

# Cherwell

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0TH WEEK, TRINITY



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## Former Oxford professor Tariq Ramadan convicted of rape by French court

### 'English Pride' protest met by counter-protest at Bonn Square

CHERWELL NEWS

Clashes broke out between an Oxfordshire Patriots demonstration and a counter-protest from anti-racist groups in central Oxford today, with both sides gathering in Bonn Square outside Westgate.

The Oxfordshire Patriots protest drew about ten attendees, and was outnumbered by a 'Migrants Welcome' counter-demonstration of over 50 people organised by Oxford Stand Up To Racism. Counter-protests arrived shortly after the group assembled, growing quickly in number and directing chants of "Oxford is anti-fascist", "stop deportations", and "there's many, many more of us than you", towards the Oxfordshire Patriots group. Multiple counter-protests referenced Oxford's long history as an "anti-fascist city".

The protest went ahead despite Oxford City Council not granting permission for the event. It had been promoted by organisers as a 'St George's Day Celebration'. In a statement to *Cherwell*, Stand Up To Racism criticised this description of the event. In a post on Facebook, Oxfordshire Patriots organisers also described the event as a "day full of music and English pride" and marketed it as a family event.

Speaking to *Cherwell* at the beginning of the protest, the organiser of the Oxfordshire Patriots, Aidan Noble, said he wanted to "stand up to the Council". He said he "didn't want to spread hate" and denied being racist, insisting he wanted "to feel pride in my country". Leaflets handed out by Oxfordshire Patriots describe the group as "protecting British values, history and culture" through "organised peaceful protests and marches". An Oxfordshire

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BEATRIX ARNOLD and MERCEDES HAAS

CW: Sexual violence, assault, rape.

The former Oxford academic and prominent Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan has been sentenced by a Paris criminal court to an 18-year jail term for rape offences committed between 2009 and 2016. Ramadan was convicted of the rape of three women, including rape of a vulnerable person, just two years after he was imprisoned for a separate rape offence in Switzerland.

Ramadan was employed by the University of Oxford as Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at St Antony's College. In October 2017, he was accused by two women of incidents of rape, sexual assault, violence, and harassment. Ramadan continued to teach students at the University until November, when he

took an agreed leave of absence from Oxford.

At the time, the University said that the leave "allows Professor Ramadan to address the extremely serious allegations made against him", but "implies no presumption or acceptance of guilt".

In January 2018, he was detained by French police and taken into custody, where he was formally charged with two counts of rape. Following this, further accusations against him emerged, with more women coming forward with claims that he had made unwanted sexual advances towards them, including allegations of violence and psychological abuse.

As a result, he was formally charged in 2020 with the rape of two more women in France and faced a further charge of rape in Switzerland. Ramadan has consistently denied the charges against him, claiming that they are politically motivated as part of a smear campaign.

Ramadan officially left his position

at the University of Oxford in 2021. A spokesperson for the University told *Cherwell*: "Professor Ramadan left the employment of the University of Oxford in June 2021 by mutual agreement on the basis of early retirement on grounds of ill-health."

In 2023, Yann Le Mercier was convicted of cyberharassing Ramadan and another individual because of the ongoing court proceedings. At the time, he received the heaviest prison sentence for a cyberbullying case.

The former professor has maintained an active presence on social media, and continues to receive support from sympathisers under the online campaign #FreeTariqRamadan. Ramadan currently has 2.4 million followers on Facebook.

Ramadan was tried by a Swiss appeals court in 2024 over an incident which took place in Geneva in 2008. He was convicted of rape and sexual coercion and sentenced to three years'

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### Proctors criticise University policy on buildings, AI, and staff payment

STANLEY ARLIDGE

The University of Oxford's Proctorial Team has criticised the physical deterioration of buildings, and the University's policies on the use of artificial intelligence and on staff payment in their traditional end-of-term Oration shared in the Oxford University Gazette.

The Oration is given annually by Proctorial team, composed of the Junior Proctor, Senior Proctor, and Assessor, as they end their year-long term. The address evaluates the issues affecting the University and the decisions made by its governing bodies. The Senior Proctor pointed to a pattern of "slow decay, masked by the wearisome efforts of those affected to find mitigations and accommodations." He noted that "when we are finally forced to act, when the mask cannot be maintained, the remedies are costly, and the harms to the University serious, and unavoidable."

The Oration painted a worrying picture of the University's buildings, claiming that many have now reached a state of "planned obsolescence". Discussing the Thom Building on Parks Road, where the Department of Engineering Science is located, the Senior Proctor said: "For many years, the decay within the building has been metaphorically masked, as damp academics did their best to keep things functioning."

In reference to the University's "digital estate", the Assessor critiqued Oxford's "flagship" Digital Transformation Programme, which "has been unable to deliver new software tools as fast as new demand rises".

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## Reeves doubles funding for Oxford-Cambridge Corridor

NED REMINGTON

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves has announced plans for a Greater Oxford Development Corporation, which would double funding for infrastructure development across the Oxford-Cambridge corridor.

It follows a similar Development Corporation being announced for Greater Cambridge earlier this year. The Chancellor announced £800 million of combined funding for the two development corporations, incorporating the £400 million originally allocated to the Cambridge project.

Giving the annual Mais Lecture to the Bayes Business School in London, Reeves also committed an additional £500 million to supporting transport in Oxford, and pledged to “acquire land through compulsory powers” where “landowners are intransigent, or insist on unreasonable demands” to support the project. This would force landowners to sell property to allow for infrastructure developments.

The corporation will support infrastructure development in Oxford and surrounding areas and transport links across the ‘Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor’. According to the BBC, the area between Oxford and Cambridge is one of the only UK regions outside of London that is a net contributor to the UK economy.

In a press release, Leader of Oxford City Council Susan Brown told *Cherwell*: “This has the potential to be a game-changer for the city, county and country. A well-designed, central-government-backed development corporation for Greater Oxford should bring both the powers and funding required to deliver the housing, infrastructure, and economic growth at scale that we urgently need.”

“We have made it clear in our plan for Local Government Reorganisation that a development corporation would likely be needed to help deliver the 40,000 homes – including 16,000 affordable homes – and 12m sq foot [sic] of commercial space we are proposing as part of a new Greater Oxford Council.”

The University of Oxford has welcomed the proposal. A spokesperson for the University told *Cherwell*: “Oxfordshire is one of the world’s leading innovation ecosystems, but constraints in transport, utilities and housing are limiting its full potential. A government-led Development Corporation could provide the long-term coordination needed to unlock critical infrastructure, attract private investment and support sustainable, inclusive growth.”

“By bringing together national and local partners, it would help ensure that growth is well-managed and delivers tangible benefits for communities, while strengthening the region’s role in driving innovation and economic growth across the UK.”



## Chewe Munkonge set to become Oxford’s first Black Lord Mayor

MERCEDES HAAS

Councillor Chewe Munkonge has been announced as Oxford’s next Lord Mayor, becoming the first Black person to hold the city’s highest civic office. The nomination was confirmed at a meeting of Oxford City Council on 23rd March by council leader Sudan Brown. Munkonge is expected to take up the largely ceremonial role for the 2026/2027 civic year, subject to his re-election in May.

Munkonge, who represents Quarry and Risinghurst ward, was first elected to the council in 2014 and currently serves as Cabinet Member for a Healthy, Fairer Oxford, as well as the council’s Small Business Champion. He also serves as the Central Administration Officer of the Oxford Trust, where he supports “all the operations of The Oxford Trust and Science Oxford’s events and education activities”. Outside politics, Munkonge works as a Central Admin Officer for a local charity and previously served as a governor at The Swan School between 2019 and 2025.

The Lord Mayor of Oxford typically undertakes over 300 engagements

annually, including leading the city’s Remembrance Sunday service, attending royal visits, and supporting organisations. During his term, Munkonge has chosen Sobell House and St Theresa as his official charities. Sobell House Hospice is a local charity that provides specialist support for people with life-limiting illnesses and their families.

The Lord Mayor role is a politically neutral position appointed annually by Oxford City Council, typically at its Annual Meeting in May. By convention, it is offered to the longest-serving councillor who has not previously held the office.

Alongside Munkonge’s appointment, Councillor Louise Upton, the outgoing Lord Mayor, has been named Deputy Lord Mayor, while Councillor Linda Smith will serve as Sheriff of Oxford.

In a press release statement, Munkonge said: “I am deeply humbled and truly honoured to be chosen as the next Lord Mayor of Oxford... As the first Black Lord Mayor of our city, I stand on the shoulders of those who paved the way, and I hope to be a source of inspiration for future generations.”

Image credit: Oxford City Council, with permission.

## Rhodes Trust suspends Global Constituency applications

SIYEON LEE

The Rhodes Trust announced earlier this month that the Rhodes Scholarship’s Global Constituency will be suspended for the 2026-2027 application cycle.

The Rhodes Scholarship, established in 1902, is a “fully-funded postgraduate award which enables talented young people from around the world to study full-time at the University of Oxford”. The merit-based program offers scholarships for graduate study to around 100 scholars yearly. The scholarships cover all tuition fees, a living expense stipend, and round-trip travel to Oxford, where the Rhodes House is located.

The established geographical constituencies for the scholarship

include the United States of America, Canada, and India. There is a defined number of scholarships to be awarded in each area, with 32 Rhodes Scholars selected from the United States each year, making it the largest constituency.

However, several world regions do not have constituencies, including South and Central America, North Africa, with these areas instead covered by the ‘Global Constituency’ which has two scholarships every year since 2018.

On its website, the Rhodes Trust specified that the suspension of the Global Constituency scholarships was due to the organisation’s shifting “strategic priorities”.

Asked for more details on their changing priorities, a spokesperson for the Rhodes Trust told *Cherwell*:

“As the Rhodes Trust looks ahead, the Board of Trustees has undertaken a careful review of how best to fulfil its charitable mission and deliver the unique Scholar experience that defines a Rhodes Scholarship. Following this, the Board has decided to focus the Trust’s Scholarship provision within its established constituency network, and will not be awarding Global Scholarships going forward, including in the current cycle.”

Candidates who are ineligible in an established Rhodes constituency may also have the option to apply for Inter-Jurisdictional Consideration for the scholarship, available if a candidate is “strongly connected to two or more Rhodes constituencies” but not eligible to apply in any one area.

## ‘English Pride’ protest met by counter-protest at Bonn Square

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Patriots protester added that “we’re not racist – they can shout what they like”.

Tensions escalated during the protest with multiple incidents involving physical confrontation and allegations made by both sides.

In one incident, a protester associated with Oxfordshire Patriots fell to the ground after standing up as his mobility scooter was being blocked by a group of counter-protesters.

Other participants from the Stand Up To Racism protest appeared to offer to the individual to their feet. Speaking to *Cherwell* following the incident, Noble insisted he “wanted a peaceful protest”, but that it had been “disrupted” by the opposing group.

In another incident, a participant who had joined the Oxfordshire Patriots crowd lunged at a woman taking part in the Stand Up To Racism demonstration – grabbing a St George’s Cross flag with the word ‘love’ written across it. He was pushed to the ground by a member of the counter-protest, and a small fight resulted between the two men. The

man who lunged at the woman was then taken aside by the police.

An activist with Stand Up To Racism also accused one of the protestors of threatening to slap her across the face after she offered them a leaflet.

Around ten police officers were at the scene of the protest, and were seen recording events on phones and body cameras. A demonstrator with Oxfordshire Patriots told *Cherwell* he had faced “threatening intimidation” but claimed the police “are doing nothing” and accused them of “two-tier policing”.

Later, the police formed a line around the right-wing demonstrators. Stand Up To Racism supporters chanted, “Who protects the fascists? The Police protect the fascists”.

Speaking to *Cherwell*, a supporter of Oxford Stand Up To Racism who asked to remain anonymous, said she hoped to “drown out” the demonstrations by Oxfordshire Patriots, and “have some great conversations” to help “people see the connections between Reform, Raise The Colours, Farage, and Trump”. She described the rise in support

for Reform UK as “very scary” and accused the Labour Government of “throwing people under a bus”. She praised Oxford’s migrant community, who she described as “neighbours and friends”.

Ian McKendrick, an organiser for Stand Up To Racism, told *Cherwell* that the aim of the counter-protest was to challenge a “campaign of intimidation” by right-wing groups. Another anonymous supporter of Stand Up To Racism, who played the drum during the protest, told *Cherwell*: “Oxford relies on immigrants – there’s no two ways about it.”

The protests come after Oxfordshire County Council issued a legal notice to Raise the Colours after St George’s Cross and Union Jack flags were hung across the county. In a statement, council leader Liz Jeffman described the displays as “an act of intimidation and division”.

Oxfordshire Patriots were contacted for comment.

Reporting by Isaac Gavaghan, Mercedes Haas, Ned Remington, and Hattie Simpson.

Image credit: Zoë McGuire for *Cherwell*.



## Former Oxford professor Tariq Ramadan convicted of rape by French court

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imprisonment, overturning a previous acquittal. His subsequent appeal against the sentence was rejected.

Ramadan failed to appear in court in Paris this month. His lawyers attributed his absence to his hospitalisation in Switzerland on account of multiple sclerosis, “violating a conditional release order that required him to remain in France”, as *Le Monde* reports. Prior to the trial, however, a court-ordered medical assessment had confirmed his fitness to plead.

He was convicted in absentia for the rape of three women and sentenced to 18 years’ imprisonment. Following the verdict, the court issued an arrest warrant and imposed a permanent ban from French territory, which will come into effect upon completion of the sentence. The judgement is not final and is expected to be appealed.

This case comes amid broader concerns about how the University of Oxford has handled sexual misconduct and assault allegations. These concerns have been further intensified by controversy surrounding another professor who was not suspended despite facing allegations of rape.

*Image credit: Irfan kottaparamban, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.*

## Proctors criticise University policy on buildings, AI, and staff payment

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They warned that without further “funding for investment”, the University’s estate could restrict Oxford’s ability to remain at the top of global University rankings. The concern reflected a similar issue identified by the 2023 Proctorial Team, who argued: “We as an institution failed to ‘see’ what was blatantly obvious – that these buildings are simply not fit for purpose.” Oxford Estates Services did not respond to *Cherwell’s* request for comment.

The Proctorial team also identified concerns about faculty wages and competition. The Associate Professor position was noted as “especially challenging” in terms of pay, workload, and career structure, making the role “a predicament and not a position”. The Senior Proctor warned: “As pay continues to slide, even if we remain competitive nationally, we will cease to be so internationally.”

The team raised further doubts about the University’s attempts to tackle the growing challenge of AI, criticising Oxford’s “startling” decision to roll out access to ChatGPT Edu to all students, the first university in the UK to do so: “Oxford ... is left floundering in the wake of rapid technological change, trying to adapt its activities and governance to what many of us see as a fundamental threat to higher education.”

“We share the disquiet of many colleagues that the rapid distribution of such licences by the University sent a powerful signal to our students that AI usage was being promoted in problematic ways.”

The Junior Proctor also criticised the University’s lack of a streamlined administrative response to AI use:

“There is too much emphasis on not stifling local initiatives; too little concern to concentrate appropriate coordinated oversight in a single responsible senior committee.”

The Proctors claimed to have seen little evidence that the University has sufficiently got to grips with the threat AI poses to the teaching, assessment, and admissions processes. They describe faculties “scrambling to develop protocols” on AI that “suit their own disciplines”, while simultaneously lacking the money needed to do so.

The Junior Proctor stated that his experience with the AI governance group (part of the University’s Digital Governance Unit) has “emphatically not reassured me that the University has appropriately got its metaphorical

arms around the challenge”.

The Assessor highlighted the “crucially important” responsibility of the proctorial team “to put discussions into a wider context, connect the dots and steer strategy and policy decisions to better outcomes, not through hard power, but through better arguments and by asking questions, sometimes uncomfortable ones.”

In response to this, a spokesperson for the University told *Cherwell*: “As is the case every year, the demitting Proctors’ Oration makes important contributions to many issues which are being actively considered and addressed across the University.”

*Additional reporting by Ned Remington.*

*Image credit: Emiliano Compassi, with permission.*



## Council rejects Regent’s Park’s plan to covert Oxfam to MCR

DANIELA BRAW-SMITH

Oxford City Council has rejected an application by Regent’s Park College to convert the Oxfam Bookshop on St Giles’ Street into its Middle Common Room (MCR), citing local regulations limiting city centre ground-floor units to specific uses such as retail, culture, tourism, and entertainment.

Regent’s Park told *Cherwell* that the College is “reviewing our options in light of the council’s decision”, and that the proposed change of use of the building was intended “to provide a larger, fit-for-purpose MCR and dedicated postgraduate study space to meet the needs of its expanded postgraduate body”.

