more thought into it, I'd have gotten further. I haven't gone back to writing about Little Truckie yet, but I have a feeling that one day I will. It would be nice if it just flowed out onto the page without any thought, but I won't get too frustrated when that doesn't happen. And maybe I'll even do a paragraph plan before I begin. Just maybe.

'I don't like the idea of hope': An interview with Iya Kiva

SEÁN TIMON

Iya Kiva is an award-winning Ukrainian poet, originally from Donetsk. Since 2014, when war first came to her region, she has lived in displacement. When I speak to Iya, she is in Lviv, where funeral processions for soldiers pass daily and the wounded walk the streets. Iya's poetry explores her reality: her home, the texture of life under siege, the work of language in wartime.

Cherwell: Paint us a picture of your daily life.

Kiva: I live in Lviv, an old and beautiful city. By Ukrainian standards I am relatively safe, although from time to time there are attacks and civilians are killed and injured here. I live near a military hospital, so every day I see soldiers being treated there. War is not something far away, you see it every day, just by going out into the street.

I live near Lychakivska Street, where funeral motorcades for soldiers pass. They are accompanied by a mournful folk song that became popular after the Maidan in 2014. I can look out the window and see public transport stopping out of respect for the dead, people kneeling. When I go to Kyiv, the situation is different. I hear explosions, listen to the shaheds circling the house where I stay, see rockets or drones shot down. Sometimes the whole night passes like this. This is my reality, in which I write, translate, edit, read, and think. But this is only from the outside. My internal state is unstable. Since February 2022, I have not had enough intellectual energy for daily tasks, because the events in Ukraine mentally exhaust even those who live in the rear. Cities you love are under attack. People you know are killed or injured. Even when it happens to people I do not know, or cities where I have never been, I feel

the tragedy has happened to me. The Ukrainian community is now a big threatened body, of which I am part, and the pain in any part of this body is my pain too.

Cherwell: Your connection to Donetsk is evident in your work. What was its character before the war?

Kiva: Donetsk appeared on the wave of 19th century industrialisation. My region is a region of resources: coal, salt, limestone, ore for metallurgy. The city arose around a metallurgical plant and mines, with capital from Wales, Belgium, Italy, France. Donetsk is a steppe, a place of heavy human interference in nature. The factories and mines are in the city itself, not outside it. My childhood impressions are of difficult ecology. Waste heaps, artificial mountains, are scattered throughout the city. They can be pink, ashen, black. Roses are one of its symbols, like coal. There is an interesting dichotomy: hard work underground, which resembles hell, and beautiful roses on earth. Donetsk is also associated with Vasyl Stus, one of the most significant poets and dissidents in 20th century Ukrainian literature. His uncompromising, stubborn nature seems to me part of the Donetsk mentality. Inside me, Donetsk is an internal map: where I was born, studied, worked, and lived longest. A place that shaped me and was shaped by me.

Cherwell: In your writing, personal experience and war seem to merge. Do you construct that deliberately, or does it arise on its own?

Kiva: Poetry for me is a form of thinking, of exploring myself and the world. The war has been going on for almost eleven years now, and through poetry I explore the reality in which I live with, and in, war. With each year, it becomes harder to

remember what life in Ukraine was like before, what I was like before, 2014.

I need to enter into resonance with some experience, thought, or reality for a text to emerge. It's like caring for an orchid for a long time and one day seeing a flower on its stem. I intuitively explore sound and meaning in language rather than rationally constructing them. I find it more interesting not to know where a thought, metaphor, or line will take me. I would call it the logic of water in a river, which makes its way by mastering the landscape and moving according to its features. This seems close to the pulsation of language itself. Language that unfolds through metaphors cannot know in advance what its new metaphor will be. Poems are a tension between me and reality. I stretch like a string to extract sound from reality, to find out how it sounds.

Cherwell: Does your writing reveal something to you about yourself?

Kiva: Yes, poetry is a place, almost a physical space, where I am most myself, where I am

absolutely naked, defenceless, vulnerable. This vulnerability is also strength, because to expose myself through words requires courage. In poetry I am naked, but also as free as possible. Writing comes naturally to me, but reading poetry in public is still uncomfortable. I feel naked in the presence of other people. The main principle does not change: write in your own language, rely on personal experience, honestly listen to your time, and recreate its music in poetry. After 2022, a sense of responsibility was added. To the living and dead Ukrainians of many generations. Culture is a kind of flash drive for recovering identity, especially through language. I've become more attentive to what I can capture in poetry, not out of compulsion, but by re-adjusting the optics to see more value in the everyday. Like changing the lens on a camera, even though you're still the same photographer.

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

Image credit: Leleka Bila, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



Resilience, remembrance, and reflection

Ruaridh McEwen anticipates Lubomyr Melnyk's performance at Balliol College

On 23rd and 24th February, the Ukrainian composer and pianist, Lubomyr Melnyk, returns to Oxford for a performance at New Space, hosted by Balliol College Music Society. When Melnyk last performed in Oxford, in November 2025, audiences were left questioning what precisely they had just heard. A piano recital, certainly, but one that seemed to exceed the physical and sonic limits of the instrument itself. For Nathan Adlam, a Balliol mathematician and pianist who co-runs the society alongside Towa Matsuda, the concert marks the continuation of something far more personal than a visiting recital.

Melnyk's performance carries a deep significance. It marks the four-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine – a date etched into the memories of countless people. For Melnyk, the stage becomes more than a place of artistry; it becomes a space of remembrance, resilience, and reflection. The weight of the invasion's anniversary makes the performance important, not only for Melnyk, but also for the millions of Ukrainians he is representing. The event is also widely supported by the Oxford University Ukrainian society, who were fundamental in advert the last concert series in Michaelmas term.

Those who attended Melnyk's Oxford recital last year will have struggled to describe the performance, feeling less like a conventional piano concert and more like a complete immersion. The rapid unbroken streams of sound makes it hard to locate a central melody, with the music instead surrounding the listener. In an intimate venue such as the

New Space, that effect is likely to be intensified with the piano's resonance filling the room and collapsing the distance between performer and listener. Raphael Darley, a maths student studying at Balliol who attended last November's performance, described hearing "four voice lines, each having five textures".

Adlam told *Cherwell*: "I found him by accident during the lockdown and was instantly hooked." What began as private fascination developed into formal study; Melnyk has described Adlam as "the sole student to have taken him truly seriously". Adlam single-handedly organised Melnyk's Oxford debut last November, drawing on community support across the University to hear Melnyk's signature 'continuous music'.

“
The weight of the invasion's anniversary makes the performance important, not only for Melnyk, but also for the millions of Ukrainians he is representing

Melnyk is often described as an 'experimental' composer, but the term misleads as much as it clarifies. His 'continuous music' style is built on rapid, sustained streams of notes that create the impression of layered textures unfolding simultaneously. Yet, as Nathan is keen to stress, it is deeply rooted in Western classical harmony. "He absolutely adores Bach and Beethoven", Adlam explains. Rather than rupture with

tradition, Melnyk's work extends it, as a kind of operatic classicism.