The College told *Cherwell* that the site currently occupied by the Oxfam Bookshop “represents the best opportunity to provide an accessible, above-ground MCR within our existing on-site buildings”. The site at 56 St Giles is part of the College’s estate and is currently divided between the bookshop, which has been running since 1987, and student accommodation.

The change-of-use proposal claimed that the building was not in the city centre as officially defined and that college activities on the site would not “lead to detrimental effects” such as artificial lighting, construction, or “impact upon the significance of the heritage asset”. In their rejection of the application, the City Council did not dispute that it was unlikely that “any harm would arise from the change of use itself”, but noted that the site was, in fact, part of the city centre area by the standards of the Oxford Local Plan 2036.

Local regulations set out acceptable

uses of buildings in central Oxford, particularly in reference to sustainable development, designated heritage assets, and “ensuring the vitality of centres”.

The Council documents also summarised objections to the proposal from members of the public, which included “effect on character of area” and “loss of community asset”.

The current Regent’s Park College MCR was established in 2005, when the College had a graduate community of only 30 members, and is located underground in a former storage basement with no windows, as noted in their planning application.

The College cited the fivefold expansion of the graduate student body over the past two decades and the inaccessibility of the site as reasons why the current MCR was “wholly unsuitable”. Regent’s Park’s planning application also referenced how “the University has drawn attention to the importance of suitable, inclusive facilities for postgraduate students, and the College must respond”.

The rejection of planning permission comes after Jesus College successfully converted the former Burger King on Cornmarket Street into student accommodation in 2025. Other colleges also have plans for new developments in the near future, including Magdalen College, which will be demolishing a 1960s building to construct more student housing.

Oxfam, now a global charity, was founded in Oxford in 1942, and has two other charity shops based in Oxford: A bookshop in Turl Street and a site on Broad Street – the organisation’s first permanent shop.

*Image credit: Hattie Simpson for Cherwell.*



## NEWS SHORTS

### Sperm of the moment

A University of Oxford study has found that abstaining from ejaculation may reduce sperm quality, with prolonged storage linked to increased “oxidative stress”. The findings challenge guidance from the World Health Organisation suggesting abstinence improves conception rates, indicating that delay may actually have adverse effects.

### Caught red-handed

A man from Oxfordshire has claimed a viral image of a red kite carrying a sausage roll is linked to his mother-in-law. John Oxenham said the bird likely took the homemade rolls from his garden, adding that the family recognised the pastry for their “slightly pale” appearance. He added: “Every member of my wife’s family who’s seen the photograph has said ‘that’s one of June’s sausage rolls.’”

### Crater? I barely know her

Oxfordshire County Council has hit back after Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander’s Mini Cooper was damaged by a pothole on the B4437 in Oxfordshire. Alexander joked that she “thought that the astronauts on Artemis II might have seen a similar-size crater”. The Liberal Democrat run council blamed government funding cuts, whilst the Department for Transport pointed to a £7.3bn roads investment plan.

### Keep chasing a first

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for external engagement, sport, and community, Alexander Betts, is running the London Marathon in full academic dress. His aim is to beat the current World Record for fastest male runner dressed as an academic and to highlight universities’ role “in a silly and trivial way”. He will wear a gown, mortar board, and bow tie whilst raising funds for Helen and Douglas House hospice.

## CROSS CAMPUS

### Don’t be a jerk

The new Yale University Presidential Senior Fellow, David Brooks, has delivered an important message to students: don’t be jerks. Brooks’ inaugural lecture in March emphasised passion, curiosity, and focusing on personal goals, rather than money or power. “If you were a jerk, you’d all be at Harvard”, Brooks joked. A reminder that success and humanity can align more often than one might think.

### New Varsity rivalry

Cambridge University has received a £190 million donation by hedge fund manager Chris Rokos – the largest single donation made to a British university in modern times, topping Oxford’s recent Schwarzman donation by £5 million. Chris Rokos, who studied mathematics at Pembroke College, Oxford, said: “There can be no better home for the Rokos School of Government than Cambridge University.”

# Magdalen College Choir to admit girls for first time in 500-year history

ANISHA MOHAMMED

Magdalen College has announced that girls will be admitted as choristers for the first time in the Choir's history, marking a momentous change for one of the University of Oxford's longest-standing choral traditions.

The Choir, established under the College statutes of 1480, has until now included only boy choristers, drawn from Magdalen College School, who sing the treble line alongside adult clerks. Informator Choristarum Mark Williams told *Cherwell* that the introduction of girls as choristers represents "a very significant change... quite a turning point in our long history". Some adult female clerks have been admitted in recent years.

The decision follows Magdalen College School's planned transition to co-education from 2027. From that point, choristerships will be open to both boys and girls aged 8 to 13. The first girls are expected to join the Choir in September next year, with a fully mixed treble line anticipated by 2031.

This change will also be reflected in the College's May Morning tradition,

when the Choir sings from the top of Magdalen Tower on the 1st May to welcome the coming of spring. Williams told *Cherwell*: "The first girls will sing as trebles from the top of the tower on May Morning 2028, and the first fully-mixed cohort of trebles will sing the May Morning ceremony in 2032."

Williams described the choristership as "a demanding experience, but also a hugely formative one", involving daily rehearsals and services alongside academic study. He told *Cherwell* that the College has "a duty to create an environment in which boys and girls can grow and flourish alongside each other".

The College has also indicated that it consulted with other institutions that have introduced mixed treble lines. Williams said these conversations suggested that such changes have "brought benefits to the boys, and to the whole group", as well as enabling girls to access opportunities previously limited to them.

The move aligns with broader developments in the UK choral sector. Over the past three decades, many cathedral and college choirs have introduced provision for girl choristers, and there are now more

girls than boys singing as choristers nationally. Within Oxford, ensembles such as the girl choristers of Merton College and Frideswide Voices at Christ Church have become established parts of the city's choral landscape.

Magdalen College has also pointed to earlier steps towards greater inclusion within its musical life. Its first female organ scholar, Anna Lapwood, came to the College in 2013 and has since gone on to a highly successful career.

Magdalen has also announced measures aimed at widening access. Choristers are educated at Magdalen College School, with the College currently covering two-thirds of fees. Under new arrangements, additional bursaries will be available, with the possibility of full financial support. Williams told *Cherwell* this means choristerships could be open "to any child, regardless of sex or the financial means of their family".

The College stated that the changes are intended to expand access while maintaining the Choir's existing commitments to daily chapel services and musical standards. To support the transition, the College will expand the number of chorister places to 18.

# Oxford tourism outperforms national average as University attractions hit record highs

ANISHA MOHAMMED

Visitor numbers to Oxford's major attractions have risen sharply, outpacing national trends and reinforcing the city's position as one of the UK's most resilient tourism hubs.

New figures from the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (ALVA) show that visits to UK attractions rose by just 2% last year, reflecting a slow post-pandemic recovery across the sector. In contrast, Oxford University's Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) recorded 3,816,898 visitors in 2025, up from 3,559,109 in 2024: a 7% increase year-on-year.

The figures place Oxford well above the national average and mark a continued divergence between the city and wider UK trends. GLAM sites are now operating above pre-pandemic levels, while the sector nationally has yet to fully recover.

Oxford's performance is closely tied to the University itself. Many of the city's most visited attractions – including the Ashmolean Museum, the Bodleian Libraries, and the Museum of Natural History – are embedded within the University and form part of its academic

infrastructure as well as its public-facing identity. Several of these sites rank among the most visited attractions in the UK, with the Ashmolean alone drawing over one million visitors in 2025.

Richard Ovenden, Head of Gardens, Libraries and Museums told *Cherwell* the figures reflected the University's cultural offer, pointing to free and low-cost entry as a key driver of footfall alongside "a lively and eclectic programme of events" designed to engage diverse audiences.

Recent exhibitions have also contributed to rising visitor numbers. The Ashmolean Museum's 'This Is What You Get' exhibition explored the visual art behind Radiohead through the three-decade collaboration between Thom Yorke and artist Stanley Donwood. Featuring more than 180 works, including album cover art, sketchbooks, and previously unseen material, the exhibition drew on the band's Oxfordshire roots and offered visitors a rare insight into the creative processes behind one of the UK's most influential bands.

This overlap between academic and public space is central to Oxford's appeal, but it also shapes student experience, and students themselves also play

a role in sustaining this ecosystem. The University's global reputation draws prospective applicants, visiting families, and international tourists, many of whom engage directly with college and museum spaces. As visitor numbers grow, students increasingly occupy a dual position as both users of and contributors to Oxford's tourism economy.

The rise in attraction visits reflects a broader increase in tourism across Oxfordshire, which continues to generate significant revenue for the local economy. At a national level, ALVA attributes continued growth to the enduring appeal of cultural experiences, even during the cost-of-living crisis, with visitors prioritising heritage and leisure spending.

The figures underline Oxford's distinctive character as a university city where academic and public life intersect. Spaces such as the Bodleian Libraries and central college sites continue to serve both students and visitors, contributing to the city's reputation as a globally significant cultural and intellectual hub.

*Image credit: Hattie Simpson for Cherwell.*



# OUP and University of Pennsylvania Press announce open access agreement

DANIELA BRAW-SMITH

Oxford University Press (OUP) and University of Pennsylvania Press (Penn Press) have struck a two-year agreement granting University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) students open access to hundreds of OUP journals.

OUP is the largest university press in the world, publishing over 500 journals across a range of academic fields. The agreement also allows UPenn-affiliated authors to publish with open access in OUP's hybrid and fully open journals without paying article processing charges.

According to the Royal Society, open access to published academic journals increases readership, citations, and accessibility to non-academics. OUP has described open access as a key part of their "mission to achieve the widest possible dissemination of high-quality research", noting that open access articles have the greatest number of policy and patent document mentions, relative to volume of output, in comparison to other major academic publishers.

The University of Oxford also

engages in similar "publisher deals" with presses around the world, enabling open access to articles in otherwise subscription-only journals for Oxford-affiliated researchers and students. Under these agreements with individual presses (e.g., SAGE, Taylor & Francis, and Cambridge University Press), Oxford departments pay publishing costs on behalf of their researchers.

OUP's and the University's partnerships with other academic presses and universities have also facilitated the growth of Oxford Academic, which brings together over 50,000 books and 500 journals on a single platform. The platform has expressed an intention to adapt to the changing landscape of academia, such as the introduction of an AI Discovery Assistant and the newly added capacity to gift limited-time access to journal articles.

The uncapped agreement places no limit on articles published open access, with Penn Libraries noting such deals have already enabled around 60% of its research output to be freely accessible.

*Image credit: Hattie Simpson for Cherwell.*

# Oxford-led study develops biologically engineered 'SimCells' to target antimicrobial resistance

MELISSA EDDON

Researchers led by University of Oxford academic Dr Wei Huang have successfully created biologically engineered cells, designed to target antimicrobial-resistant (AMR) bacteria.

Published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* journal, the study involved developing and testing two types of nonreplicating therapeutic cells named "SimCells" and "Mini-SimCells". Dr Huang's team describe these cells as smart "bioparticles" that can selectively eradicate drug-resistant bacteria, whilst sparing non-pathogenic cells.

The testing process saw SimCells targeting a multidrug-resistant strain of *E. Coli*. Within six hours, the SimCells eliminated more than 85% of the target bacteria, whilst the mini-SimCells eliminated more than 97% within 48 hours.

The team utilised a 'plug and play' design to create a multipurpose cell that can be reused to target different pathogens by changing the nanobodies on its surface, without rebuilding the basis of the cell.

The study seeks to counter the threat of antimicrobial resistance, which sees microorganisms like bacteria and parasites evolve to resist drugs developed to eradicate them. According to the World Health Organisation, AMR has emerged as "one of the top global health and development threats", as antimicrobial medications such as antibiotics and antivirals become less effective.

Huang and his research partner, Yun Dong, told *Cherwell*: "The conventional antibiotic pipeline is failing to keep pace. Our SimCell (simple cell) platform

addresses these challenges by offering a new way to fight dangerous drug-resistant bacteria.

"Because they cannot replicate and do not work like standard antibiotics, Sim Cells could provide a safer and more adaptable way to strengthen our diminishing antibiotic arsenal against the world's most serious AMR pathogens."

Cumulative projections from the Global Burden of Disease study suggest over 39 million deaths between 2025 and 2050 that would be directly attributed to AMR. The WHO predicts AMR to be the trigger for the next global pandemic, on account of the range of infections and diseases that will be immune to modern medicine. Procedures like cancer chemotherapy, caesarean sections, and organ transplants will also be inhibited. Estimates from the World Bank suggest AMR could result in \$1 trillion in additional healthcare costs, and a cumulative global GDP loss of \$100 trillion by 2050.

Huang and Dong told *Cherwell* that rather than the "current paradigm of developing a new small-molecule antibiotic for each resistant pathogen", the "universal base" of the SimCell makes it not only more effective than antibiotics, but also more efficient. The 'plug and play' method bypasses the time and cost-intensive research process for antibiotics, and has the potential to "accelerate the response to AMR outbreaks, reduce development costs, and ultimately contribute to a shift in infectious disease management".

The team believe advancements in synthetic biology have "the potential to reshape how we conceptualise antimicrobial intervention".

## Twelve colleges do not pay all staff the Oxford Living Wage

OSKAR DOEPKE

At least twelve Oxford colleges were not paying all staff the Oxford Living Wage (OLW) as of their most recent financial year, *Cherwell* can reveal.

Balliol, Brasenose, Harris Manchester, Oriel, Regent's Park, St Anne's, St Catherine's, St Edmund Hall, St Hilda's, St Peter's, Trinity, and Wolfson all paid their lowest-earning employees less than £13.16 per hour, the OLW set for 2025-26. Christ Church and Reuben did not respond to *Cherwell's* Freedom of Information request before the stipulated deadline.

The OLW is a voluntary hourly rate, distinct from the government's minimum, that, according to its website, reflects the "real cost of living and working in Oxford" – the UK's second-most expensive city. Introduced by Oxford City Council in 2018, the OLW is set at 95% of the London real Living Wage, a different hourly rate calculated by the Living Wage Foundation.

The OLW stood at £13.16 per hour in 2025-26, rising to £14.06 per hour in April 2026-27. Meanwhile, in 2025-26, the UK real Living Wage sat at £12.60 per hour and the London real Living Wage at £13.85, before respectively increasing to £13.45 and £14.80 per hour for 2026-27.

In 2020, the University of Oxford committed to paying all staff at least the OLW. However, as Oxford colleges are independent employers, the University's pledge did not extend to them.

Among the twelve colleges that did not pay all staff the OLW, the share of staff receiving it varied. At St Peter's and Wolfson, just 46% and 54% of staff were paid at least the OLW, while 98% of staff at St Catherine's and Trinity were paid it.

### Who gets left out

The headline figure, however, obscures variations in pay across staff groups. Across the twelve colleges, academic and administrative staff were mostly paid at or above the OLW threshold. Pay below the OLW threshold was concentrated predominantly among casual employees – non-permanent employees typically without

guaranteed hours – and, among them, those who work in catering, facilities/maintenance, and security.

For instance, Wolfson paid casual security employees £12.21 per hour, but their full-time and part-time counterparts at least £15.55 per hour, with a ceiling of £21.68. At St Hilda's, casual catering, facilities/maintenance, and security staff earned £12.60 per hour, even as equivalent permanent staff made at least the OLW of £13.16 – a difference of 56p per hour.

Staff in catering, facilities/maintenance, and security were among the lowest-paid groups in 13 of the 20 colleges that provided sufficient data. For the remaining seven colleges, some administrative employees earned the same as, but not less than, catering, facilities/maintenance, or security staff.

“*At St Peter's and Wolfson, just 46% and 54% of staff were paid at least the Oxford Living Wage*”

The colleges that did not pay all staff the OLW also tend to rely more on casual employees. For example, the non-OLW colleges employ 321 of their 542 catering staff – 59% – on casual contracts (excluding St Catherine's, which did not provide a full breakdown by contract type). In comparison, among colleges that met OLW, 41% of catering staff are on casual contracts. The same colleges also employ 16% of their security on casual contracts, compared to 31% at colleges that do not pay the OLW.

The casual hourly rate, moreover, does not capture the full extent of the pay gap. *Cherwell's* data found that casual workers across a number of colleges are excluded from benefits above the statutory minimum. At St Hilda's, for example, all staff but casual staff have access to free eye tests, healthcare, dental care, a contribution towards glasses, and a cycle scheme.