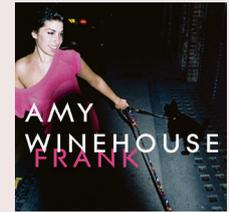
Much of the astonishment centres on the physical technique itself. Melnyk is recorded to be the fastest pianist in the world, with the ability to play an astonishing 19 notes per second. His style demands extraordinary stamina and speed, sustaining patterns at velocities that seem mechanically impossible. Even Adlam, who performs the repertoire as an amateur, is struck with disbelief. After Melnyk's last recital at Magdalen College, he recalls a midwife remaining half an hour afterwards, "so terribly worried" for his hands; she could not believe he did not suffer from repetitive strain injury.

There is also a larger story unfolding behind the scenes. A documentary, led by filmmaker Rupert Clague, explores Melnyk's music and life. The project, *The Peace Piano*, has reportedly secured Werner Herzog as executive producer. The performances this February also sit alongside a study from a research team from the University of Cambridge and Goldsmiths, University of London, which focuses on flow state. Attendees of the event are encouraged to complete the questionnaire which will investigate how live music leads to altered states of consciousness, framing Melnyk's performance as more than just music, but as a psychological experience.

Melnyk's return to Oxford represents more than just a repeat performance. His performance is significant to the memory of Ukraine on the anniversary of the Russian invasion, and it signals the growth of a small but intensely committed community around his work – one rooted, unexpectedly, in a Balliol maths student's lockdown discovery.

MUSIC

What's Oxford listening to?



Amy at John's recommends *Frank* (2003) by Amy Winehouse:

"This album is the perfect nostalgic antidote to the cold, dreary February mornings. 'In my bed' has become a recent favourite, with the flutes providing an ethereal contrast to Winehouse's classic R&B sound."



Esme at Keble recommends *Fancy Some More?* (2025) by PinkPantheress:

"A fun infusion of 2000s pop and 2020s beats."

Image credits: 'Frank' and 'Fancy Some More?' via Spotify.

WHAT'S ON

STAGE

Perudo
Burton Taylor Studio
24th-28th February

Noether
Mathematical Institute
25th-28th February

MUSIC

Keble Early Music Festival
Keble College
24th-28th February

FILM

If I Had Legs I'd Kick You
Phoenix Picturehouse
20th-26th February

She Taught Me Serendipity
Ultimate Picture Palace
24th February

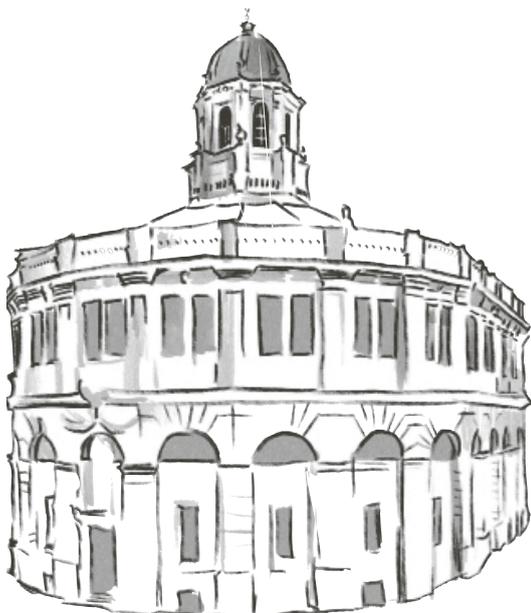
LITERATURE

The Writer's Process: Zine Fair
Weston Library
28th February, 11am-3pm

ART

PalFest Exhibition
Central Oxford
5th-8th March

Facing the Future
Kendrew Barn Gallery
20th-25th February



The Source Exploding Whale

It cut through your breath like fever
A foreign pulse grafting warmth across
Your skull like thunder from a silent movie
Eigengrau the vowels
Rimmed with red cling to your eyes
Like blisters and the plexus which had
Always seemed so steady
Draws its nets into a mettle string
Just a single stroke
And all the years purse into blossoms above you
your mothers cousins
Paint light with their black stomachs
hearts with end stopped pulses
In a rhythm that that makes
The whole ocean sting somewhere
The shimmering lips of your ribs
Mouth sunlight through the ceiling
Of a stranger's home

CONSTANCE CHAPMAN

A body of one's own: Medical mystery in the modern age

In an age of seemingly infinite medical information, why do we feel more estranged than ever from our own bodies?

BEATRIX ARNOLD

Recently, I found myself marooned in that most demoralising of places: the NHS waiting list. I was soon falling down the rabbit hole of catastrophisation, after succumbing to the inevitable temptation of googling my symptoms (it wasn't looking good). This isn't a unique experience: I have been misled by the internet more times than I'd be willing to admit, whether by WebMD, bloggers, or even influencers.

Our level of access to medical knowledge is unprecedented, and yet we have such little confidence in what to do with it. Magazines, TV shows, and social media are flooded with medical factoids, tips and tricks to cure this or improve that, all, of course, backed by the indisputable authority of unnamed 'experts'. In an age of information surplus, when our medical resources are at their most developed, we have been plunged into yet more ignorance, and, as a result, have become paradoxically estranged from our own anatomy. This inundation of medical information is, in part, a hangover from the COVID pandemic, a period where individual health turned into public data, and our bodies were regarded as political property. We accepted absolutes and read medical statistics like weather reports. In the search for transparency, we have come to treat our own bodies like detached entities, something to observe, find fault with, and upgrade accordingly.

Social media has, in turn, inaugurated an age of obsessive self-monitoring. It is no longer enough to feel healthy: What about your amino acid levels? Have you tried biohacking, nootropics, proteinmaxxing? Yet the algorithm privileges narrative value over factual accuracy: private

experiences are marketed as universal truths, bolstered by the unshakeable testimony of personal opinion. Everything is sensationalised, then distilled into a digestible, purchasable pill, a spoonful of sugar to help the misinformation go down. This is only exacerbated by pop culture. Shows like *Grey's Anatomy* have, for years, conditioned us to expect narrative clarity from medical issues; mysteries are solved within the run-time of an episode, obfuscating the complexity of the human body. In the digital age, the very definition of health has become subject to internal tensions, both public spectacle and private mystery.

Social media turns advice into prescription, information into imperatives, in a new catechism of wellness. Follow my ten-step cleansing programme, my intermittent fasting schedule, my physiotherapy routine, so you too can win at the game of health. Everything is relentlessly categorised as 'clean' or 'toxic', and ruthlessly moralised as 'good' or 'bad', transforming the indeterminate into commandments of lifestyle. This facade of moral certainty is fundamentally a marketing tool, a projected ideal of absolute truth that can only be achieved through consumption. We are composed not of any kind of corporeal reality, but of disparate parts imported from a facile Pinterest fantasy that smothers over the texture of life. In this environment, sanitising yourself becomes a sort of aesthetic project.

Women's health, in particular, has long been a site of epistemic confusion. The murkiness surrounding female reproduction that continues to colour public perception and even legislative policies is just another iteration of that perennial discomfort around the female body: the gendered nucleus of

hysteria, the site of the 'wandering womb'. Transparency around female anatomy still feels unachievable, when public discourse is couched in the language of avoidance. If ignorance is the default, we lose any metric to assess the truth value of any given claim: perhaps the pill will make me infertile, like that one woman on Instagram insisted, or maybe wearing a bra will give me breast cancer.

In this context, everything, from cellulite to menopause, is continuously pathologised, and even demonised. Women's health, lacking clear definition, is a taboo discussion, so that medical complaints are diminished and disregarded by those who represent themselves as authorities. This, of course, manifests itself most perniciously when it comes to reproductive rights, rooted in a kind of epistemic battle over who gets to dictate anatomical functions. Medical professionals, influencers, and politicians

alike take it upon themselves to interpret, and regulate, women's self-knowledge. The consultant who told me, at 13, to "stop this attention-seeking nonsense"; the ex-boyfriend who, at 17, hid my anti-depressants; and the male GP who, last year, delivered my life-altering test results in a curt 20-second phone call: such men assert an understanding of my body to which I myself could never lay claim. Voicing my own opinion feels like trespassing on restricted property.

I feel that I am ultimately subject to a body I do not understand, an unknowable and impersonal entity. I can't say if I've ever truly experienced a sense of comfortable embodiment, or whether that even has any meaning. In the end, the only thing I can affirm with any certainty is that it is never a good idea to google your symptoms at 3am.

Image credit: Michael Ancher, CCO, via Wikimedia Commons.



The (family) stories hiding in plain sight

AMY LAWSON

Like many people, I used to zone out a bit when my parents started talking about family history. Being the youngest child – by quite a large gap, since there are eight years between me and my older brother – a lot of the memories which seemed to belong to the 'family' as a collective happened before I was born. I would sit through conversations about "great grannies" and stare at grainy photographs of unknown people in unknown gardens, trying to piece together a sense of the past, a past which wasn't actually that distant – we're only talking three generations back – but one which felt like a foreign land all the same. As we delved further into the past, these figures became even more hazy.

My parents would consult the grandparents, oracular-style, on whether certain Welsh cousins were once or twice removed, on what so-and-so did during the war, and so the puzzle became increasingly difficult to muddle through. All the while, I wondered about the true relevance of any of it. None of my ancestors were noble, or otherwise appeared all that interesting. It was highly unlikely that, like Josh Widdecombe on *Who Do You Think You Are*, we'd accidentally discover we were connected to a figure of royalty, making the seemingly endless sifting through old parish records and censuses worth it.

Unsurprisingly, this was quite short-sighted of me, especially since I've always been interested in history. Admittedly, it was the kind that happened thousands of

years ago, often involving gripping tales of aristocratic betrayal, missing tombs, and undeciphered languages – I wasn't the only one to be taken in by that big shiny golden book about ancient Egypt in primary school. For such a long time, I was excited by the history that seemed to rewrite the rules of the world I was familiar with, one where ritual practice and superstition often dominated, of generals leading battle charges with plumed helmets and naval battles staged in amphitheatres. All those unsolved areas of history also seemed to beckon to me, promising a treasure trove of untold secrets and scandals around every corner.

I haven't stopped being interested in these things in the least. But something changed when I started thinking about what I wanted to study at university, and which areas of Classics appealed to me in particular. Studying ancient Epic poetry at A-Level – specifically the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* – had awoken me to a world, not only of mythological cities and their destruction, of sea-monsters, witches and oracles, but one in which the stories of regular people were just as poignant.

I'll always distinctly remember coming across a particular passage in the *Iliad* – in a scene which comes about as close as the ancients can get to a high-speed car chase, Achilles chases Hector around the city walls of Troy, intent on single-hand combat to the death, in revenge for killing his beloved Patroclus. It's an extremely tense episode, with everything seemingly hanging in the balance. Yet, suddenly the narrator

stops. He describes the two springs that feed the Scamander river, and the stone washing-troughs which the Trojan women used to clean their clothes in times of peace. My teacher was keen for us to focus on this particular vignette, and I came to understand that it was the heart-wrenching sense of the microcosm within the macro that was so powerful. The idea that, beyond a war which had ravaged a city and its communities for ten years, there was still the memory of people as they are everyday. Although fictional, I imagined those women talking amongst themselves, exchanging niceties whilst they scrubbed their robes. I'm sure there are plenty of Greek students who could make much more of this passage, and what is being done with the language, but for 17-year-old me, this changed everything.

The thing is, the stories that have the power to fascinate us the most are often the ones hiding in plain sight. I soon realised that, actually, it was the human aspect of *literae humaniores* (the fancy Latin name for 'Classics') which drew me in and, in a much more wholesome, sustaining way than battles or mythological creatures, kept me entertained. The humanity in history is one of the main (and many) reasons why I love my subject.

Incidentally, it was around this time that my grandma's memory started to decline, in a fairly rapid and alarming way. She had always been so diligent in researching the family history on my dad's side, compiling complex maps of family trees and storing away letters and photographs of people she had

never met. I didn't appreciate it fully when I was younger, how this is a task which requires an incredible amount of patience and willpower (particularly when you have an eight-year-old screeching, for the umpteenth time, "But who was Grandpa Norman?" in the background). Now, when I'm sifting through reading after reading – most recently, trying to make sense of the web of mythological characters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and how they relate to one another – I sometimes think of her, and her eagerness to pursue the past.

On a recent visit to their house, I was shown a photograph I'd never seen before. Extremely faded, it showed a group of seven people in a garden: two men, three women, and two younger girls seated at their feet. On the back, written in an elegant, watermark-flecked script, were their names, all with the last name 'Gascoyne'. Descendants of French Huguenots who had come to England fleeing persecution – specifically, to places like Spitalfields and Soho – the group, although somewhat uppity-seeming in their Edwardian clothing, were rather unassuming. Without the context of the lives they led – the two men were silk-weavers, I'm told, and had inherited their trade from their forefathers – it would be just another old photograph, just another list of unfamiliar names. But the stories which my grandma so carefully collated – even if she can't remember them herself now, or even who we are – make these remnants of family history so special, even if, to the outsider, the photo is just another artefact.

HOROSCOPES



Aries

Don't judge a book by its cover. Ask ChatGPT to summarise it instead.



Taurus

All publicity is good publicity, so start a rumour about yourself.



Gemini

Getting eight hours of sleep is sexy.



Cancer

Head to the Jazz Bar for some real fifth week blues.



Leo

Good things come to those who wait, and those who send a follow-up email.



Virgo

Buy that sweet treat. It will fix things, temporarily.

HOROSCOPES



Libra

WAKE UP. You're living in a simulation. WAKE UP.



Scorpio

Reply to that message. Seriously, it's been a week!



Sagittarius

The early bird gets the worm, but the late bird gets a lovely lie-in.



Capricorn

The next Aquarius you meet might just be the one.



Aquarius

Avoid Capricorns like the plague.



Pisces

Time is money. I guess you're broke on both counts.