Research by the Living Wage Foundation has found that casual and other insecure employees are



as disproportionately likely to be younger, older, and from minority ethnic backgrounds. Accommodation and food services – the sector that most closely maps to college catering and facilities/maintenance work – also accounts for the second-highest percentage of insecure work in the UK. *Cherwell* does not hold data on the age or ethnic makeup of casual employees at Oxford colleges.

### The bigger picture

Of Oxford's 39 colleges and 4 permanent private halls (PPHs), 16 hold formal accreditation as OLW employers from Oxford City Council. Accreditation, which is overseen by the council, requires employers to pay all staff based in Oxford at least the OLW and implement the respective annual pay increases. Accredited employers are also listed publicly on the council's website.

Beyond the 16 accredited employers, a further 14 colleges and PPHs pay all staff the OLW without formal accreditation. As a result, the number of collegiate OLW employers has grown more than fourfold since 2020, when *Cherwell* previously found just eight to be paying all staff the OLW, although that figure includes St Benet's, a PPH which closed in 2022.

Several colleges also noted that, while they did not pay all staff the OLW, they met the threshold for all permanent employees. For instance, a spokesperson for Harris Manchester told *Cherwell* that the College has a

“policy of paying the Oxford Living Wage for all full-time or part-time members of staff”. St Anne's, St Catherine's, and St Hilda's referenced similar policies.

“*In 2020, the University of Oxford committed to pay all staff at least the Oxford Living Wage. However, as Oxford colleges are independent employers, the University's pledge did not extend to them*”

More colleges also said they meet at least the real Living Wage threshold for all staff. A spokesperson for Regent's Park told *Cherwell* the real Living Wage “is the minimum we pay to all staff, irrespective of contract type or age”. St Anne's, St Edmund Hall, St Hilda's, and St Peter's likewise confirmed to pay all staff at least the real Living Wage.

A spokesperson for Brasenose, meanwhile, told *Cherwell* that “the college is committed to ensuring that pay levels remain fair, competitive, and

appropriate to the roles undertaken”, adding that it undertakes regular benchmarking and at least one salary review per year. “While not all roles may align precisely with the Oxford Living Wage”, the spokesperson told *Cherwell*, the College still provides “a range of additional benefits ... that are highly valued by staff which go beyond basic pay”, including generous leave, pensions, and free lunches.

Likewise, a spokesperson for Regent's Park told *Cherwell* the College “places the highest value on its staff and recognises the essential contribution they make”, and that the College is “committed to fair pay for everyone who works here”.

In response to *Cherwell's* findings, Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy, Fairer Oxford, told *Cherwell*: “When employers commit to paying the Oxford Living Wage, they're making a meaningful difference to the lives of thousands of local people and we want as many businesses as possible to sign up.”

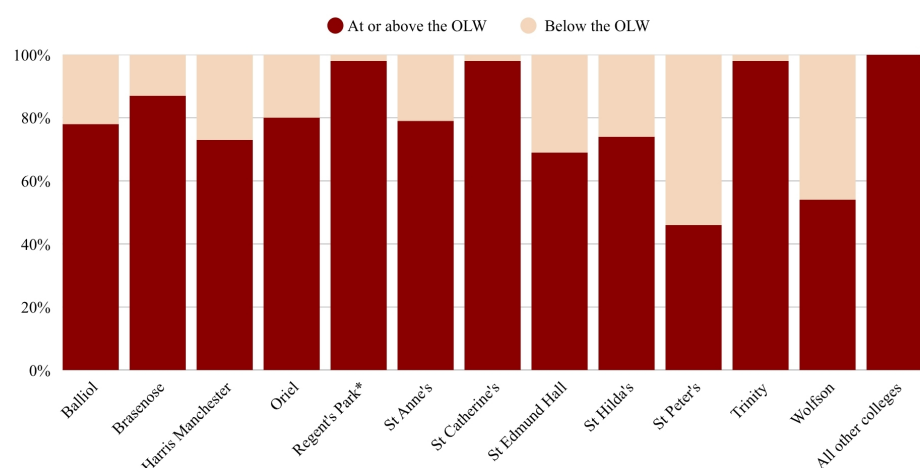
“Many Oxford colleges are already accredited and, as major employers in our city, this is fantastic for the thousands of people working there. I would encourage any colleges that are contemplating it to speak to those already doing it or reach out to our team to find out more. Together, we can make Oxford a fairer city for everyone.”

*Balliol, Harris Manchester, Oriel, St Edmund Hall, Trinity, and Wolfson were contacted for comment.*

*Graph credits: Oskar Doepke. Image credit: Emiliano Compassi for Cherwell.*

### Percentage of college staff paid at least the OLW

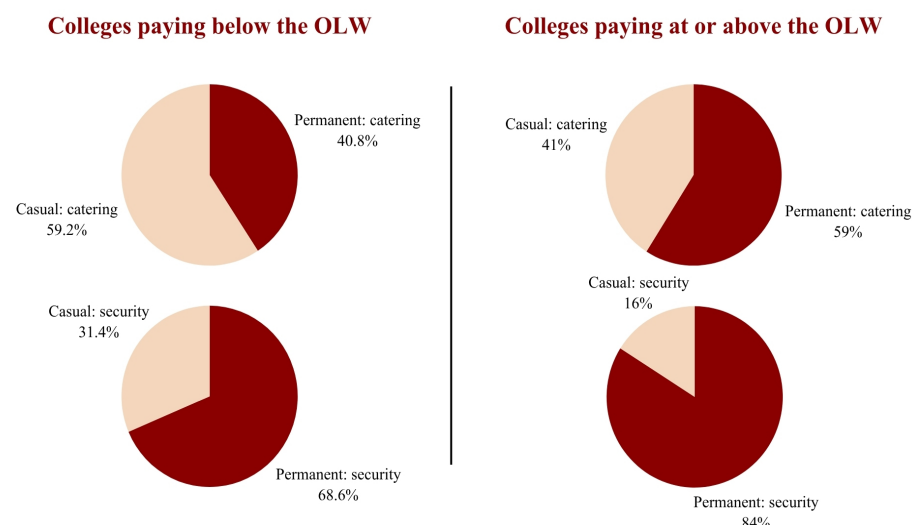
Based on *Cherwell* analysis of Freedom of Information responses



\*Data excludes 27 casual staff, so the OLW compliance rate for Regent's Park is incomplete

### Percentage of casual staff at Oxford colleges

Based on *Cherwell* analysis of Freedom of Information responses



## Social media heightens Oxford's class problem

AMALIA LARSSON NEGI

According to the University's admissions data, in 2024, 14.5% of students admitted were from the most socio-economically deprived areas in the UK. Many students at the University come from comfortable, more middle-class backgrounds, but sprinkled in are members of the elite: the children of aristocracy and the ultra-wealthy. For many working-class, state-educated students, coming to Oxford allows them to interact with people from this world for the very first time.

It can be very disorienting to enter this new social sphere. At first, you can feel overwhelmed by its strange traditions and the people you are suddenly interacting with. It's bizarre to have a Scout who cleans up after you. To be wined and dined in black tie, and to have a bursary that allows you to spend without worry, can be uncomfortable for those who grew up with less. It's very easy to feel out of place, both academically and socially.

As time goes on, immersion in this fantasy land makes you out of touch. There's an illusion of student solidarity, that we are all the same. We all know the trauma of essay deadlines, we use the same Oxford lingo, we study in the same libraries, we eat hall meals together, and we attend the same events. But then the vacation rolls around. As people return home, you realise the Oxford bubble is not real life. The reality of class differences smacks you abruptly in the face.

For working-class students, the truth is that many university acquaintances do not live the same lifestyle as you do. Most students at Oxford never need to worry about whether their household will make ends meet this month. They do not have the burden of a maxed-out student loan, a crippling overdraft, and a laborious part-time job awaiting them in the vac. The vacation period is one where the vibrant world of Oxford feels very far away. What can connect you is the friends that you have made there, and social media is the easiest way to catch up on their lives.

A dopamine-boosting doomscroll is particularly tempting for those of us who have few entertainment options during the vacation. Instagram shows you the lives of your new acquaintances and the alien world they reside in – a montage of huge houses, constant travel, and smiling friends in chalets and pools. It could not be more different from how you and most people live. It is difficult to escape the realisation that not only does this lifestyle exist, but it also exists near to you, and yet remains unattainable. It opens your eyes to the true class difference that exists between you and many of your peers, which amplifies the feeling of not quite belonging to the environment of Oxford. The unequal nature of the lottery of life is made more apparent when social media allows you to take a glimpse into the lifestyles of fellow students.

In term, there are subtle reality checks that remind you of the class differences that exist at university, and they tend to be cliché. This is far harder to dodge when your scrolling takes place in an uncomfortable home, shattered, after a long shift at work.

The whiplash that comes with oscillating between a comfortable, social life at university and a harsher time at home is exhausting. It can feel like you

don't really belong anywhere. A sense of isolation is inevitable when you are one of the few people in your circle who live in real financial struggle. It can seep into your confidence academically and socially. The thoughts of "I don't really fit in here" get louder in those moments where class difference is made apparent, which only exacerbates imposter syndrome.

As petty as it may seem to whine about social media, the fact remains that this is a symptom of the core experience of working-class students at Oxford. Social media enables you to witness the unaffordable lifestyles of people around you. Even without that tool to help you sneak a peek, the cutting realities of being working class in Oxford will always find a way to follow you around. Like stones in your shoes, it can add pressure to change yourself to fit into this new world, as your own feed transforms in response to this different social circle. Working-class students can attempt to glamorise what little they have by changing their social media habits. Perhaps post some snapshots of the budget holiday you worked the whole summer for? The story behind that picture of a nice meal with friends, or snaps of the Varsityski trip, is that it has plunged you into the (not so) warm embrace of your overdraft. These attempts to blend in are made in vain and can feel depressingly shallow.

Yet there is extraordinary pride in making it to Oxford from a socio-economically deprived background. The pains of adapting to a world where most won't understand the experiences that come with this pay off. The ability to live two contrasting lives certainly makes you a well-rounded person. Despite the burden of financial worries, fewer networks, and feelings of social isolation, working-class students still manage to adapt and thrive.

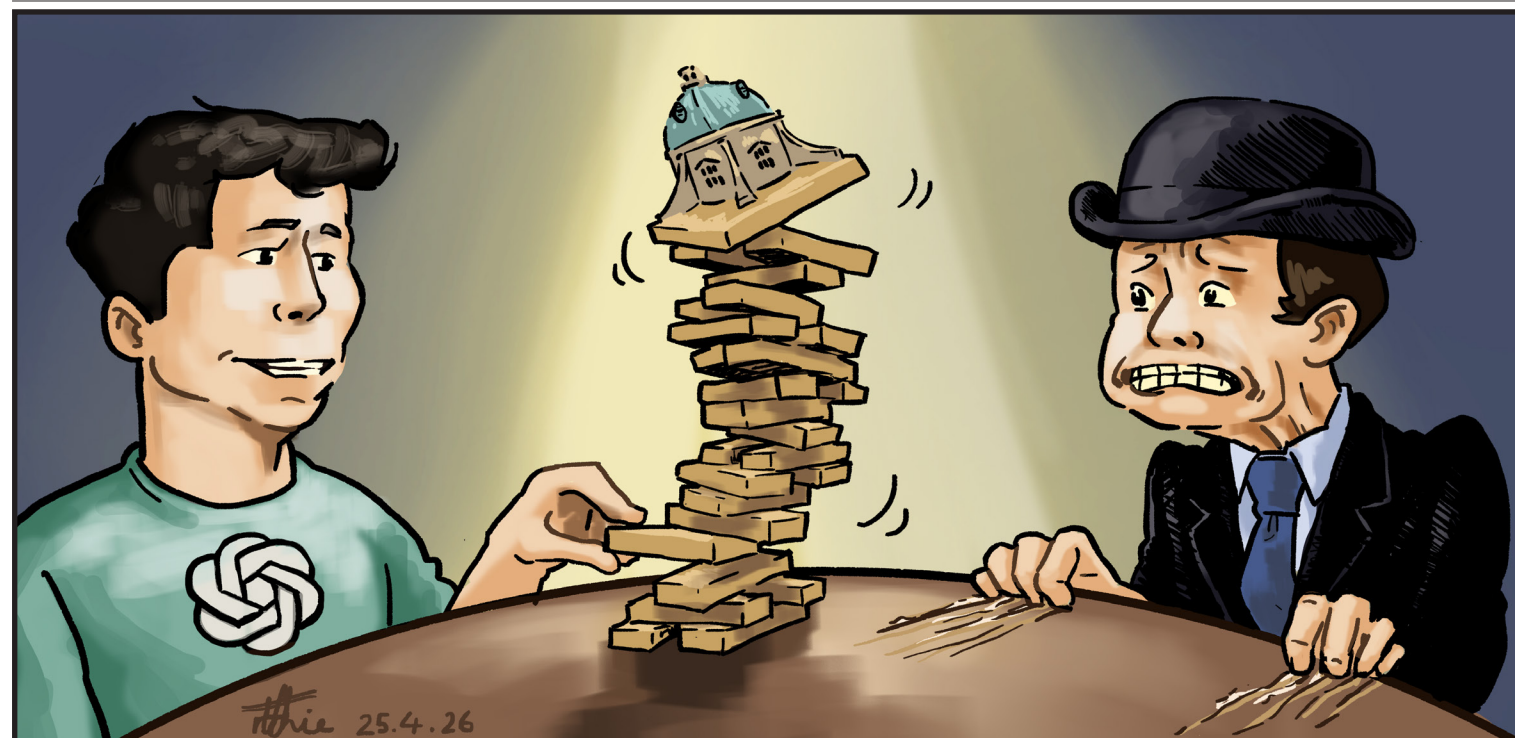


Illustration credit: Archie Johnston, for Cherwell.

## What are children learning from their screens?

SABA AHMADZADEH NOUGHANI

Today, when compared to my own childhood, screens dominate children's lives more than ever, and it seems that the screens they are exposed to are worlds away from the ones I grew up on. Looking at my younger cousins' favourite shows, the gap between our childhood experiences feels much wider than I anticipated. I don't recognise (nor like) any of their cartoons: loud, rushed, flashy, so colourful they hurt my eyes, and the screen is simply too chaotic and cluttered to tolerate. The scenes are constantly changing and in motion, as if competing for attention. It's almost aggressive. You get the impression that whoever makes these shows doesn't even like, let alone understand, children. Instead, my childhood favourites like *Come Outside* and *Mr Maker* were always teaching me about the world. *Charlie and Lola's* pastel colour palette was vibrant but not overpowering, while shows like *Balamory* didn't overstimulate children.

Children's television inevitably evolves, but as I look at kids glued to their screens, I no longer see the art of storytelling, but constant stimulation and noise. This doesn't calm a child, but instead hooks them, their faces frozen to the screen, and makes them more anxious even after the device is switched off. It has been widely observed that fast-paced content triggers the "fight-or-flight" response in children, and hence makes them irritable, more prone to emotional meltdowns, and worse at self-regulation.

It also makes me wonder what the point of children's television is anymore. The shows I grew up with were

educational and meaningful, but these shows seem to be just noise and colours. I can't deny that it may engage children, and arguably that's all that the media is meant to do. Yet, my concern remains. Research shows that environments, including screens, that are saturated with constant and fast-paced stimuli and sensory input can limit a child's ability to concentrate and engage in deeper cognitive processing.

I care because our children's learning, attention spans, and concentration are at risk. I don't want to see children, especially in their early years, glued to screens. I want to see them running around, playing imaginatively, expressing themselves loudly, and visiting all that there is to see. If circumstances don't allow parents to provide this, and they prefer to occupy their children with a screen, then I beg of all parents, at least let the screen be a calm and pedagogical space. Even then, screens should only supplement play, not replace it.

These loud, fast, and flashy shows also condition children to expect constant stimulation, and consequently, make it much harder for them to engage with anything that demands their patience or reflection. My issue with these newer cartoons does not stem from taste or nostalgia, but rather, from awareness of how the media that children are exposed to in their formative years influences their attention, learning habits, and the development of independent, critical minds. The cartoons I grew up on didn't just entertain and educate, but were also how so many children understood routine. CBeebies aired bedtime stories, *What's on your plate?* lunchtime

shows, and in the mornings, I knew that it was time for me to leave the house for school after three shows had finished, always airing at the same time and order. They facilitated so many of my friendships. When my primary school friends would come over, we would watch CBeebies, and its cartoons were reference points in our lunchtime conversations.

In my first year of university, when I was learning how to cook, I somehow came across a segment of an *I Can Cook* episode, and before feeling a rush of nostalgia, it saddened me that children today don't have similar shows. When Mathew Baynton (who played Charles II in *Horrible Histories*) visited the Oxford Union in 2022, the entire chamber erupted in song. Everyone in knew the lyrics to 'The King of Bling'. In today's world of viral moments, trending sounds, and short-form content, what is it that will bring children that same sense of generational camaraderie in 20 years' time?

Seeing children watching Netflix with personalised streaming, or scrolling through social media, I wonder if all children are engaging with the same content. If not, does this mean they're experiencing different childhoods? What have they lost as a result? How many shared references, conversations, and even friendships will they now miss?

It's clear that my childhood cartoons were a product of their time. Our children certainly won't have what we had. Yet for something that was supposed to be a phase eventually outgrown, these cartoons have had a long-lasting effect on the way in which I perceive our changing and fast-paced world today, and I'm only just beginning to fully recognise and appreciate this when comparing them to the cartoons and media that the children of today engage with.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Have an opinion on something we've published? Email [editors@cherwell.org](mailto:editors@cherwell.org)

### The name of the game

I agree with Leo Jones ('Studentification' is hollowing out Oxford) that the University's numerous 'development' projects risk making Oxford a worse place to live for town and gown alike. I only wish to add a minor gripe about the terminology that has sprung up to describe this phenomenon: 'studentification'. This language appears to lay the blame for the predatory practices of the University squarely at the feet of students for having the temerity to move to another city in pursuit of a degree. The real fault lies elsewhere: with landlords who use the student demand for housing as an excuse to raise everyone's rent and with University middle-managers who behave like heartless real estate companies. Calling it 'studentification' suggests that it is the inevitable consequence of being a 'university town'. It's not: it's an active choice. It's time we placed the blame where it belongs.

Stanley Smith, *Teddy Hall*

### Brick by brick

Beatrix Arnold and Stanley Smith's feature on the UPP ('The independent cinema battling Oriol College to stay open') was a welcome reminder of what's at stake when colleges prioritise expansion over community. Too often, development in Oxford is treated as inevitable, as if colleges exist apart from the city around them. This piece pushed back on that, highlighting not just the cultural value of independent cinema, but its role as one of the few genuinely shared spaces in the city. Independent cinemas aren't just about films – they're spaces for conversation, for community, and for engaging with ideas beyond the university. Oxford is often criticised for being insular. This feels like a clear chance to do things differently, and to recognise the value of coexistence rather than displacement. The article made that case clearly, without slipping into cynicism. It is clear that Oxford University needs to look beyond expansion. Protecting spaces like this cinema would be a good place to start.

Studentification Hater, *St Catherine's College*

## THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts

Give a raise to your intern for this idea. ('Timothée Chalamet appointed Visiting Professor of the Arts')

drtonimaox via *Instagram*

Colleges seem to forget that people who are not students live in Oxford too and deserve their own spaces ('The independent cinema battling Oriol to stay open')

lxnsdown via *Instagram*

Given the usual Union track record of dirty linen causing those elected to demit office, I expect popcorn sales to soar across Oxford. Perhaps *Cherwell* might offer odds on the first to go? ('Catherine Xu wins Oxford Union presidency for MT26')

Glenn Calderwood via *Facebook*

I'm in pursuit of greatness with this one ('Timothée Chalamet appointed Visiting Professor of the Arts')

beatrice.arnold\_ via *Instagram*

About time...don't you think? ('Corpus Christi unveils its first female portrait')

Fi\_teague via *Instagram*

A dazzling piece. Thanks, allies! ('Comedy is very deceptive: Seán Carey on 'Operation Mincemeat')

mincemeatlive via *Instagram*

Racists are not welcome in a city of sanctuary. ('Police investigate group hanging England flags amid safety concerns')

hoahblumshaikh via *Facebook*

Follow *Cherwell* on Instagram and Facebook and comment on our posts to see yourself in the next print!

# There really is no smoke without fire

*Oxford's preference for the cigarette over the vape has its roots in classism*

LEO JONES

Preoccupation with one's appearance is to be expected when starting at university. New wardrobes and even newer anxieties combine as the daunting concept of Fresher's Week approaches. Coming from a working-class background, these feelings are inevitably amplified when starting at an institution like Oxford. One wishes only to fit in – a daunting challenge in a university drenched in tradition and history, known for its generational wealth and privilege.

We look to what we can control: our appearances, subtle behaviours. We want to put forward our best selves, but also feel confident with the people around us. But there are certainly some behaviours that you would never expect to carry social meaning. Nicotine, for me at least, was certainly not one of them.

Growing up in a deprived seaside town, my classic night out before university might include some drinks in our sticky local Wetherspoons before shuffling across the road to an equally grubby nightclub. Not before a quick pit stop at the brightly lit 'Vape Selection', where a cash-only lemon and lime Crystal Bar awaited us. This route was well-trodden, as many an LED light and fruit-flavoured puff marked the darkened club. Rarely, if we were fortunate enough to afford a pack (or more realistically, leech from someone else), the rogue Marlboro would make an appearance.

There was something exclusive about the cigarette, how when someone lit one up, the herds would come running. I found myself enjoying being that person with the packet, as I would exchange bizarre details about my life with strangers in the club's smoking area. 'Smoking socially', in all senses of the term, gave me a buzz. As an extrovert, I was happy to be a part of the 11.6% of 18-24 year olds who enjoyed a late night fag and a deep chat.

While I had always viewed smoking as a luxury, largely down to its price, I had never viewed anyone any differently for puffing on a Superking or an Elf Bar. There was no hierarchy,

nor was it a marker of identity. But university changed that.

The vape, in Oxford, is practically extinct. Or rather, it is hidden. I noticed how friends who did enjoy a Lost Mary would do so discreetly: a quick inhale before it disappeared hurriedly into a pocket. But the cigarette, on the other hand, was a different story.

People seemed proud to smoke. They would gather in groups, almost parading their cigarettes, as they dramatically lit one up for a friend. Whether in a pub garden, outside a bar, or simply walking down the street, I would see the same calculated raising of the filter to the mouth, a deep, slow puff, before the cathartic, eye-roll that came with the exhale. It was almost choreographed in its performance. It was alluring, with something frankly sexual about it.

“*What feels most jarring is not the smoking itself, but the selective romanticisation of it. The same act that signified struggle in one context becomes style in another*”

The return of early 2000s beauty and fashion is nothing new. Clothes are branded with Y2K labels in shop windows, while unhealthy skinny bodies walk down red carpets. 'Heroine chic' is back, as dark circles, hollow cheekbones, and malnutrition are flaunted as a physical ideal – particularly for women. Health is not in. Instead, we see something darker and grittier in these trends, certainly exacerbated by frequent paparazzi shots of Paul Mescal, Sabrina Carpenter, and Charli XCX taking a drag.

However, what struck me was not the universality of this 'trend'. People have always

mimicked celebrities: that is old news. But it was this distinction between the chic, glorified, and even fetishised cigarette, versus the villainisation and trivialisation of the disposable vape that I could not comprehend. Until university showed me its roots in classism.

The average vape's bright colouring, cheap price (averaging around £3-5), and sweet flavours make it uncool. A lesser commodity compared to cigarettes, which comparatively average at around £13-20 per pack. I joked with friends about how people were able to afford this lifestyle on a student budget, as I rationed my pack of 20 to last as long as possible. But not only this, I found it hilarious the way in which people paraded around with their cigarettes in Oxford. They were treated like some kind of armour, a status symbol, while I watched my friend shamefully rush their lemon and lime back into their pocket.

Despite Gen Z's hyperexposure to the damage that cigarettes can cause via campaigns throughout the 2010s, it was clear that this performance was a symptom of something different. A broader aesthetic desire to appear scruffy, frazzled, and messy, in a way that mimics the working class but conveniently excludes the implications of that. It was poverty porn at its finest – the performance of class as style.

I grew up with a single mum ashamed of her smoking, a feeling which certainly influenced me as I was told to stay away from cigarettes, that I would be broken from my first puff. Cigarettes were never glamorous – they were a burden, both financial and physical. I would never have imagined that, in a different context, they could become something to display with pride.

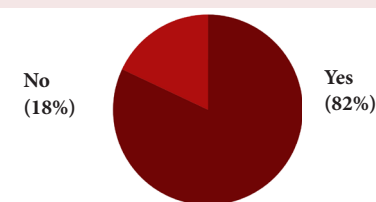
And yet, here they are – no longer hidden behind cupped hands or apologetic glances, but held aloft, aestheticised, transformed into something aspirational.

What feels most jarring is not the smoking itself, but the selective romanticisation of it. The same act that signified struggle in one context becomes style in another. The difference is not the cigarette, but who is holding it.

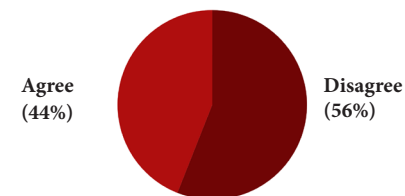
In the end, the smoke may dissipate, but its signal is all too clear.

## THE VERDICT

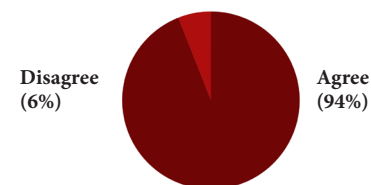
Is Mandelson a symbol of a broken system?



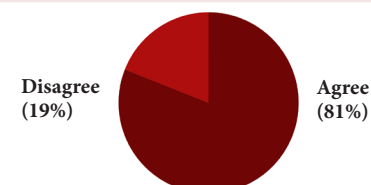
The Oxford vac is just a privilege showcase



Modern kids' TV is worse than when we grew up



Smoking is cooler than vaping



\*According to over 400 Instagram respondents

# When I met Peter Mandelson

HASSAN AKRAM

In October 2024, during the Oxford Chancellor election, one of my responsibilities as Deputy Editor of Profiles at *Cherwell* was to interview Peter (then Lord) Mandelson, who was among the five frontrunners contesting the election. I was due to meet him at St Catherine's College at 2.30pm. While I was on the coach from London to Oxford, my phone rang – an unknown number – and on the other end was Mandelson. "I'm at St Catz", he said, audibly annoyed: "Where are you?" I pointed out that he was an hour early. "No, I'm not. 1.30pm was the time I was given." I explained that the *Cherwell* editors must have given me the wrong time, that I was very sorry, that it wouldn't happen again, etc. He replied that he would try to fit in the interview at a later time.

When, eventually, I arrived at St Catherine's College, it was an hour's wait in the Porters' Lodge before the great man presented himself. Even the manner of his entry was worthy of the Mandelson lore. A slick black car pulled up outside the college. It took me a moment to notice – though it might have been a trick of the light – that the peer was making the end of his nose very blunt against the car window, in an angular attempt to discover whether or not that journo from *Cherwell* had arrived on time. Seeing that I had, he sprang out, and we shook hands.

I spent the next two hours intermittently interviewing him as he hopped between the several ceremonies and meetings which his position as an honorary fellow demanded of him. He seemed already to know what he wanted to say, which is fair enough for a politician. One tic stands out in my mind. Every time he mentioned some praiseworthy feature of his record in office, I, out of polite interest, said, "Really?", and his tetchy response each time was to exclaim, "Yes!", as if scandalised that anyone might be unaware of his achievements.

By the end of the interview, his irritation had

subsided, giving way to the famous "prince of darkness" charm which for years had sent him ricocheting back and forth between Cabinet and disgrace. He enquired whether I wanted a drink or snack, to which I politely refused. Then, after his suggestion that if I had any further questions, I could put them to him by phone, I left.

A week later, when the interview was published, I and the other *Cherwell* editors realised that it contained a serious omission. I hadn't asked Mandelson about his connection to Jeffrey Epstein, of which I had not been aware, but which turned out, on investigation, to be well-documented. We did some research, scanned whatever was publicly available, and wrote an article on it.

If the Prime Minister had read it before deciding on a new Ambassador to Washington, he would have found ample evidence on which to block Mandelson's appointment. Among other things, it contains the smoking gun that in June 2009 Mandelson stayed at Epstein's Manhattan townhouse, while Epstein was in prison for soliciting prostitution from a minor. That alone should have disqualified him from the Ambassadorship, from the Chancellorship, and from public life.

“*It was taken for granted that friends of paedophiles, like war criminals, must be accepted as legitimate political players*”

Given the anti-Mandelson frenzies which have erupted since the Epstein Files releases of September 2025 and February 2026, it is worth pointing out that these concerns about him went largely unraised when he was first appointed



Ambassador, even though enough was already publicly known for a group of 19-year-olds to be able to compile a dossier on him.

Keir Starmer and his government, like anybody else with access to Google, must have known that Mandelson had been an associate of Epstein. It did not trouble them. They celebrated the appointment of a great statesman, the genius behind New Labour and the grandson of Herbert Morrison. The apologies which have since been made are more probably the result of the public outcry, not of any real remorse at having appointed him.

Very likely, members of the government or commentators in the media saw nothing wrong with making an Ambassador of the close friend of a disgusting paedophile. The President of the United States, after all, had been an even closer friend of the same man.

It was taken for granted that friends of paedophiles, like war criminals, must be

accepted as legitimate political players. Indeed, if the Mandelson principle were expanded, and friendship with war criminals became punishable by exclusion from public life, there would be hardly any Cabinet left. "No one can rule guiltlessly." That must have been the rationale which led the government and the media to disregard Mandelson's past; it must have been the rationale which led Mandelson himself to disregard his friend's crimes while Epstein was still at large.

Mandelson, whose disgrace is now so complete that he has nothing more to do than to urinate publicly in Notting Hill, deserved shunning from public life and grilling in every interview long before the release of the latest files. The stink was already there, but not enough people noticed it.

Image credit: Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, Open Government License via Wikimedia Commons.

## The independent cinema battling Oriel College to stay open



*The Ultimate Picture Palace's campaign to extend its lease beyond 2037 has united community members, Oxford students, and alumni*

BEATRIX ARNOLD and STANLEY SMITH

On a freezing January evening, an eager crowd piled into a small, independent cinema just off the Cowley Road, the Ultimate Picture Palace (UPP). The event, a private screening of Chloé Zhao's *Hamnet*, was hosted by the cinema in collaboration with Dame Pippa Harris, the film's Golden Globe winning producer. Packed into the UPP's single-screen 108 seat auditorium, the invitees were an eclectic mix of notables from the University of Oxford, including the Vice Chancellor Irene Tracey, film students from the Ruskin, and devoted local cinephiles.

At first glance, the evening appeared to be the perfect blend of 'town and gown', with both halves of Oxford coming together as a cohesive community to share their love of cinema. But this sense of unity belied a growing tension, as relations between the UPP and the University become increasingly strained. With the looming threat of an unrenewed lease from Oriel College, the current landlord of the premises, the independent picturehouse is appealing to the community at large for support in the struggle against the ever-clarifying spectre of closure.

### A cultural hub in East Oxford

The Grade-II listed building which hosted the evening screening has functioned on and off as a cinema for more than a century. Founded by a local actor in 1911, what was then known as the East Oxford Picture Palace showcased the early offerings of the emerging medium of film, until its owner was conscripted in 1917. The cinema stood unused for 50 years, before being

reopened by a pair of Oxford alumni in 1976. Under the new name of the Penultimate Picture Palace (PPP), the cinema became a staple of Oxford's small but enthusiastic film community, cherished for its late night screenings and its adventurous, often controversial, programming choices.

After the PPP's closure in the 1990s, responsibility for the cinema passed through several hands in quick succession. It was run variously by a former employee, local film enthusiasts, and even, in the summer of 1994, a group of squatters who renamed it the Section 6 Cinema and hosted free screenings for families. Eventually it found its way to Becky Hallsmith, a local who, in 2011, bought it in what she called an "impulse purchase", and set about renovating the premises. After Hallsmith's passing in 2018, a group of friends and family assumed responsibility for the venue; their aim was to transform it into a community-owned cinema, and, in 2022, they succeeded.

“*The UPP has remained consistent in two respects: its independence as a business and its role as a cultural hub in East Oxford*”

Despite its numerous names and many managers, the UPP has remained consistent in two respects at least: its independence as a business and its role as cultural hub in East

Oxford. For this reason, it was as much the star of the show at the *Hamnet* screening as the Oscar-nominated film and its celebrated producer. In a post-screening discussion, Dame Harris fondly recalled how going to the PPP as a teenager with Sir Sam Mendes, the director who would later become her co-producer, fuelled their life-long obsession with film. Nor is Harris the only one who clearly cares about the cinema. Many of the audience members were among those who donated to the UPP when the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to close it in 2020, raising £87,000 in a little over a week.