Loaf actually: A guide to Oxford's best sourdough

SKYE-JANE INGRAM

Sourdough is a simple pleasure. A perfect loaf should have a chewy, light, tangy, and springy crumb, and is usually best when toasted with a thick layer of jam and a slab of butter or as a base for a sandwich. It reminds me of home where my family always keeps a loaf in the cupboard. On cold days it's a reliable and simple comfort – the kind that makes Hilary term feel a little less bleak. Here is the definitive ranking for next time you require some carbs to help you meet your essay deadline. For this ranking, assume a white or wholemeal sourdough unless stated otherwise.

8. Tesco

Tesco's sourdough is exactly what you'd imagine. Promisingly, their white loaves have a slightly golden crust. However, the loaf itself is disappointing and lacks the distinctive tangy taste of a good sourdough. The small number of bubbles suggest that the dough would benefit from further fermentation. However, for just £2.10, you get what you pay for.

7. Sainsbury's

Sainsbury's sourdough loaf is much of a muchness compared with Tesco's. Both loaves also usually become hard within a day or two. On the other hand, loaves that are slow-fermented do not go stale as quickly as the natural acids produced help the bread to maintain moisture. I ranked Sainsburys above Tesco purely for the fact they offer a sourdough baguette, which is really quite nice.

6. Jericho Cheese Company

This bread is good. It has a delicious crunch, and there are two locations to get your bread fix: Turl and Little Clarendon Street. However, due to its prohibitive price, it ranks sixth: a standard loaf will set you back £6.75. If I were to eat this bread regularly, I would be left unable to pay my battels. So, enjoy this one sparingly.

5. M&S

In my view, their 'Signature Sourdough' is the best loaf currently offered in a supermarket. With its lovely crust and substantial size, there is also the added bonus that they offer to cut the loaf for you in store. The crumb itself has a slightly savoury taste that would combine excellently with olives or cheese. These loaves also last quite a long time if stored well.

4. Ole and Steen

An excellent crumb. Ole and Steen have a few different options; my favorite is the Copenhagen sourdough which is crispy on the outside. However, they also offer an excellent

Rye loaf. If that wasn't enough, they also offer great deals: if you use the app, there is usually an offer of the week, which allows you to buy a loaf for up to 50% off.

3. Barefoot, Jericho

Barefoot has excellent surroundings and multiple locations. If you visit the branch on North Parade Avenue, you can see the bakers at work making the next day's loaves. The bread itself is soft, with a noticeable fermented taste. The only drawback is its density, though the designs on the loaves are some of the most creative I've seen, with their signature B the most common. Watch out for the pumpkin-inspired loaves during Halloween!

“ On cold days it's a reliable comfort – the kind that makes Hilary feel a little less bleak

2. GAIL's

The crumb is much lighter than many other loaves on the list, hence why I've awarded GAIL's second place. I would particularly recommend their seeded loaf, which has a distinctive sesame flavour, and is unlike any other loaf I have tried. This bread has a satisfying bite on the outside, and internally is both moreish and satisfying.

1. Hamblin, Covered Market

I had heard great things about Hamblin, and their signature 'country loaf' did not disappoint. I was initially sceptical of the dark – frankly rather burnt – looking crust. However, once I tasted it, I quickly realised I'd been missing out on the delights of this bread for nearly half of my degree. With generous helpings of jam, this is hard to beat. If you can't make it to their store in The Covered Market, there are also a few shops around Oxford that stock Hamblin loaves. If you don't fancy committing to a whole loaf, 2 North Parade offers half for only £2.50. I would urge anyone who is curious about sourdough to try this loaf.

So, perhaps you disagree with my ranking. Be my guest – sourdough, like most comforts, can be deeply personal. I have yet to actually make a loaf of sourdough myself, but I do know that this ranking proves that Oxford is blessed with exceptionally good bread. Though my purse is significantly lighter, and, like the dough, my standards have risen, I'd argue that it has been a worthwhile investment: now I can claim (tentatively) to have found the best sourdough in Oxford.

CHERWELL-FED

Oxford meets Hackney meets Mexico City: Bigfoot reviewed



NANCY ROBSON

This term, stumbling home from Indie Fridays or on a pilgrimage to Tops Pizza, I kept noticing this decidedly cool bar a little way down the Cowley Road. With fairy-lights strung across its wooden terrace and 'Bigfoot' scrawled in playful letters across the glass, it seemed slightly out of place in central Oxford. If anything, this kind of idiosyncratic concept and DIY glamour belongs firmly in Hackney. But I'm a Londoner at heart and, as if I hadn't already been tempted enough, discovering their £5 Margarita Wednesdays sealed the deal.

Even on a dreary evening in February, the place is buzzing, but we manage to squeeze ourselves around the last empty table outside. The crowd is young and surprisingly fashionable for Oxford – there are no college puffers or quarter-zips in sight. Inside, the Hackney theme continues: mid-century modern furniture, plants hanging from the ceiling, and beanies as a seemingly compulsory uniform. Oh, and plenty of Bigfoot memorabilia. But the place is saved from suffocating in its own coolness by its laid-back atmosphere, the friendly waiters and scruffy charm.

The menu itself is simple but mouthwatering: four different types of tacos, five varieties of margaritas, and a few eclectic beers on tap. They have a whole menu of chasers for these, but I'm here for the margaritas and won't let myself get distracted.

When it arrives, the watermelon margarita is just as pink as I'd hoped it would be. It tastes like summer and, more dangerously, not at all alcoholic. The standard one is a slightly classier affair, one that strikes the perfect balance between bracing and refreshing. These people know how to make a good

margarita.

In the name of journalistic integrity, we decide to order all of the tacos. For me, the standout of the night is the carnitas – the rich flavour of the braised pork perfectly balanced by the lighter notes of pickled red onion and pineapple. I'm less convinced by the chicken taco, the flavour of which is dominated by the chipotle mayo, but it is not unenjoyable.

I have (I hate to admit) a childish aversion to mushrooms, so I leave the oyster mushroom taco to the others, all of whom promptly inform me that it is their favourite. Apparently, the umami of the miso glazing and gentle spice of the jalapeno sauce is enough to make you forget you are eating an actual fungus.

The final taco is decidedly less familiar, but this is serious research we're undertaking, so it's cactus time. I'm more than pleasantly surprised to discover that cactus has the texture of pepper.

Menu

- Tacos: £2.80 each
- Classic margarita: £8.50
- Watermelon margarita: £10
- (Deals available on Tuesdays and Wednesdays)

98 Cowley Road, OX4 1JE

If it has a distinctive flavour, it's masked behind the cheese, jalapenos, and salsa: a match made in heaven. The tacos are definitely on the smaller side, and by the time you've eaten an entire meal's worth, the cost does begin to mount up. But if you want to unwind, drink some filthily good margaritas and feel like you've escaped Oxford for a few hours, then Bigfoot might be the place for you.

Image credit: Eoin Martin with permission.

AGONY AUNT

I have been seeing someone pretty regularly since 0th week of Hilary. I think it's fair to say I think about them every minute of every day. The logical solution is to confide my feelings to this person. Can someone handle being loved so quickly?