### A challenge of 'long term security'

The event was motivated by this palpable love of the UPP, as well as the sense of community pride in Oxford's born-and-raised producer and her success with *Hamnet*. Yet aside from this, the primary purpose of the evening's entertainment was to raise awareness of the latest existential threat facing the storied venue.

As Micaela Tuckwell, the Executive Director of the UPP, explained to the audience, Oriel College bought the freehold to the UPP building in 2021, with plans to redevelop it as part of a 'fifth quad' once the cinema's lease expires in 2037. With this in mind, the College is refusing to grant the UPP's request for an extension of their current lease.

"The challenge we now face is one of long-term security", Tuckwell said when we sat down for an interview after the *Hamnet* screening. "As things stand, we have just eleven years left on our lease. That might sound like plenty of time, but in reality it makes it extremely difficult to invest responsibly, carry out essential renovation works, remain commercially viable, or plan

properly for future generations."

The most pressing issue, Tuckwell explained, is the imminent need for renovations. Unsurprisingly, given its age, the UPP is not fit for modern purposes. There is no flat access to the building, and the loos, positioned somewhat amusingly at the bottom of stairs directly below the screen, are not wheelchair accessible. The building's energy efficiency likewise demands attention; renovations are required to keep a lid on heating costs and ensure that the cinema is financially solvent. Without these improvements, the picturehouse may have to close before the end of its lease.

Tuckwell said that the investors required to fund the renovations are already lined up, but that they are unwilling to commit unless the UPP secures a lease of at least 20 to 25 years. This predicament has, furthermore, prevented the picturehouse from procuring essential funding that enables the day to day operation of the cinema. Last year, the UPP was denied a major National Lottery grant because it did not meet the lease conditions. As a result of Oriel's reluctance to commit to the cinema's long term residence in the building, Tuckwell emphasised that the UPP "can't modernise the cinema...to be competitive" with other venues in Oxford.

This critical juncture in the history of the UPP is inevitably coloured by the broader instability in the independent cinema sector. Seismic changes in the screen landscape at large, driven by the rise of streaming and accelerated by the market challenges that formed the corollaries to the COVID-19 pandemic, have posed significant difficulties for picturehouse owners across the country. A survey conducted by the Independent Cinema Office last year found that, without significant capital investment, almost a

third of independent cinemas in the UK will close within the next three to five years. While it is not the only local business threatened by the increasing encroachment of the University of Oxford into the surrounding town, the loss of the UPP, one of only two independent cinemas in Oxford, would be particularly devastating for many of the city's movie-goers. The fragility of the independent cinema industry, once a cornerstone of the global cultural milieu, renders the UPP's current campaign even more crucial.

“*I feel that we all belong together in this city, and we can cooperate together*”

### A cinema 'for the entire city'

For Alastair Phillips, Chair of the Management Committee of the UPP, the closure of the cinema would be a devastating blow for the arts in Oxford. “The UPP is an amazing cultural resource for the entire city”, he stated. “It covers all kinds of diverse programming.” It is certainly true that the UPP is willing to showcase films that others are not. This is clearly exemplified by their screening of *The Voice of Hind Rajab*, the ‘docufiction’ about the murder of a six year-old Palestinian girl by the Israel Defense Forces. While the film has struggled to find distribution elsewhere, despite having been showered in awards, the UPP ran it for more than two months between 2025 and 2026.

Tuckwell and Phillips see the UPP as an asset which can benefit both the local population and the University community. They emphasise that they are willing to work constructively with Oriel College and are keen to avoid playing into the ‘town versus gown’ narrative. “I feel that we all belong together in this city, and we can cooperate together”, Phillips said. “We’re here as a learning resource for the College and for the University, and there’s different ways we can kind of develop that relationship as we go forward.”

“What we’d really like to do is to be able to have a creative partnership”, Tuckwell explained. “It could be them using this as a lecture space in the day and us continuing to be able to have a public theatre cinema at night. We’ve put that on the table to them, but unfortunately, the latest thing they said to us was ‘no, we definitely can’t give you a longer lease’.

“There’s lots of examples around the country of higher education institutions working with independent cinemas or independent theatres. We were asking the College to support that vision.”

Phillips points to the example set by the University of Warwick, where he is a Professor of Film and Television Studies. He says the film department there regularly works with the local Arts Centre, which has a three-screen cinema. “We do all kinds of collaborative activities with the Warwick Art Centre cinema. We work on

student events, we work on programming... we’re always involved in speaking opportunities.

“We’re very interested in developing a really close relationship with Oriel that can benefit both the cinema, but also Oriel students. Students want to be film makers, they want to interact with screen culture, maybe while they’re at university, but maybe some of them will go on into the industry. We want to give them a leg up.”

Oriel College told *Cherwell*: “We are proud of our heritage cinema, the Ultimate Picture Palace, and are in dialogue with the new managers about how to ensure it remains open to the wider public. We have no plans to extend the lease at this early stage in the tenancy.”

### The campaign to ‘save the UPP’

In spite of all this reconciliatory rhetoric, it’s clear that the UPP are willing to take decisive action to fight for the future of the venue. On Thursday 12th March, the cinema initiated its campaign to “save the UPP”, launching a petition which now has over 20,000 signatures. This was followed with a call for regulars to gather outside the cinema, with the aim of recreating a historic photograph taken of its patrons in front of the building.

The local community responded in droves, with well over two hundred people turning up – so many that they did not all fit inside the small premises. Standing amongst this crowd, the depth of feeling for this small business is unmistakable. When Tuckwell addressed the patrons and mentioned Oriel College, they loudly booed and hissed, which she rather diplomatically tried to discourage.

Regulars were forthcoming with fond memories of the UPP and their previous interactions with it. “You know what student life is like, you leave all your work to the middle of the night”, one former Oxford University student in his sixties said. “They used to screen films at midnight and the last thing you really wanted to do is to work continuously all the way through. A two hour break to go out and watch some crazy film in the middle of the night at the PPP just got you through, it really did.”

“*We’re facing a sycamore gap moment here. This beautiful thing could be taken from us, and we have one chance to talk the people who are planning to do that out of taking that from us*”

His fear for the future is palpable. “We’re facing a sycamore gap moment here”, he said,



Left: A UPP patron.



Right: Anneliese Dodds, Labour MP for Oxford East.



Right: Micaela Tuckwell, Executive Director of the UPP.

referencing the devastation felt when the iconic tree at Hadrian's wall was felled illegally. “This beautiful thing could be taken from us, and we have one chance to talk the people who are planning to do that out of taking that from us.”

Another Oxford alumnus explained the key role the picturehouse has played in his life: “The PPP is where I took my girlfriend for our first date. She’s now my wife, the mother of my children. For me, like generations of other students, I would imagine, the PPP is not just a vital part of Oxford’s cultural life specifically, but of life in all its senses.”

One of the patrons who showed up to lend her support was Anneliese Dodds, the Labour MP for Oxford East. Speaking with us, she made a direct plea to Oxford students to support the UPP’s campaign: “Come to the cinema, enjoy it. It’s yours as well... But once you’ve come and enjoyed it, please do raise your voice. Make clear that this cinema really needs to stay right in the heart of the community.”

Nor is support for the campaign limited to local residents. It is evident that many current Oxford students, who might be supposed to be the beneficiaries of such ‘studentification’ efforts as Oriel has planned, are also concerned about the future of the picturehouse. One Oxford student described the UPP as “a bastion of what cinemas could be”, stressing that “it would be a resounding loss were it to be yet another institution gobbled up by the University.”

Despite its grounding in the local community, and relatively peripheral location to the nucleus of student life in Oxford, the UPP nevertheless continues to make a compelling contribution to the cultural lives of those at the University. One Oxford student said: “It’s my favourite cinema in Oxford, and I’ve thoroughly enjoyed every time I’ve been; the proximity to many a Cowley pub for a post-film debrief with friends is a recipe for the perfect evening. I’d be gutted to see it go, and I hope the community voice speaking up for it is enough to challenge Oriel’s over-extended reach.”

Another student emphasised the “sense of being in a communal experience that UPP gives you that just doesn’t carry over in a shopping-centre multiplex.” Without the UPP, cinema-

goers in central Oxford would be furnished only by Oxford Cinema & Café on Magdalen Street, Phoenix Picturehouse in Jericho, and Curzon in Westgate, which would make the city “immeasurably poorer”.

“*The UPP embodies the perilous status of independent cinemas up and down the country: beloved by their local communities, they are nevertheless living with the constant threat of closure*”

### An emblematic struggle

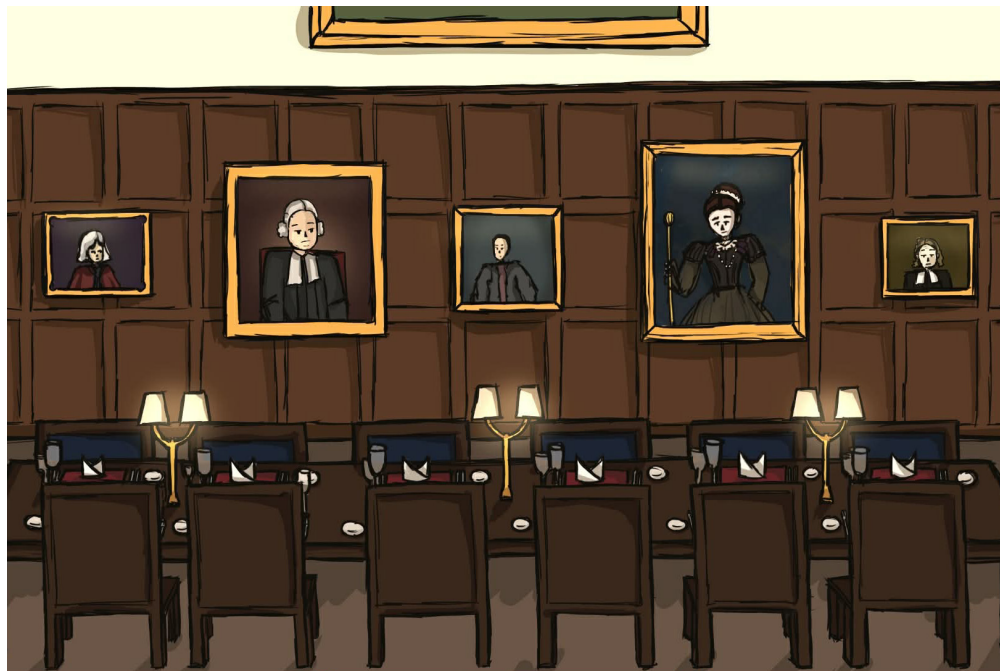
Above all, the campaign to “save the UPP” concretises the idea that preserving culture, in all its forms, starts at home. The art deco venue, and its variegated programme of mainstream, independent, and classic films, ensures the unique appeal of the UPP, and its endurance at the core of Oxford’s artistic milieu. The enthusiasm of cinema-goers, past and present, is a potent testament to the vibrant contribution of such independent picturehouses to the cultural lives of local communities.

The UPP embodies the perilous status of these cultural cornerstones up and down the country: beloved by their communities, they are nevertheless living with the constant threat of closure. In Oxford, the issue is further aggravated by the constant development projects of colleges, forcing independent businesses into conflict with the University itself. Yet, seeing how passionate the Oxford community is about this cinema, one can’t help but feel, and hope, that the Ultimate Picture Palace will live on for another century.

Image credits: Stanley Smith for *Cherwell*.

# ‘The only woman in Hall’: Gender and college governance

*Women now make up 47% of Oxford’s Heads of House. Yet with each college’s unique history and internal structure, the scope of collegiate leadership gender inclusivity is difficult to generalise*



RUBY BARENBERG and HATTIE SIMPSON

When Baroness Alexandra Freeman became Principal of Hertford College last month, she did not initially realise that she was the first woman to hold the role. It was a detail that, she says, came as a surprise, given that Hertford had begun admitting women in 1974, amongst the earliest of the formerly all-male colleges to do so. The significance of this fact has emerged gradually since. At one of her first gaudy dinners, she hosted some of the college’s first female students, including its first female JCR President. “I was really surprised how much it meant to them to have a female Principal”, she reflects. “More than one said that they had wondered whether it would happen in their lifetime.”

That sense of something both long overdue and yet only newly realised runs through Oxford’s recent shift in college leadership. Women now make up 47% of Heads of House, a figure that would have been difficult to imagine even a generation ago, and the University itself is led by a female Vice-Chancellor. At a glance, the change appears to be substantial. But it isn’t evenly distributed. Thirteen colleges have never had a female Head. Nine current Heads are the first women to hold their roles. And among the Permanent Private Halls, there has yet to be a single female Head. The result is a pattern that feels less like a clean transition into the modern day but rather a series of staggered steps, shaped by the histories of the individual institutions.

## Timelines and trends

The emergence of women in senior college leadership is, in many ways, a recent phenomenon, best understood by considering the long individual institutional histories of each college. Women’s colleges have, unsurprisingly, a long history of women in senior leadership roles from their founding, with male heads historically the exception rather than the norm. St Anne’s and St Hilda’s, for example, have both only ever had one male Principal. Lady Margaret Hall’s first male Principal, Duncan Stewart, took the position the same year that the college became co-educational.

In most other colleges, however, many of the first female Heads were only appointed towards the end of the 2010s, with 13 colleges appointing their first female Heads since 2015, as though the University as a whole is, belatedly, catching up with itself. While most male colleges started to admit women in the 1970s, changes in gender inclusivity have been gradual, often just layered onto existing structures. Colleges admitted women as students, gradually appointed women as fellows, and at last saw these changes reflected at the level of leadership. The delay between these stages can’t be ignored and highlights just how much historical influences and entrenched norms still shape colleges today. This can also help

explain why colleges like Hertford, early adopters of co-education, have nonetheless only recently appointed their first female Heads.

But this acceleration hasn’t produced uniformity. Some colleges, such as Mansfield, have moved quickly, appointing multiple female Heads in succession. Others have yet to appoint one at all. Despite being amongst the first male colleges to go co-ed, Wadham has never been led by a woman. Brasenose and Jesus have only just appointed women as their Heads of House, both of whom will take up their roles later this year.

The persistence of the ‘first woman’ phenomenon is revealing. These appointments are often framed as milestones; celebrated by colleges as markers of progress that signal a break with the past. But they also point to how long that break has taken, and how dependent it remains on the particular trajectories of individual colleges.

Yet these appointments also reflect larger trends within the university culture. The fact that the initial appointment of women to these roles is clustered, for instance, suggests that many colleges may be attempting to keep pace with one another. The growth in leadership inclusivity during the late 2010s also means that many of the first female Heads of House faced the additional challenge of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, which Dinah Rose, President of Magdalen College, described as “tough for everyone” regardless of gender.

These changes also illustrate broader societal trends in women’s professional leadership in academia and beyond. These changes have also resulted in the way in which women hold themselves in positions of power. Rose noticed these shifts firsthand: “In earlier years, [women] often adopted a rather stiff and formal persona, perhaps compensating for some anxiety about whether they’d be accepted in their role. It is a joy to me now to be friends with a number of senior women who are funny, irreverent and relaxed, as well as being brilliant and accomplished. It seems to me that they own the space of leadership in a way that was more difficult for an earlier generation.”

## The appointment

These patterns are shaped, in part, by how Heads of House are selected. Most rely on internal elections among fellows, others on appointment processes involving the University Council, and in certain cases – most notably at Christ Church – the position is decided by an external authority. The Dean of Christ Church is appointed by the Crown on the advice of the Prime Minister.

In theory, the internal election approach is a more democratic form of governance, but in practice, it can often reproduce the existing imbalances which have become deeply embedded within higher education. Fellows – often the group responsible for electing Heads – remain disproportionately male in many colleges. At Balliol, for example, whose first

female Master, Dame Helen Ghosh, took up the post in April 2018 and remains in the role today, less than a quarter of fellows are women. Similarly, at Jesus College, whose first female principal will assume the role this August, less than a third of the Governing Body are women. Where leadership is determined internally, it is unsurprising that outcomes tend to reflect these underlying demographics.

This is not necessarily the result of explicit bias. Instead, it is perhaps better understood as a form of pipeline inequality, where imbalances in representation at junior levels accumulate, resulting in a lack of diversity in senior leadership. Academic career progression, fellowship appointments, and informal networks all play a role in shaping this pipeline. In many cases, these dynamics are subtle: the product of long-standing imbalances, uneven progression rates, and the weight often placed on particular forms of academic experience or institutional familiarity.

“*These appointments are often framed as milestones; celebrated by colleges as markers of progress that signal a break with the past. But they also point to how long that break has taken, and how dependent it remains on the particular trajectories of individual colleges*

The result is a landscape in which progress depends less on overarching institutional reform than on the internal dynamics of individual colleges. Even where colleges attempted to widen the field, appointments remain shaped by internal culture as much as formal criteria. As Helen King, Principal of St Anne’s, notes, each college brings its own “personality and values and history” to the process, with governing bodies weighing candidates differently depending on what they see as most important at a given moment. Whilst search processes – often outsourced to headhunting agencies – may begin with a broad pool, decisions are ultimately made within comparatively small groups, drawing on shared understandings – both explicit and implicit – of what leadership should look like.

King is cautious about drawing firm conclusions from this, emphasising the complexity of the system itself. Fellows, she says, approach these decisions with a strong sense of responsibility, weighing a range of factors. “Different fellows put different weights on different things”, she explains – whether that is academic record, leadership experience, or the ability to represent the college’s identity. But that breadth of consideration also means that no single factor – including diversity – is ever likely to be decisive on its own.

## What’s in a name?

Language offers another window into these dynamics. Across Oxford, the titles given to Heads of House vary widely: from Warden to Provost, Master to Principal, and President to Dean. Whilst these distinctions often appear superficial and ceremonial, they reflect deeper histories of authority and institutional identity.

Older colleges tend to retain titles such as ‘Warden’ or ‘Provost’ whilst newer or reformed colleges have tended to adopt terms like ‘Principal’ or ‘President’. The variety of Oxford college titles is particularly notable, as 20 of the 31 colleges at Cambridge use the term ‘Master’ to describe the Head of the college. The only college in the Oxbridge system to use a title that is gendered feminine is Girton College at Cambridge, which has used the title ‘Mistress’ since

the College was founded in 1869.

Issues of language extend beyond titles themselves. In some college statutes, such as those of Keble College, the Head is still referred to using explicitly male pronouns. Elsewhere, especially amongst former women’s colleges, the reverse pattern is clear with female pronouns regularly used as the default in these governance documents. While subtle, the use of gendered pronouns may change the way students and faculty of colleges understand how accessible leadership pathways may be to them.

At the same time, it is also notable that simply having more gender-inclusive titles does not always correlate to actual gender inclusivity in appointments. For instance, of the eleven colleges that have never appointed female Heads, only one uses the gendered title of ‘Master’. At Cambridge, where the term ‘Master’ is used much more often, there also does not seem to be a significant practical connection between the gender of the title and the gender of the title holder. This is not to suggest that the title of leadership roles is unimportant, but it does appear that, in practice, the gendering of a title may not limit the gender of the appointee.

## Lived experience

These historical contexts can often be highly significant in determining the experience of current-day female Heads – although the wider picture remains more nuanced. Freeman notes that even before taking up her role, she had “already heard stories” of discrimination within the university. Rose, in comparison, suggested that leading a college represents, in some respects, a “refreshing change” from other institutional environments, noting particularly her previous experience as a barrister in which she was “conscious of the need to establish my credibility in court in ways that men don’t have to”.

Professor Lady Sue Black, President of St John’s College, described Oxford as “a good standard for other institutions” as women have many roles in senior leadership within colleges and across the university. However, Oxford lags slightly behind Cambridge, where only 5 out of the 31 colleges have never had a female Head, about 16%. Rose also noted that her position as a female Head of a formerly all-male college puts her in “some striking situations” such as when she “presid[ed] over an all-male gaudy of alumni who matriculated before the College became co-educational in 1979. On at least one occasion, I was the only woman in Hall, apart from members of the choir and the serving staff”.

## An ongoing process

Viewed in isolation, the rise in female Heads of House suggests meaningful progress – compared to even just a decade ago, the landscape has changed significantly. Fundamentally, women are no longer the exceptions with college leadership in the way that they once were. And yet, the ‘first woman’ phenomenon points to a process that’s still largely incomplete, with around a quarter of colleges having never appointed a woman as Head. Oxford also has yet to appoint a female Chancellor – a reminder that some of its most visible positions of authority remain shaped by tradition.

This unevenness is also visible beyond gender. Whilst the number of women in leadership has increased, progress across other forms of representation, such as ethnicity and religion, remains limited. Baroness Valerie Amos became the first-ever Black Head of an Oxford college upon her appointment as Master of University College in September 2020. She remains the only Black Head of House to have ever led an Oxford college.

At the same time, the positive changes in the inclusion of female Heads speak to what Professor Dame Julia Black, Warden at Nuffield College, describes as a “transformed” landscape for women in leadership roles. Speaking about the entirety of her professional career in academia, Black also emphasised that the shifts in inclusion are also highly intentional: “This change hasn’t happened by accident, however, but is the result of a concerted effort by an extraordinary number of people in multiple sectors over a long period of time. So it’s essential to keep supporting women to be successful leaders.”

*Illustration credit: Crystal He for Cherwell.*

# Cherwell

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# John Evelyn



**D**àjiā hǎo, chaps. I'd like to open by congratulating everyone here for surviving the Union's hatred and war era and arriving at the peace and love era. Despite the very fun crewdate that nobody can remember, it seems that this era is coming to a premature end.

We somehow managed to pull a termcard together – all it took was the largest committee in years. In an attempt to deflect from any woke allegations whatsoever, President Peace and Love herself has assembled perhaps the least progressive group of appointees imaginable. This horde has invited speakers so controversial that whole debate lineups won't even be revealed until the last minute. Gosh and in fact wow.

Even then, vac days were not without problems. For some reason, Radley's Least Employable 2026 and Tolerant Timmy were spotted in the PO more than any actual committee members, despite not having a position themselves. Our elected officials, when not crashing out over tribunals, seemed to have taken the phrase "vacation day" literally. Homeless Masters and Sandra Eagle handled basically every social, whilst Human Poached Chicken did so little finance work that he accidentally called Homeless Masters the Treasurer. In front of the bursar.

In fairness to Human Poached Chicken, he's had a tiring vac. From "crushing" on

Homelander and Ace Ventura, to having a slate dynamic so confusing I'm not even going to try to talk about it here, to innumerable milk jokes, perhaps he just needs a nap. Indeed, on that subject, there's one former hack who needs a nap more than anyone else here. Perhaps if he got some sleep, he'd stop informing the Cricketer that he knows what he did and would get a real job instead of posting from anonymous Facebook accounts.

That's all from me, so goodbye and zàijiàn dàjiā. And as for why I've sneaked in Chinese? I guess you'll just have to wait for a few weeks. Not even for *Jevelyn*. Literally any newspaper.

## ARCHIVES

### Plus ça change...



1988

**O**nce upon a time, *Cherwell* was issued with an injunction to prevent them from naming an Oxford don in relation to allegations of sexual harassment against students. In our enlightened age of press liberation, such a thing is, naturally, beyond the realms of the imagination.

*Cherwell*, not to be cowed, railed against "the attempts of bureaucracies seeking to cloak this issue in a conspiracy of silence". Its indomitable stance in the "fight against intimidation" roused support from across the student body, with letters congratulating the editors on their pluck – a potent demonstration of the power of press coverage, however dilute.

In the following issue, the editors doubled down, and printed a cartoon criticising the lack of accountability among the upper echelons of the University administration: a Dean is pictured promising to launch an investigation into the sexual harassment case "just as soon as hell freezes over."

Such cases are, of course, a far cry from the front pages of *Cherwell* today, and alien to the University as an institution. The rather melodramatic asseveration of the 1988 editors, therefore, can hold little resonance for our readers: "*Cherwell* will not climb down or apologise for attempting to name the person concerned. Dons will be named. The Press is a mighty weapon and we will use it."

democratisation of news. It is also leading to the slow death of proper journalism. Facts are distortable from conception – not packaged into professional, verified reporting, but immediately manipulated for political objectives and consumed first not as news, but as rhetoric. We've lost the vital buffer between events, and those wishing to use stories for their own purposes – quality impartial reporting committed to accuracy, not vested interests.

Oxford is a horrifically inaccurate sample of the real world, but the threats to objectivity are no less serious here. That's where we come in. Take a look at our article on the Proctors' Oration this week, written by Stanley, one of our new Section Editors, pushing past jargon to raise awareness of criticisms of decisions affecting all of us, from the heart of the University.

Cynics might accuse us of a misrepresentative narrative – it's surely hardly accurate to suggest the University isn't investing in infrastructure when the £185 million Schwarzman Centre has just opened. We can point to our first Michaelmas front page covering Schwarzman to show that we're interested in building up awareness, not an agenda.

You can form any opinion that you like on the news you read here – but based on our best representation of the facts, not just the information that fits your perspective. Our passion for *Cherwell* comes from a desire to protect a university culture that values proper journalism, in the hope that Oxford graduates may rebuild a society that cares for it too.

## Editorial



### Mercedes Haas Editor-in-Chief

#### Trinity

**M**ost *Cherwell* staff consider the Week 0 print an idea that made sense to someone else, at some point. Its conception comes simply at the wrong time: when the city has been vacated of students, when people remember there exists a world outside of OX1, when messages go unanswered for reasons that feel, briefly, justified.

And yet it is precisely this that makes it quite compelling. Not because it is convenient, or even especially well-organised, but because it is assembled under conditions that should prevent it from existing at all. It is a miracle that the W0 print in a student newspaper has survived for this long. Pieces are filed from different continents, edited across time zones, and argued over by people who, in some cases, have never even been in the same room. Decisions are made asynchronously, revised retrospectively, and occasionally forgotten altogether. At a certain point, a newspaper produced like this begins to make the idea of a "deadline" feel less like a practical constraint and more like a historical curiosity.

The Oxford English Dictionary records the earliest use of the word 'deadline' as a complaint: "No member of a subordinate union shall be allowed to accept work in any newspaper or job printing office where a task, stint or 'dead-line' is

imposed by the employer." In the past few weeks, Bea and I may have imposed one or the other deadline. Some of them even meant something. Whether the *Cherwell* union chooses to escalate this is, regrettably, above our pay grade.

At the time of writing this, I have not seen a single laid-in page, and articles are still in the process of being edited and revised. The print exists, for now, as a rumour sustained by Google Docs and good faith. This is therefore less an editorial than a small act of superstition: an attempt to speak the Week 0 print into existence, and to trust that, by the time you read this, it will have done so. That being said, a lot of time, sweat, and tears have gone into this, so we hope you will enjoy reading it as much as we have enjoyed writing it!



### Ned Remington News Deputy Editor

**Y**esterday, I deactivated my Twitter account for the fifth time this year. I'd redownloaded it two weeks before believing my new position as News Deputy Editor at *Cherwell* justified the occasional glance at the profiles of William Hague and Irene Tracey. I don't think the role warrants the toxic addiction to far-right AI ragebait, podcast edits, and snarky quote-tweets by self-indulgent centrists. A bubble constantly searching for new reasons to get its followers to hate each other – hardly the place to find real news.

The social media age that has raised us was dressed as the ultimate

## Lewis Goodall on politics, podcasting, and the prime minister

*‘There’s a difference between impartiality and neutrality’*



STANLEY SMITH

Lewis Goodall is a very busy man. Between co-hosting the hit daily podcast *The News Agents*, starring in LBC’s flagship Sunday radio show, and winning awards for exposing government cover-ups, the journalist and broadcaster has very little spare time. So I’m grateful when he squeezes in a half hour Zoom call with me in the middle of his work day. He may be on a break but he remains professional; his demeanour as we make small talk before the interview is the same as when he presents a podcast to millions of listeners. Energetic and conversational, you get the sense that he is always firing on all cylinders.

Goodall, aged just 36, has already had a distinguished career, being at the centre of what is often described as the ‘podcast revolution’ in British media. In 2022, Goodall left a prestigious job as policy editor of the BBC’s *Newsnight* in order to start *The News Agents* with veteran journalists Emily Maitlis and Jon Sopel, a decision he says was regarded by many at the time as “a little fringe, a little eccentric”.

Nearly four years later, you can tell that he is happy with the gamble he made. In his view, not only have podcasts become “utterly central” to the way in which we consume news, but individual hosts “have become enormously influential, way more than a lot of legacy shows”. When you compare the dwindling viewership of *Newsnight* to the success of *The News Agents*, which boasts four million monthly listeners, it’s hard not to agree. Nonetheless, Goodall hasn’t entirely thrown his lot in with the ‘new media’ format. Regularly working with Sky and Channel 4, he keeps one foot firmly planted in the more traditional media world, giving him a unique vantage point from which to assess the shifting sands of British journalism.

Goodall, however, doesn’t view his career in terms of clear distinctions. “All these barriers between media are dissolving, integrating, coming to nothing”, he tells me. He points to the fact that podcasts are increasingly mimicking traditional news shows, with hosts shelling out enormous amounts to pay for cameras and professional studios. “Apple and Spotify, in the last three months, are moving to basically video-first platforms for podcasts”, he points out. “You’re watching TV news, it’s just taking a different form.”

“*All these barriers between media are dissolving, integrating, coming to nothing*”

To him, the key developments in the industry are less to do with the format, and more to do with the constant demand for news that social media has created. Instead of producing work for regularly scheduled deadlines, journalists now have to be constantly on it, ready with a special report or ‘emergency podcast’ whenever news breaks. “You are everything, everywhere, all at once”, he says. “That’s what modern media shows have to be. It means you have to have a visual offering, an audio offering, a social media offering in each and every direction, because it’s an utter competition for eyeballs in the attention economy in which we live.”

“It’s exhausting, and it’s frustrating, and it’s relentless sometimes. But it’s also very exciting because we’re at a genuine moment of evolution in a media landscape which doesn’t come along very

often.”

Goodall’s ability to be at ease with this rapid change is likely the product of having lived a life defined by seismic political and economic transformations. Goodall was raised by young parents on an estate in southwest Birmingham, experiencing a childhood shaped by de-industrialisation and the constant threatened closure of the Rover factory which employed his father. He was seven when the Blair government came to power, ending 18 years of Tory dominance in British politics. For Goodall, this altered the direction of his life. Encouraged by Labour’s programme to increase the number of first-generation university students, he secured a place at Oxford University, studying History and Politics at St John’s College.

It’s clear that Goodall largely enjoyed his time at Oxford. “Look, as anyone who’s been there knows, it’s a deeply unusual place and a deeply unusual university experience”, he says. “There aren’t many times in your life where your job is to think about Thomas Hobbes, right? That’s a kind of really unique moment, which I realised about 18 months in, I think I enjoyed it a lot more when I did that.”

As was inevitable for a student from a working class background in the 2000s, Goodall encountered the prejudices of his more privileged peers. He recalls an instance where a “very charming guy” turned to him and declared “Oh Lewis, I love having you about. You’re the college’s bit of rough”. Goodall is remarkably relaxed about these run-ins, laughing the whole thing off: “That was the only time in my life, before or since, that I’ve ever been described as a bit of rough.”

If anything, Goodall’s background was a source of pride for him, rather than alienation. “I think what it gives you is just a license to be confident”, he reflects. “You’re gonna come across, both there and afterwards, some absolute chancers who, quite

frankly, were it not for the circumstances of their birth, would probably not be where they were or are today.

“Sometimes they will realise where you’re from and try and intimidate you. I think, what Oxford does, it just gives you that iron clad confidence to be like: ‘No, I’m not going to be intimidated by you because I might not be where you’re from, but I’ve gotten where you’ve got to, at least on equal terms, if not actually with one hand behind my back.’”

After graduating in 2010, Goodall worked as a question writer for *University Challenge*, and then at the Institute for Public Policy Research, before landing a job at the BBC in 2012. He once again found himself at the centre of tumultuous change, as the BBC sought to get to grips with a news ecosystem being redefined by social media. “I remember when I started working in news because I was 24 and the editor was like: ‘So, I’ve done this thing called Facebook Live right? We thought maybe you could, like, be in charge of that.’”

“*I might not be where you’re from, but I’ve gotten where you’ve got to, at least on equal terms, if not actually with one hand behind my back*”

So how exactly did these changes affect day-to-day reporting? “Without getting too History and Politics at Oxford about it, it’s just structure and agency”,

he says. Social media, he recalls, enabled young reporters to build their own brand independent of their employers. “If I’d been a journalist 20 years before, and I wanted to do my story... I’d go through the processes. I’d pitch to my editor and then eventually the piece would appear on *Newsnight*. But of course, I was then coming through at a time where you were initially encouraged... to go directly to the viewers. So, by definition, you end up being more of a player and you yourself become part of discourse rather than the organisation you’re working for, who previously controlled all of that.”

After a while, he explains, the BBC sought to rein this in. Before long, Goodall found himself being called to meetings with higher-ups to discuss his social media presence. He tells a story of one instance in which he posted a rundown about an election that had taken place in Norway and had to explain why he did so to his bosses. “I wasn’t being quizzed about the rights and wrongs of it, I doubt the BBC executive could even identify Norway on a map. It was more like, ‘why are you talking about that?’”