Sincerely,
Emotionally paralysed third-year

Dear Emotionally paralysed third-year,

I think it's safe to say that you're experiencing some powerful feelings. This can be both extremely exciting and overwhelming. It's natural to think about someone constantly when your feelings are so strong. What's important to recognise is that they are real and valid, no matter the time frame. Whilst you will be taking a risk in sharing how you feel, being honest about your emotions doesn't have to mean overwhelming the other person; it can be done gently and with respect for their response. It's also important to prepare yourself for all possible outcomes. This can be painful, but it's part of opening yourself up to love. This Agony Aunt would like to believe that your partner would be brave enough to accept your feelings if you are brave enough to share them, but this doesn't mean they should feel rushed into a forced reciprocity. Try to stay grounded and give yourself, and them, time to understand these emotions fully. Love is a process, and moving at a pace that feels right for both of you will be key.

Lots of love,
Agony Aunt

Gen Z and Oxford: Nihilism inside the bubble

Natalie Conboy reflects on the trend of nihilism, climate guilt, and the quiet paralysis of life in the Oxford bubble

We all know that Oxford can feel like a bubble. Every day brings new challenges and new deadlines, to the extent that a week can pass in an instant and there is just no time to peek outside of the blinkered existence of tutorials and the occasional pub trip. But this tunnel vision can become restrictive and even self-perpetuating. The hourly sunny notifications I receive from the BBC on the state of the world have become more and more easy to force to the back of my mind as I hurry from the Schwarzman to the Taylorian and back under a perpetually grey but evidently not-on-fire sky. It's very easy, and almost necessary, to be an ostrich and stick your head in the sand, if it means I am able to desperately string ideas together to finish my third essay in a week.

“
By removing myself from the endless feed of bad news, I've started to focus on what can be done, rather than what can't

The rise in nihilism (or 'Doomerism') in Gen Z is nothing new. In nihilism, everything is temporary by definition. If the world is going to burn in a few years, then we might as well enjoy ourselves instead of worrying about the next Prime Minister or saving for a house, right? If you have to work, it can feel more rational to spend the money you earn on something you'll actually enjoy now, rather than saving it for a rainy day – especially when it feels like it's been raining since 2008. Whether it manifests in politics, the economy, or the environment, this turn towards nihilistic thinking in general indicates a growing detachment from long-term planning, rooted in the belief that caring too much about the future may no longer be worthwhile.

It doesn't help that Gen Z is so often told it must save the world from itself. During Freshers' Week, we were informed that we would contribute to the totality of the world's knowledge, as if this fate were already mapped out for us: “Don't worry, privileged student, you've been accepted into a

Hub Of Learning and can now be an upstanding, caring citizen by default.” I remember telling my mother (Professor of Responsible Leadership, Improving Diversity, and Generally Making the World a Better Place) what I wanted to study, only to be asked what was useful about it.

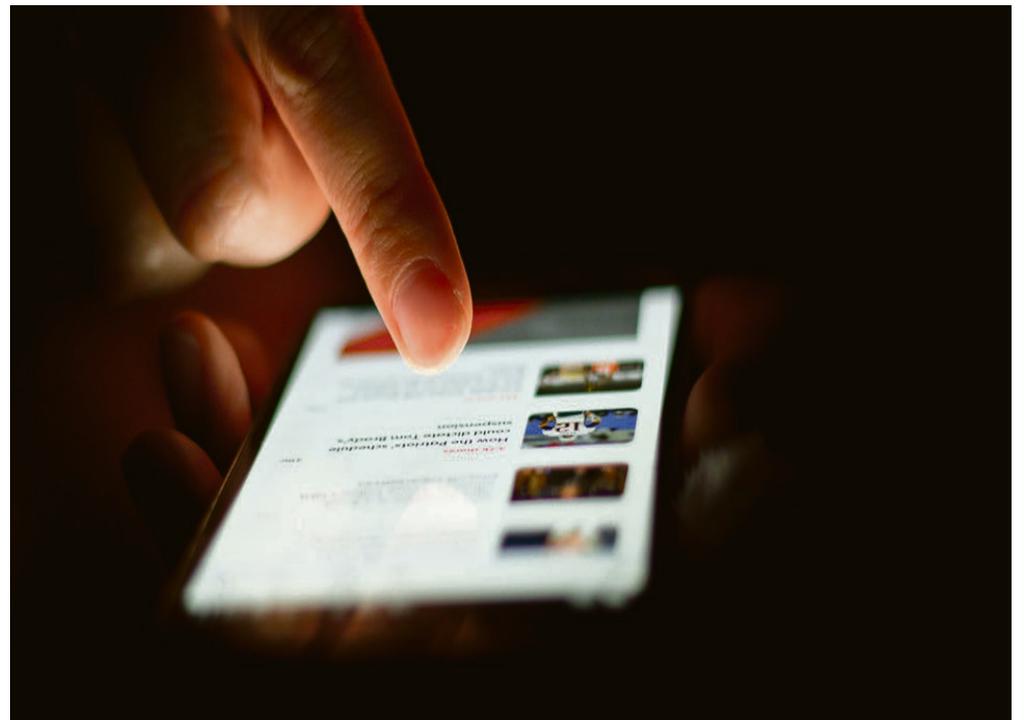
“
Reminders of how badly we need change are constant

The uncomfortable answer is that it isn't. When the planet already feels like it's in ruins, emerging with a Masters in some niche corner of French literary history does seem like a somewhat absurd endeavour. The guilt of not contributing towards a better future with each passing moment can lead to inertia: not feeling able or willing to do small things because I can't single handedly save the world. This is even more prevalent in Oxford's culture, where it can feel like nothing is of value unless perfect, especially if I'm already battling twelve essays a term.

In this light, an impulse towards nihilistic thinking makes sense. Except I'm not enjoying the present moment so much as wallowing in perpetual existential crises about how it's possible for the older generations to have put us in this position, knowing the answer, knowing we're just as bad, and resenting them for it anyway.

But if I've convinced myself of the futility of any action, am I let off the hook? Is my existential dismissal therefore just an easy way out, contributing to this paralysis? It is, after all, much easier to relax by doomscrolling and online shopping when you're not worried about the environmental impact.

Nonetheless, reminders of how badly we need change are constant, even as I brush them away to deliver a well-formed argument about the far-right at a formal, clinging to a semblance of sanity. That is, until my friend in Oregon asks me, joking-not-joking, if she could marry me for an Irish passport. It's becoming increasingly difficult to ignore another headline about short-sighted political decisions as I'm distracted by a notification that fossil fuels weren't mentioned in



the last COP30 summit during my essay crisis in the RadCam, all the while feeling morally superior for using Ecosia instead of Google. There's only so far performative sustainability can go in relieving climate guilt.

But the only way to escape fearing the crushing inadequacy of anything you could potentially do is to start doing it. And as much as I would love to be able to give up on everything outside my control, as many wellness podcasts would advise me, my sense of privileged moral guilt is too strong for me to not have a conscience, so ignoring everything is, unfortunately, impossible. This is what worries people looking at Gen Z nihilism from the outside: if nothing matters, what is the motivation to do good in society?