This is an issue which, to Goodall’s mind, the BBC still has not resolved. “Places like the BBC, they want to put the brand first, always. But people, intrinsically, for good or ill, when they’re going online now, look to individuals they identify with, and they like, and they respect. And the BBC, I think, in particular, has never been able to reconcile or find an accommodation between having those tall poppies, and letting them sit comfortably within the brand itself... My argument was always that organisations need to be able to harness that energy and harness that phenomenon, whether they like it or not.”

To Goodall, the BBC’s inability to get to grips with social media is an existential problem; one that reveals flaws in its model of impartiality. “I think these organisations have not thought enough about how to shift and change their journalism in this age in which everybody can have an opinion, in which everybody can complain to you absolutely instantly.” With the BBC, he says, “it became a question of ‘we need to manage perception’, in which accusations of bias against reporters made on social media were automatically taken as valid, rather than investigated to see if they had any substance.”

“There’s a difference between impartiality and neutrality. Anybody who is genuinely neutral is a block, you know, you’re brain dead. It would be bizarre if you went into journalism, particularly political journalism, to have no views, and no judgements about the political world around you. That makes you a worse journalist, a way worse journalist.”

As he speaks, Goodall becomes more and more animated, leaning into his laptop camera with his arms outstretched in front of him. It’s no wonder that his feelings are so strong on this matter, given the number of times he’s been at the centre of impartiality rows himself. Some of these were easily dismissed – he laughingly recalls when, while working at Sky News between 2016-2020, he was accused on social media of bias because he had served as a Youth Officer for the local Birmingham Labour Party when he was 15.

Others, however, were far more threatening to his career. In 2020, BBC board member and former Conservative party communications chief Robbie Gibb publicly suggested that Goodall had a left-wing bias. Goodall clapped back, tweeting: “Thanks for this Robbie. Maybe one day, if I’m as impartial as you, I can get a knighthood too.” Goodall later stated that the failure of his editors to stand up for him, instead allegedly warning him to “be careful: Robbie is watching you”, motivated him to leave the BBC in 2022.

“*They didn’t have a genuine theory of impartiality. Their theory of impartiality was defined by their worst enemies and continues to be*

Our discussion comes only a few months after another impartiality controversy at the BBC, in which the BBC’s director general and as its head of news resigned after a memo by a former external advisor accusing the organisation of a left-wing bias was published in the press. I ask Goodall what he made of this episode, particularly in the light of his own experience at the organisation. To him, the BBC allows “impartiality to be a stick that is used to beat them, and they allow that because they basically subscribe to what I would describe as a completely hollow view of impartiality.”

He says that, during his time at the BBC, there was an obsession with the criticism coming from the right that “they were a bunch of liberal metropolitan elites or whatever. That was the bias of which they

were most aware, and they were constantly guarding against. I can’t remember anybody being terribly worked up if we were being biased about the Green Party, or the Communist Party, or the Socialists, or whatever it happens to be.”

Goodall believes that the BBC continues to be far too deferential to criticisms levied at it in bad faith. “It got inside their heads far too successfully. They didn’t have a genuine theory of impartiality. Their theory of impartiality was defined by their worst enemies and continues to be. And guess what? They get no credit for that, none. Because their worst enemies continue to be their worst enemies. All day long.”

“*For Labour, this current media environment actually should be a real opportunity for them*

One gets the sense that Goodall could talk about this topic for hours, but with my allotted time fast running out, I steer the conversation towards another British institution which seems unable to adapt to a changing media landscape: the government. How well does he think the Labour party has spread its message in the age of podcasts, reels, and social media? “I don’t think Labour have been very good at it partly because they’ve been worried about pissing off the newspapers too much”, he says. “I think it’s ridiculous, by the way, the power of the lobby and some of the established newspapers continues to be very strong, despite the fact that their readership has never been less.”

“For Labour, this current media environment actually should be a real opportunity for them”, he says. “Because one of Labour’s big structural problems historically has obviously been the dominance of the right wing press in British political media.” This, he argues, left them with two options: either reject it (à la Corbyn) or pander to it as Blair did, both of which have proved problematic in the past.

“Now they’ve got a third option, which is that they can help create a new news ecosystem which is, if not more intrinsically favourable to them, at least less hostile to them... I have been surprised by how little those at the top of the Labour party, over the last couple of years, have been interested in developing that new media space to their benefit.”

This brings us to the topic of Goodall’s latest project: a Channel 4 documentary exploring why Keir Starmer’s government, less than two years after a historic landslide, is so unpopular. So, what exactly is it that interests Goodall so much about Starmer, a man that many describe as profoundly uninteresting? “I think there’s a sort of personal paradox... This is a man who’s reached the apex of our politics, who is clearly driven by a deep sense of personal ambition. And yet, he’s also a man who, in so many ways, I know this from personal conversations with him, loathes politics, abhors politics, is, in some ways, very anti-political.”

He points to the fact that even Morgan McSweeney, the former Downing Street Chief of Staff, supposedly could never reliably predict what Starmer’s thoughts on an issue would be, as a result of the prime minister’s lack of instinctual political beliefs. “That fascinates me. You have a man willing to make profound personal and familial sacrifices, because being prime minister is basically horrible, for all the glory of it, it’s basically vile, like day to day. So what sustains it? He’s a deeply unusual political figure, sphinx-like in that way.”

It is certainly an interesting time for this documentary to come out. Many had assumed, in the absence of Starmer’s own political beliefs, that McSweeney was setting much of the policy direction of the government. But with Starmer’s right-hand man booted out of No. 10 earlier this year, no-one is quite sure who is now setting the agenda. “There’s a horrible cliché in politics”, Goodall says, “which like most clichés in modern politics, basically comes from *West Wing*: ‘Now you can let Starmer be Starmer.’”

“But that’s the question: is there a Starmer to be Starmer? Without getting too Shakespearean about it, is there an authentic, real Starmer? I think it remains to be seen, the extent to which he’s just going to be moulded again, or whether he’ll try and finally do the moulding.”

It’s hard to know how all the ongoing transformations that we have discussed will play out. Will the government take a new direction? How will the media landscape continue to evolve? Will broadcasters like the BBC adapt, or end up on the scrap heap? One thing, however, is clear: Lewis Goodall is no stranger to rapid change and, as ever, he plans to make the most of it.

*Keir Starmer: Where did it all go wrong? is available to watch now on Channel 4. Image credit: Channel 4, with permission.*

# OXFORD SPOTLIGHT



## *Catherine Royle speaks to Samuel Drew about Somerville, the Foreign Office, and the importance of pragmatism*

Sitting at a table in a sunny Somerville office, I get out my phone and ask Catherine Royle: “Do you mind if I record the interview?” I receive a diplomat’s reply: “I suppose not, but it will make me say different things, you know that? I have a lifetime of never saying anything you don’t want to see in print.” From the outset, it’s clear that Somerville’s principal continues to be shaped by her unique diplomatic experience. A career spent in the Foreign Office and then NATO means that Royle has lived all over the world, from Chile to Venezuela to Afghanistan. “I worked it out; until I got here, since 1997 I’d really lived in Britain for three years.”

Royle is a Somerville alumna, having studied PPE there before completing an MSc at Aberystwyth. She speaks of applying to Oxford with a casualness common to many students, yet I’m surprised by her modest dismissal of the barriers that she overcame. Her sixth-form experience at a newly converted grammar-to-comprehensive school was, she admits, “a bit of a mess, to be honest”. Her initial application to Merton College was (unbeknownst to her) doomed to fail because of “a philosophy tutor who didn’t agree with the college going mixed. He never let any women in”.

It’s clear that her time at university after being “picked up” by the then all-women’s Somerville was formative. She describes the unique experience of being surrounded by “exceptional” women, especially Daphne Park, the principal of the College at the time. In those days, Park was known for her distinguished career in the Foreign Office, but it was only when Royle joined the service herself that she learnt what Park was really doing: she was a senior spy controller for MI6. It’s clear that Park, described as both “extraordinary” and “terrible”, was an inspiration for Royle, and it’s a surprise to her that their relationship didn’t end with attempted secret service recruitment. She recalls going to speak to Park to ask for permission to become the Somerville JCR president. “Daphne Park... said ‘If you do this, you won’t get a first’. And I said ‘Well, I’m not going to get a first anyway... may as well have something good on the CV’.”

We naturally turn from the inspiration of Park to Royle’s own Foreign Office career. I ask about the decision to go abroad. Whilst Catherine was certain, her family was not, with her mother seeing it as “her idea of hell”. It’s difficult not to feel overwhelmed as Royle rattles off the countless postings, locations, and responsibilities of her varied diplomatic career. Yet it’s her very first experience in Chile that she draws out as a highlight. It doesn’t sound idyllic: she was given the placement suddenly, “had to go and learn Spanish in eight weeks”, and the lack of communication services meant that “as far as my friends were concerned, I just dropped off the end of the world”. But the experience of living through a turbulent time in Chile shaped Royle’s life. “It was a very formative experience and a fascinating period. When I arrived, Chile was a dictatorship. When I left, it was a democracy”. I get a glimpse of the extraordinary life of the diplomat, where one becomes a spectator to rare, epochal moments.

Our interview takes place only a few weeks after one such moment: Israel and the USA’s attack on Iran, which started in spite of diplomatic talks. How does Royle see the role of a diplomat in an increasingly militarised world? She defends her field:

“I think it’s an absolute disgrace that the Foreign Office is cut to the bone, always underfunded... If you start with wars as the continuation of politics by other means, then you do need to do something other than fight... You need people who are able to work through the disagreements between states, it is a skill set.”

The potential drawbacks of relying on military power take Royle back to Afghanistan, where she was deputy ambassador and managed co-operation with the Afghan police during the period of US-led military presence in the nation. “Part of the problem of where we went in Afghanistan was that the diplomatic bit of it was really undervalued. The military were pushing things and doing things, thinking ‘well, actually we’re the policy makers here’. But they didn’t know how to do it... in particular, the American military, they don’t really think about working in partnership because they don’t have to, except that, if they did, they’d do better.” Royle feels that diplomats get a bad reputation; in her view their role as pragmatic consensus builders is essential. “My aim is to make everyone equally unhappy. Because, if I could make everybody happy, well, we’d just do that.”

Royle explains how she’s brought this diplomatic approach to her current position as principal. I ask what prompted this pivot in her career back to the world of academia, especially since earlier she contrasted the fields, claiming that, as a diplomat, “you’re absolutely not a specialist, in some ways you’re the antithesis of an academic”. The story of her return to Somerville foregrounds Royle’s straightforward attitude. Already an honorary fellow of the College, she was asked if she might apply for the role of principal. “I thought about it, what an honour, obviously, and a wonderful community to rejoin. So why not? ... People in NATO were saying to me: ‘Do they know what they’ve done?’ And I said: ‘well, they know me quite well. So, it’s their own fault.’”

I ask about the strange experience of returning to her previous place of study. “Walking back in, it was really weird... But the College in many ways is similar in its approach.” How was it adjusting to the role? “There’s a steep learning curve, but I can still do things that go back to my old days... funnily enough, lots of people want to talk about the state of the world at the moment. I can still scratch that itch.” Yet grappling with the complexities of the college and university relationship hasn’t been easy. “[Oxford] is reckoned to be the best university in the world. I sort of think that’s possibly in spite of its governance rather than because of its governance.” Royle talks about the opportunities and challenges of being the principal with enthusiasm rather than apprehension. “It’s really exciting to look at the next generation, to think about the next thing coming up.”

Throughout our discussion, it becomes clear that Royle’s approach towards her role is both pragmatic and principled; a respect for tradition combined with an excitement for the future. She unwittingly sums up her attitude best in an offhand comment: “We need to keep the important values... and value the history, but not get stuck in it.”

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

*Image credit: Oxford Atelier/Somerville College, with permission.*

# RECRUITMENT

Bearing Academy, an online education and career advisory institution founded by an Oxford alumnus, is currently seeking Consultants to help coaching students for their best suitable future academic development.

Bearing Consultants are responsible for advising youths on befitting discipline and university and guiding them through application and interview process in the lead up to entering university.

Professional advice if needed is provided to help equip consultants better for the roles. Flexible hours and remuneration package are on offer. Academic tutors / staff, postgraduate and undergraduates of any discipline and anyone instrumental in the university application process are welcome to apply.



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We look forward to you being a member of our team!



# ivo



# CULTURE

## All in a day's 'Work.txt': Metatheatre's extremes

Jess Phillips reviews and unintentionally acts in a carefully crafted play that shatters the fourth wall



For £5 (and a 42p booking fee), I found myself in a room full of theatre kids who had finally attained that cherished jewel of our modern world: a job. I first heard about *Work.txt* when I was asked by a friend (or coworker?) if I was free on Saturday night. Being instinctively adverse to clubbing, I was, indeed, free. Unemployed, even. And this was a gilt-edged proposition I just couldn't turn down.

At the mention of the name Ted Fussell, I threw £5 (plus the emphasised 42p booking fee) of my student loan at TicketSource, completely unaware of what I was getting myself into. All I knew was that I was expected at 'The Place of Work' (Lecture Room Six at New College) at 8pm that Saturday. Since punctuality is one of the traits that makes me such a team player, I met Teddy Farrand (or the receptionist?) outside the lodge ten minutes early, presented him with my ticket, and announced that I was clocking in for my shift.

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*The show emphasised the £5.42 ticket price as a way of pointing out the peculiarity of the fact we had paid someone else to let us do work for them*

Upon entry, I followed the instructions on the screen, placing the book that I was asked to bring with me onto the growing pile in the centre of the stage. I struck up a conversation with my fellow audience members, or coworkers, as we began to immerse ourselves into this bit to which we had already committed £5 plus (say it with me) a 42p booking fee. “It feels like we're talking around a water cooler”, Rebecca Harper remarked while she mimed holding a little paper cone. We speculated about whether this would count as work experience on LinkedIn.

The audience was already taking the “play performed entirely by its audience” pitch very seriously.

The show centred around a script-cum-PowerPoint presentation. Yellow text flashed on a black screen, encouraging either the whole audience to speak or only a specific group who had something in common. The categories ranged in specificity, from “runners” to “people who don't sleep well”. This technique was rather revealing: you never knew whether your voice was going to be part of a chorus or if you would be reading a line alone. You could learn a lot about how your fellow audience members characterised themselves through their silences and their responses with this technique, and you shared a lot about yourself in return.

The show emphasised the £5.42 ticket price as a way of pointing out the peculiarity of the fact that we had paid someone else to let us do work for them. This was compared to the structure of university: we get loans to do work that will eventually help us do more work and pay back the loans until we are 60 years old. For now, though, that £9,535 a year is only a number on a webpage, and we can forget that the drudgery of our degrees is not only self-inflicted, but something we pay for.

These more bleak illuminations were mingled with other excellent comedic moments, executed successfully thanks to the energy of the audience. This article would not do the show justice without a nod to the single best moment of student theatre I have ever experienced, as either cast, crew, or audience. The screen flashed up with these words on separate lines: Every Night In My Dreams.

The melancholic whistling of the opening notes radiated from the screen before us, and the slide changed into a karaoke video of Celine Dion's 'My Heart Will Go On'. We sang the full 4 minutes and 40 seconds. Arms swayed. I turned to the others in my row and began to dedicate my performance to Maggie Kerson, who responded likewise with a dramatic air grab, as she informed me her heart will, in fact, go on. We turned our phone torches on and waved them in the air. It was a live concert on a small scale, but the energy could have filled Wembley Stadium. I choose to believe that this was an accurate reflection of the corporate world, that each working day is punctuated by the collective belting of 90s pop classics.



At the end of the play, the humour melded with an unsettling bitterness. It jumped from the subtle commentary on the working world and our place within it, not as human beings, but as employees, and shifted to a more blunt, bleak outlook of the world. Our main character and fellow audience member, Holly, lay on the floor and told us all the reasons she wanted to “stop”.

“  
*The universe became a workplace. It was a reminder of how we have produced our own prisons in the form of deadlines, networking, and contracts*

The printer, which had been inconspicuously set on a table in the corner of the room for the duration of the play, then took over as

the narrator, providing an epilogue. This speech moves beyond the end of the working day and blends cosmic existentialism with meaningless corporate speak. It tells us about the destruction of the natural world, the death of the human race, yet the persistence of work nonetheless. “God tries lateral thinking”, the audience is told. “Sound gets put on a zero-hour contract.” It was bizarre yet depressing to hear this workplace jargon being applied to the world beyond humanity. The universe became a workplace, striving towards nothing in particular. It was a reminder of how far we have come from where we started as part of the natural world, how we have produced our own prisons in the form of deadlines, networking, and contracts.