The answer lies in the present moment. Nihilism as an all-encompassing worldview can start to feel oppressive, but by taking myself away

from the endless feed of bad news, I've started to notice what can be done, rather than what can't. Even with Oxford's busy schedule, meaning can be found in something as simple as finding joy shopping in Oxunboxed, the student-run refill shop, or joining your college's Climate Society. By paying attention to the small things, we can discover what does matter. If life in general is meaningless, we are, at least, free to try to make the present moment as good as we can, and to inspire others to do the same.

So, I'll make my money count. I'll go to a protest. I'll vote for a Green Party councillor. This year I've decided that it's about time I start acting like the integral part of this country's future that the University tells me I am. Because if every member of Gen Z who cares in silence starts shouting about it, we might actually get somewhere.

Image credit: Japanexpertenase, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

OXFORD TINY LOVE STORIES

It felt as though love arrived in instalments, a fleeting glance here, a stolen eye contact there. My heart skipped a beat when I saw him standing before me, waiting to be seated at the formal in Christ Church last Sunday.

We were this close to sitting face to face, but fate, as ever, was inexplicable. Throughout the meal, I kept turning around just to catch his dimpled smile.

I don't wish to romanticise my beloved just yet, but there is little else that lingers from that evening. The dessert was forgettable, but he was there, and somehow, that is enough to cherish Christ Church and its dining hall.

May, St Antony's College

CHERPSE.

Oxford's blind dating

An evening at the Jericho Tavern.
Can old acquaintances turn into something more?



Girl about campus

First impressions?
They seemed really nice and friendly! The chat flowed easily.

Did it meet your expectations?
Yes! It was a lot of fun!

What was the highlight?
When we went to the Independent Cafe after the walk!

What was the most embarrassing moment?
There honestly wasn't one! Sorry to disappoint...

Describe the date in three words:
Cute, fun, and of course: chilly.

Is there a second date on the cards?
I think so!

Definitely Not A Furry

First impressions?
That I'd actually seen her around before – we do the same subject and I recognised her from various lectures!

Did it meet your expectations?
I was worried that a blind date would be awkward or boring, but I actually really enjoyed myself, so yes, definitely!

What was the highlight?
We continued in the Independent Cafe, which was nice. I also learnt that someone told her that everyone at Wadham, my college, is a furry, which was amusing to hear. (I am not a furry. No shame to furries).

What was the most embarrassing moment?
I happened to be at a farm before the date and was worried about smelling like farm, though she thankfully said I didn't...

Describe the date in three words:
Warm, relaxed, sweet.

Is there a second date on the cards?
Hopefully?

SPORT

Away day blues: The impact of unfamiliar territory

Ben Murphy investigates the effect travel afar has on Oxford's sporting results

BEN MURPHY

Year after year, Cambridge reaps little reward for the surly teams that travel there: no matter the sport, the result is often the same. An away day fixture is always a difficult one – any sports fan knows that. A hostile atmosphere, a longer journey, and an unfamiliar pitch or court all combine to trouble the travelling team. These challenges are further amplified when pitted against a rival. With Varsity season fully underway, conquering the complications of an away day is key to a successful display of Oxford's sporting superiority.

Does the answer lie with the fans? In football, there is a common claim that the supporters are the extra man, making the game easier for the home team. For example, Newcastle United's stadium, St James' Park, is an away fixture notorious for its intimidating atmosphere. There, away fans are shoed into a high-up corner far from the pitch, making their voices difficult to hear. Their local rivals, Sunderland, are unbeaten at home so far this season, with the Stadium of Light something of 'a fortress'; yet they reside in a modest tenth place due to their away day struggles. Fans do matter. A former Blues captain for Oxford University Athletics told *Cherwell* of their experience running the 200m at home: "When I made it to the home straight, it hit me. Wow. The crowd pushed me that little bit harder to win". Perhaps even a small crowd does make a difference on a warm summer's day: OUAC won handily in the home fixture of Varsity in 2024, yet were beaten away in 2025.

However, replicating the atmosphere of a professional football stadium, lined with thousands of fans, is a task that even the fiercest and most anticipated Varsity matches would struggle to achieve. How is it then that these (relatively) lesser-attended events are still dictated by location? Familiarity must play a role. To refer to football



once again, a recent ban on artificial pitches will be implemented from the 2026/27 season in the Scottish Premier League. No doubt this is to force a level of parity, preventing teams from gaining an unfair advantage playing at home. Manchester City recently lost to the (relative) minnow Norwegian team Bodo/Glimt – who play on an artificial pitch – in the Champions League. The differences between Oxford and Cambridge pitches are not as stark as those of artificial versus natural.

“*Conquering the complications of an away day is key*”

Athletes are undoubtedly more familiar with the pitches they train on and compete upon regularly.

What about when neither side is at home? The matches are neither a 'gimme' nor an uphill struggle. They are even. Rugby Varsity is held at

the StoneX Stadium, home of Premier League side the Saracens. Not only is this a neutral venue, but it is also almost equal in distance from Oxford and Cambridge: London. Neutral venues offer the clearest test of skill and pure ability in sport: neither team is familiar with the pitch, and both are allocated an equal number of seats for fans.

For those matches that do not have a neutral venue, the location of Varsity alternates between the two cities every year. As a result, too many talented Oxford athletes – on one or three year courses – are forced to play away from home for the majority of their university careers. This cruelty is furthered by the criteria some sports impose for obtaining the famed Oxford Blue award: it is a requirement of Men's Basketball, for example, to win the Varsity match in order for the athletes to receive a full blue rather than a half-blue.

Circumstances of Varsity away matches can differ vastly – a former University basketball Blues captain told *Cherwell*: "Cambridge took us to eat at a burger place, whilst we hosted them at a formal dinner." The captain was not impressed by the quality of the burger place either. Psychological warfare on show? Oxford Women's Basketball won the most recent Varsity home fixture, and lost the away fixture. All of these factors add up: some athletes have an understated disadvantage in pursuing their Oxford sporting dream.

Even with this rather bleak report, hope is not lost. Everybody knows that an underdog story is the best in sport: Buster Douglas vs Mike Tyson, Leicester's 2015/16 Premier League title win, the 1980 'Miracle on Ice'. To those brave soldiers advancing to the frontlines of Cambridge this year, bring a packed lunch and some of your mates along with you, and know that all of Oxford supports you in your endeavours.

Image credits: Petr Broz, CC by-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons (above); Peter Griffin, CC0 via Publicdomainpictures (left).



UPCOMING

Rugby

The Varsity Matches
Saturday 28th February
StoneX Stadium
Captain: Jack Hamilton

Swimming

Saturday 28th February
Iffley
Captains: Jake Hudson and
Molly Aspinall

Lacrosse

Saturday 28th February
Uni Parks
President: Kate Savage

BUCS SUCCESS

Oxford Athletics sustain indoor dominance

Three days of BUCS Indoor action saw a spectacular victory from undergraduate student Jack Organ in the 800m, with a time of 1:51.29. Organ's victory sustains Oxford's middle-distance dominance, Charlotte Buckley having taken 1st place in the 800m last year. Fantastic performances across the weekend saw Alex Gruen finish 4th in the 3000m final and Natalie Elizabeth Groves take 5th place in the 400m final. Alongside this, Harry Wilson made the semi-finals for the 800m, clocking a time of 1:55.69.

LOCAL HEARTBREAK

Sunderland eke out a win over Oxford United

Oxford lost narrowly to Premier League side Sunderland in the fifth round of the FA Cup at Kassam Stadium last Sunday. Under new head coach Matt Bloomfield, Oxford managed a spirited performance, with the only goal of the game coming from a first-half penalty by Habib Diarra. The Yellows could not do it on a cold rainy afternoon in OX4 and still sit one place off the bottom of the Championship, but can at least comfort themselves with a promising showing from lively new signing Jeon Jin-Woo.

OUTSIDE OXFORD

Joy and heartbreak at Milano Cortina 2026

In a shock upset for world-record holder and self-styled "Quad God" Ilia Malinin, the 21-year-old American finished eighth in the men's figure skating singles event after being heavily favoured to win it all. In stark contrast, Great Britain have smashed their previous gold medal record (one) at a Winter Games, having already won three golds, with skeleton racer Matt Weston becoming the most decorated man in British Winter Olympics history.

LEAGUE LAMENT'S

MGA misery at Hughdam heroics

Pressure continues to mount on the Anne's college Football team, as a much-anticipated league match against the OUAC Sabbatical Officer's college team was played on a cold Thursday morning. Anne's conceded two goals early on, with momentum swinging to and fro in a game where the kit colours of both teams ended up a muddy brown. Having mounted a comeback to make it 2-2, thanks to a fantastic Len Yamabe finish, the Mint Green Army was pushing for a dramatic late winner, only to have their hopes shattered by a rapid Hughdam break from an Anne's corner. Against the run of play, Anne's could only watch on as the Hughdam striker slotted it past the keeper, sending the home team into raptures.

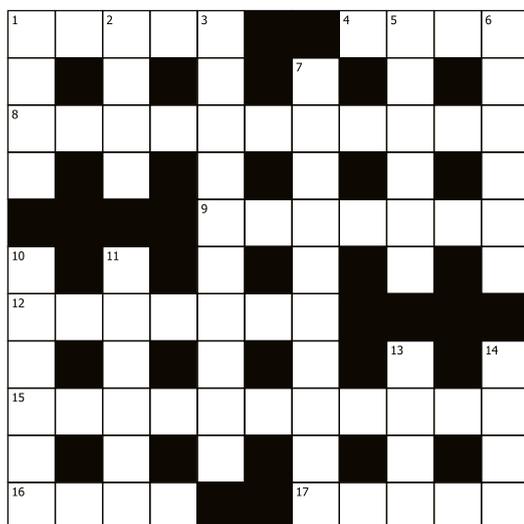
Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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

Puzzles

Capital Letters by JEM BENNETT

Editor's note: Even if you've filled in all the other words, 2D is quite hard. Good luck with the coin toss!



ACROSS:

- 1) This could be down, almost aching, out of sorts! (5)
- 4) Party animal (4)
- 8) In Belgian reservoir, gay actress (5, 6)
- 9) Steal, secure, and profit (7)
- 12) Excitement about toenail (7)
- 15) Titan abased, harassed, and in trouble (2, 1, 3, 5)
- 16) Prince from Jerusalem / Iran (4)
- 17) Expire encased in gold – farewell (5)

DOWN:

- 1) 23°08'N 82°21'W (4)
- 2) 33°18'N 44°21'E (4)
- 3) 40°23'N 49°52'E (10)
- 5) 04°22'N 18°35'E (3, 1, 1, 1)
- 6) 06°48'N 58°09'W (6)
- 7) 06°55'N 158°11'E (10)
- 10) 17°15'N 88°46'W (6)
- 11) 13°57'S 33°42'E (6)
- 13) 12°38'N 08°00'W (4)
- 14) 12°03'S 77°02'W (4)

A message from the Editor:

As you can see, we've gone quite all-in on the crosswords this week. Do give them a go; there's a healthy mix of different types and I'm sure you'll like at least one of them.

Fear not, logic puzzles and the like will return in Week 7, but fair warning: we're also cooking up a frankly nightmarish Cryptic. Get practising!

To submit puzzles to Cherwell, please email puzzlescherwell@gmail.com. We can't accept every submission, but we'll take a look!

US-Style Crossword by JADEN LEE

ACROSS:

- 1) Shakespeare, familiarly
- 5) Measure of fuel efficiency
- 8) Cooking method for siu mai, e.g.
- 13) What lines between connected fields do
- 14) Underground rock band?
- 15) 1957 Jimmy Dorsey hit, or exclamation upon receiving underdone steak
- 16) * Drone controller?
- 18) Noah's landing zone
- 19) Texting abbreviation
- 20) Tiebreakers
- 21) Frames
- 22) Like a quick walk
- 24) DC Capitol fig.
- 25) Label for a femme
- 28) Question after a wild night out

DOWN:

- 33) Famous last words?
- 34) "Understood"
- 35) Move, to a realtor
- 36) Secure with a belt
- 37) Penny-pinching sort
- 38) Father of X Æ A-12
- 39) Festive season
- 40) Brutish fantasy creatures
- 41) Running the show
- 42) * Puccini's Suor _____
- 44) High-quality grades of black tea
- 45) Slightly larger versions of 59As
- 46) Gas or water carriers
- 48) It generates interest
- 51) Tay-tay album
- 52) To's counterpart
- 55) Like most Nintendo games
- 56) * A dreamy time?
- 58) What Bolt often did to

his competitors

- 59) Type of small battery
- 60) Biblical brother of Jacob
- 61) What one's hands do in prayer
- 62) US government ID digits
- 63) Baking amts.

DOWN:

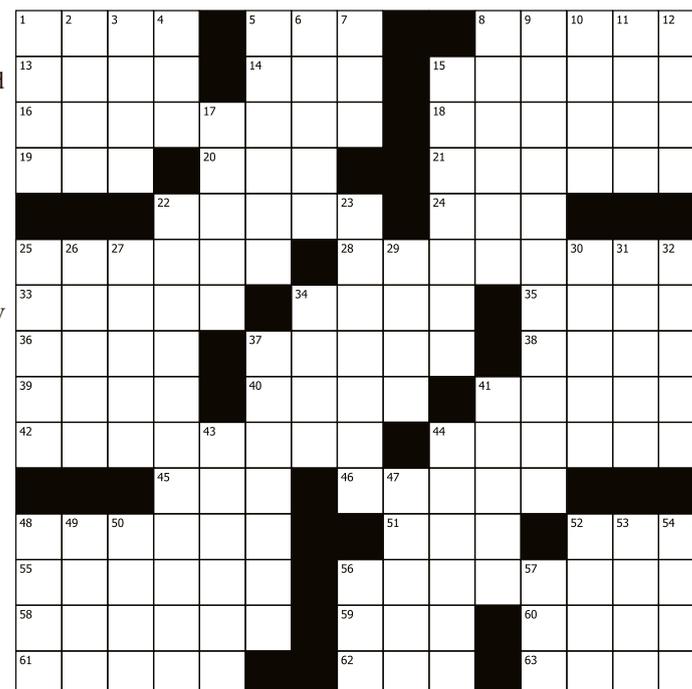
- 1) 4th of July mainstays
- 2) Any of 31 PMs, to Oxford
- 3) Laments
- 4) Maker of beats
- 5) Link to the underworld
- 6) Gegen_____ (football tactic)
- 7) "Good golly!"
- 8) See it, say it, _____
- 9) * Events that go off the rails

10) Appropriate name for a sandwich lover

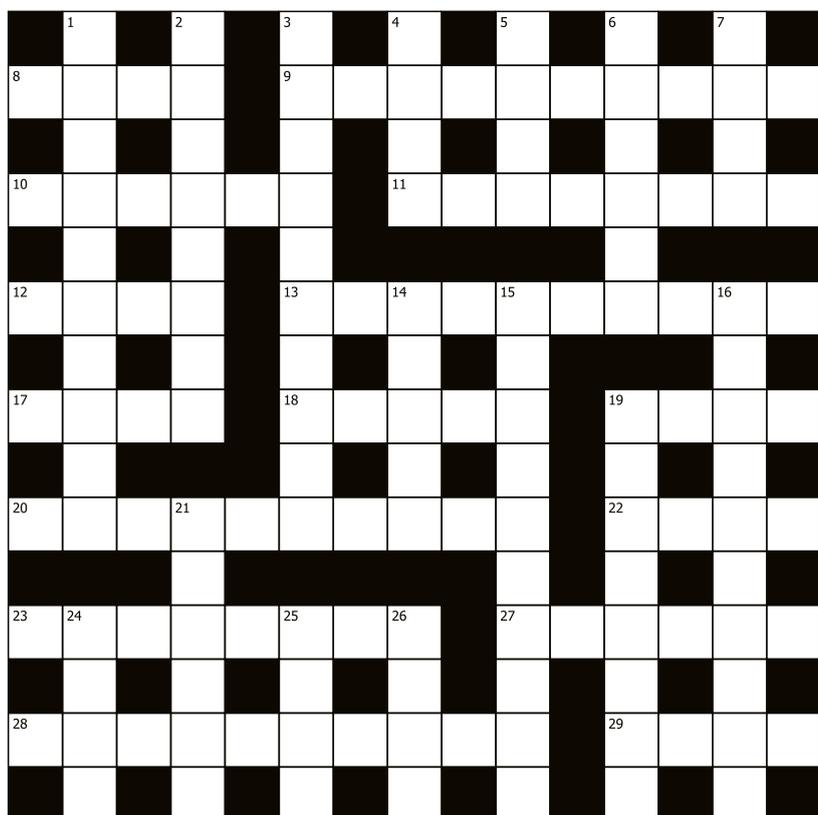
- 11) Sea south of Kazakhstan
- 12) NY-based rival of the Phillies
- 15) "Sure, Einstein" with an eye roll, vis-à-vis "I don't think that's right"
- 17) Societies and genders have them
- 22) Ellington, Davis and Miller, e.g. or what the starred clues have in common?
- 23) * It helps you get to first base at a ball game?
- 25) Half of seminal 1215 document
- 26) "Is it my turn?"
- 27) Easing of restrictions, in brief
- 29) Just-passing grades

30) Copernician prefix

- 31) How solitaire is played
- 32) Buffet utensil
- 34) Texter's qualifier
- 37) Prepare, as the seal on an envelope
- 41) Gives a darn
- 43) Scored in the paint, maybe
- 44) One met rhymingly by Simple Simon
- 47) Circles maximise these
- 48) "Jibbitz" canvas
- 49) Legendary Real Madrid striker
- 50) Jazzy James
- 52) Expedited admission?
- 53) Cut, as with a scythe
- 54) Beethoven's Symphony Eroica, for instance
- 56) Dessert, with "malai"
- 57) Net-nicker



Cryptic Crossword by ALESSANDRA EDWARDS and NAT ELDER Difficulty: 4/5



ACROSS:

- 8) Love guys? That's a bad sign (4)
- 9) During musical, regular bulge is unavoidable (10)
- 10) Rough plan for sugarless ketchup sample (6)
- 11) Harmful intent to disguise mouldy lard surrounding one heart (3, 5)
- 12) Anna cooks bread (4)
- 13) Spreadsheet by liberal European hit NYC with greatness (10)
- 17) Want cocaine-free party (4)
- 18) Setter shouts in pain by small noises made by cat (5)
- 19) Disgusting tier (4)
- 20) Drab samosa cooked for diplomat (10)
- 22) Self-worth gets knocked back over real brute (4)
- 23) Hotel worker shelters a little dweller (8)
- 27) In France, the desperate lover comes first, it's basic (6)
- 28) Mario's enemy captures castle after network that helps him keep tabs? (3, 7)
- 29) Cutesy part of thread with end trimmed (4)

DOWN:

- 1) After burning food, it's clear korma meals are overcooked (5, 5)
- 2) Meta app initially not conforming by Spain's example (8)
- 3) Grand claim he faked on American leader's first term (10)
- 4) That guy to heartlessly rub mint, e.g. (4)
- 5) Form of relation: Daughter (4)
- 6) Manic revolution lasts a long time, causing injury (6)
- 7) Flyer rejects setter's scheme (4)
- 14) Note large perfume ingredient makes lots of mist (5)
- 15) Los Angeles holiday destination contains good man, if nothing else (4, 6)
- 16) Remote ragebaiter gets under skin of confused crone (10)
- 19) Bride's partner, topless, to sleep with friend from home (8)
- 21) Regular hack; uninitiated bimbo with haphazard limbs (6)
- 24) Chimps, for one, are beginning physical education speed (4)
- 25) Soon to be unidentified (4)
- 26) Challenge to game of cricket (4)

Week 3 Answers:

A Little Off The Top: RUSTI[C]; IN AIR; [P]OPULA[R]; NOSED; SCARE; [O]RION'S; UN POC[O]; [U]SA USA; TILER; [T]IRADE; Taking extra letters clockwise from the top gives **OUTCROP**.

Connections: 1) Living members; 2) Pasta shape translations; 3) Map projections; 4) Fratricides; 5) Hops; 6) US Poet Laureates; 7) LaTeX codes; 8) E-numbers; 9) Fingers of the hand; 10) Former names of elements

Cryptic: Across: SENT OFF; FABRIC; AMNESIA; VACUUM; PECKING ORDER; REASSURING; AIR; SIN; IN PARALLEL; ACTION-PACKED; E-BOOKS; RADIANS; NOSIER; SADNESS; Down: SLAY; NINE; OYSTERS; FRANK; AMAZON; ROUND TABLE; CAMERA ROLL; NINJA; CRUSTACEAN; CARNATIONS; RUN UP; AMENDED; YORKIE; CURLS; TALE; ISIS