While my heart will go on, so will the corporate cesspools we have built for ourselves, but Celine Dion has only sung a power ballad about one of these things. Still, *Work.txt* provides something of a solution to the horrors of the modern workplace in its call to inaction in a world of hustle culture and relentless productivity.

Image credit: Rebecca Harper, with permission.

## It's a bird, it's a plane, it's theatre: Defining the ill-defined

AMY LAWSON

It has been 93 years since the first performance of Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan* at Schauspielhaus in Zurich. Many critics cite Brecht as the pioneer of the genre of 'epic theatre' – that is, a theatre which tells instead of shows. The protagonist Shen Te frequently changes costumes in front of the audience to become her alter ego, Shui Ta; characters address the audience, changing the set mid-scene. Anthony Lau's 2023 production featured giant frogs and saw characters entering the stage via a slide. Brecht's theatre seeks to constantly remind the audience of where they are: in a theatre, watching a play, and not immersed in a mock-realistic depiction of the world. It rewrote the rules of what theatre had been up until that point (in the western world, at least). In 2026, both nothing and everything has changed: theatre continues to constantly re-write and re-perform itself, and thus evades any kind of all-encompassing definition.

A few years ago, dressed in a light rain jacket and battered walking boots, I stood amongst a captivated crowd at Green Man Festival, watching Kae Tempest perform from his album *The Line is a Curve*. His powerful, spoken-word performance both shook me to the core and rooted me to the spot. It bothered me. It was like nothing I'd ever encountered before – which perhaps reveals my somewhat sheltered view of

the musical scene – but it got me thinking about the lines we draw around performance, the role of the audience, the simple idea of telling something to someone, and when this becomes theatre.

“  
*If theatre seems to resist definition, then it is not because it lacks one, but because its definition is deceptively simple*

As a serial user of etymology websites, I did what I do best and looked up the origins of the word, discovering that it comes from the Greek *theatron*, which literally translates as 'a place for looking'. This piqued my curiosity. To all intents and purposes, a discussion of Kae Tempest's *The Line is a Curve* should be in the Music section of Culture – right? Tempest has been nominated twice for the Mercury Music Prize, as well as receiving a nomination at the 2018 Brit Awards for Best Female Solo Performer. Then again, he was also named a Next Generation Poet by the Poetry Book Society... so perhaps Books?

This impulse to categorise Tempest's work was, inevitably, what was holding me back from

fully enjoying the experience. Since that year at Green Man Festival, I've (somewhat) expanded the horizons of my theatrical experience and, each time, I've been confronted again and again with the same question of categorisation – by stand-up comedians, by drag artists, by the chorus in the Greek play I saw in my first year at Oxford. They are all connected by one fact – there was an audience, and there was a performer.

If theatre is, at its most basic level, 'a place for looking', then every iteration of it that I've mentioned ticks that box. But not all looking is the same, and this is what Brecht grappled with. Among other things, he wanted to reject the kind of looking which is passive, which gives way to complete immersion, and, as such, does not incite the audience to action. His refusal of a 'passive' theatre can be seen everywhere.

In a form like stand-up, the audience takes an active role, with their reaction shaping the performance in real time. Even something as simple as asking a member of the audience where they're from, or what they do, can completely derail the show – as I discovered at a recent Mike Rice gig in Oxford, where a particularly buff guy in the front row (think somewhere between a gym regular and Jacob Elordi's hulking, reticent Heathcliff) became the butt of a plethora of jokes – and it's up to the comedian to decide whether they want to detach or reroute, integrating the new material into their set. Or, the audience can be directly involved in a production itself, with aspects

like karaoke and PowerPoint being employed to extract a storyline from those who are, in traditional terms, supposed to be just 'looking'.

Oxford itself is a place full of performances which blur the boundaries of simply looking. Think of the Oxford Medieval Mystery Plays at St Edmund Hall, where last April, for the fourth year running, multiple locations around the college hosted a series of biblical plays in various medieval languages. The setting was often intimate, with audience members seated on the grass, or simply wandering in and stopping to look, even joining in at points. The idea of a fixed theatre is unsettled, and it becomes less a location than a series of encounters. Improv shows like *Austentatious* (returning to the New Theatre this May) are driven by the audience, who submit a novel title which the cast then begin to perform. Student theatre often uses seemingly unconventional spaces, like college bars, gardens, and chapels to perform experimental pieces.

If theatre seems to resist definition, then it is not because it lacks one, but because its definition is deceptively simple. The 'place for looking' embedded in the word itself is never neutral – it can be passive, it can be an environment where empathy is built; detached or participatory, fixed or constantly shifting, it always demands that an audience witnesses a moment in time, it demands that they do not look away. Perhaps the question to ask is not what 'counts' as theatre, but where and how we choose to look.

# ART What I learned from Tracey Emin about regeneration

## Willow Jopp reflects on 'Tracey Emin: A Second Life', and its resounding emotional impact

CW: Abortion

I left Tate Modern's latest headline show, *Tracey Emin: A Second Life*, feeling unmoved by the artworks. I found the paintings somewhat derivative and the neon signs plain tacky, and lots of the text featured on her artworks struck me as faux-poetic and edgy. That is not to say I got nothing out of this exhibition: what moved me was not so much the individual works as the force of the exhibition as a whole – its conception and emotional reach – and I left with a far stronger respect for Tracey Emin than when I entered.

The first thing that struck me about *Tracey Emin: A Second Life* was how busy it was. The first room was filled with a constant beeping of alarms, as the crowds of people had no choice but to stand too close to the artworks on account of a lack of space. Half of the screen showing her film, *Why I Never Became a Dancer*, was obscured by the audience's silhouettes. A queue wrapped around the sides of her installation, *Exorcism of the Last Painting I Ever Made*.

It is no surprise that this exhibition is a hit – Tracey Emin is one of the most famous British artists of our time. But the fact that the visitors were predominantly women of all ages, all eagerly and closely engaging with the many, many artworks on display, is something to be noted. People have claimed to leave teary-eyed, having had a visceral reaction to Emin's art – clearly, her works resonate deeply with her audience.

Such an emotive response feels particularly significant because Emin's work has so often been discussed in terms of scandal, confession, and spectacle. Yet in the exhibition, this sensationalism falls away, and what remains is an artist who has spent decades refusing to disguise pain, humiliation, desire, grief, and shame.

Even though the work did not move me aesthetically, I could still feel the force of that refusal. There is something powerful about watching a woman's emotional life, once dismissed as messy or excessive, being treated with tact and seriousness by an institution like Tate Modern, and by the crowds gathered inside it.

For much of Emin's career, that emotional exposure was treated as something embarrassing for its confessional and raw treatment of female experience. What feels different in *A Second Life* is that this abrasiveness is celebrated. In that sense, the exhibition measures a broader cultural shift in what kinds of feelings are acceptable as art. To see her work so positively received, then, is the culmination of a lifetime of scrutiny which came both from herself and from those around her.

“*There is something powerful about watching a woman's emotional life, once dismissed as messy or excessive, being treated with tact and seriousness by an institution like Tate Modern*”

The exhibition is clearly succeeding on its own terms. People are queuing up to see it, and, more importantly, responding to it with real emotional intensity. And it was precisely seeing Emin's triumph which moved me, rather than the artworks themselves.

What stood out for me above all about Emin's work was the impression that her life has been full of struggle, even after achieving fame as an artist. The centrepiece of the exhibition, the powerful film *How it Feels*, captures this well. In it, she discusses 'how it feels' to have an abortion in a sober, neutral, deeply moving way. She travels to the clinic at which the abortion happened, and discusses what went through her mind before, during, and following the procedure.

It is the piece which stuck with me most, for



the precise reason that Emin describes how her traumatic abortion changed her self-perception from a 'failure' of an artist, to a 'failure' of a human being. If there is one thing Tracey Emin is not, it is a 'failure'.

It was, therefore, a strange feeling to see artworks so full of self-hatred become transformed into something victorious for Emin. She, who was once deemed the 'enfant terrible' of the Young British Artists, is now an inspiration, having achieved what any aspiring artist dreams of: a survey exhibition which is as vast and unfiltered as it is reverent and sincere. By the gift shop, there is a notebook where visitors can write about how the exhibition made them feel. The most recent entry stated: "Thank you Tracey, you've inspired me to finally start painting again". *A Second Life*.

What this exhibition taught me is that what matters in Emin's work is the permission it seems to give: to be ugly, exposed, excessive, wounded, honest – and to make something anyway.

I did not leave the exhibition thinking Tracey Emin was my new favourite artist, but I left feeling proud of her, and grateful for the fact that an artist can remain difficult, even unappealing in places, and still resonate strongly with people. The exhibition is an example of what can happen when an artist survives long enough to outlive the versions of herself that others tried to fix in place. I left feeling that making art, and continuing to make it, can itself be a form of survival. That, more than any single work in the show, is what stayed with me.

Image credit: Karen Bryan, CC BY-ND 2.0 via Flickr.

# Set to bloom: The return of floral print **FASHION**

CERYS BENNISON

Florals? For spring? Groundbreaking." So speaks the withering sarcasm of Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada*, condemning all flowery fabrics to uncoolness even ten years after its release. Her dismissal implies that the floral print is basic – the horror of all fashion's avant-garde. Oxford's seeming aversion to pattern shows leftovers of this logic; style shown through outfit styling rather than design details. Textiles often fall secondary to an ensemble's overall impact, with florals seldom regarded as revolutionary. Yet in Oxford's wealthy male-centred microcosm – and well beyond it – they prove to be a tool of subversion, intentional or not. Flower prints are muddy with complexity, and ripe for revisioning.

Woven, printed, or embroidered, flowers are easily the most familiar motifs in fashion history.

They have become associated with opposing constructions of femininity, with Christian Dior's 'flower women' of the post-war period, petal-skirted in their essentialist embodiment. However, it was his floral-printed day dresses that influenced a generation of women, reaffirming nip-waisted body ideals and linking flowers as pretty, domesticated visions of nature with the 'domestic goddess' housewife trope. This is reflected today through a resurgence in the tradwife aesthetic, coupling homemade bagels with flowery, floaty gowns. Celia Birtwell's sheer chiffons show 1960s reactionism to Dior's 'New Look': the Hippie generation sought to shake off their mothers' fashioning of femininity, with Birtwell's prints evoking psychedelia and Pop Art through a feminist lens. Indeed, her Mystic Daisy print is a model for how cool florals can be, outfitting every It-Girl under the 60s sun. Jane Birkin famously wore it for a Vogue photoshoot

(back when it was acceptable just to wear one outfit for your fashion call) and Liza Minnelli dons a Mystic Daisy shirt in *Cabaret*. However, for Anna Wintour, florals are fundamental in crafting her timeless elegance, becoming a motif that is reconfigured and coloured to fit current modernities. Each new series of *Bridgerton* makes this clearer, with florals used to connect Regency dress with contemporary fashion – and the more diverse narratives that come with it. Bridging nature and art, these biological bouquets have dressed ideological divides, making floral prints unexpectedly contentious.

“*Floral prints prove to be a tool of subversion, intentional or not*”

Rich with jewel-toned realism, the Ashmolean's *In Bloom* exhibition captures how flora has afforded creative and economic agency to women specifically.

In the museum collection, Rachel Ruysch's still lifes convey how studies of natural subjects enabled women to access the patriarchal art world without violating their prohibition from art schools. Flowers presented a readily available subject: symbolising female propriety, such blooms – exotic or commonplace – also allowed women to exploit Enlightenment interest in botany. Mary Moser's flower still lifes gained her enough acclaim to become one of the two female founders of the Royal Academy of Arts and even established within the royal court, demonstrating flora as an entry point into traditionally male professions. Indeed, *In Bloom* displays a coloured engraving by Maria Sibylla Merian. It depicts a banana blossom with the life cycle of a Bullseye moth, capturing the utmost biological detail in unique composition.

Retrospectively, Merian is considered one of the earliest entomologists. Yet the agency afforded by flowers to women shaped the art world's dismissal of floral depictions. The association between flowers and femaleness has helped and hindered women, extending to their bodies through fashion.

High fashion has recently revamped the floral print. Springing from Paris' latest catwalk extravaganza, Sarah Burton's Givenchy collection problematised the prejudicial concept of Old Masters, dressing the modern woman in the Dutch Golden Age world of Rachel Ruysch's paintings. The standout dress sees jewel pigments of tulips run in embroidery threads, effectively turning flowers into fringing. No daintily-coloured pastels to be seen here – these flowers are wonderfully gothic, outstepping their assumptions as passive embellishment and giving movement and flair to the wearer as she walks. If Jonathan Anderson's fall/winter Dior show is anything to go by, the floral reformation is set to colour accessories too, romping all through summer in gorgeous water lily heels. This is a welcome step away from literalising the feminine flower at Dior, leaning into a more tongue-in-cheek, youthful use of the founder's sourcebook. Riotously rosy, Dries Van Noten also saw men in floral-printed splendour, showing how flowers are dying out as binary statements of outmoded fashionings of femininity. This may not seem all that revolutionary in 2026, but in a city that appears surprised to see a female physicist, the floral print still has a place as a vehicle of gender subversion. Come Trinity, the floral print poses a destabilising antithesis to Oxford's unpatterned fashion staples, rooted in upper-class fashionings of male exclusivity. Floral fabrics are more than ready to be reclaimed from bastions of prairie-dress-wearing trad wives. They still have the power to be groundbreaking, regardless of what *The Devil Wears Prada 2* might soon have to say.

Image credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art, CC0 via Wikimedia Commons.



# Does 'Euphoria' no longer speak to our generation?

*Emma Heagney dissects the new season of the hit series and its identity crisis*

Should I have been watching *Euphoria*'s first season as an innocent, bright-eyed 14-year-old? Probably not. At the time, I thought the chaotic lives of the characters were what I could hesitantly expect as I got older. Little did I know I was actually destined to be a neek aiming at Oxford, but the point still stands. While I couldn't relate to Rue's drug-fuelled crash-outs, or Cassie and Maddy's fights over Nate, the angst and vulnerability of the cast spoke to me, and certainly to millions of other teenagers around the world. Coupled with a Petra Collins-esque aesthetic and the familiarity of Zendaya from her Disney days, *Euphoria* was bound to resonate with Gen Z. So, why was the recent premiere of the third season so underwhelming?

Set several years after the second season, season three of *Euphoria* sees the cast of troubled teenagers in their early adulthoods, pursuing careers and supposedly dealing with the same insecurities and relationship problems they faced in high school. We are transported from a gritty yet glittery haze to a desert straight out of *Breaking Bad*, with a complete overhaul of the show's aesthetics and creative direction. Town festivals and house parties are swapped for meth labs and strip clubs, but many of the characters are invested with the same immaturity as before, although their audience has grown up in the meantime.

While *'Euphoria Sundays'* are as popular as ever on X, the behind-the-scenes chaos plaguing the show is just as notorious. Season one and two composer Labrinth announced that his music would not appear in the third season, after being treated "like shit" by associates of the show. Although it is unclear exactly what happened between Labrinth, HBO, and writer Sam Levinson, the absence of Labrinth's unique score has changed the feel of the show entirely. To add fuel to the fire, Labrinth released music on the last *'Euphoria Sunday'*, leading fans to speculate that this was originally meant for the show. What was once a common thread between years-apart seasons is now an awkward Hans Zimmer-filled placeholder, lacking a clear vision. When the third season hinges on the premise of a time-jump, aesthetic and thematic continuity is needed more than ever, but highly publicised fallouts like these only weaken the show's identity.

Additionally, while it is yet to be seen whether major players from past seasons will return, several

fan favourites are confirmed to have left the show for good. Actors Angus Cloud (Fezco O'Neill) and Eric Dane (Cal Jacobs) sadly passed away in 2023 and 2026, respectively, with Dane's final scenes as Cal airing posthumously in the upcoming season. Other cast members are also said to be missing from the third season, including Algee Smith (Chris McKay), Barbie Ferreira (Kat Hernandez), and Storm Reid (Gia Bennett). Most shocking, however, may be that lead actor Hunter Schafer (Jules Vaughn) did not appear at all in the season premiere. An overhaul of characters does not bode well for the series, especially given the countless allegations of a toxic working environment, including from Oscar-nominated actor Colman Domingo.

“*The time taken for this season to materialise failed to account for the audience's dwindling desire*

These issues point to a wider problem with the show's production, which has resulted in the loss of Gen Z's attention: simply, too much time has passed. While *Skins*, a comparable British TV show, grew annually with its audience, *Euphoria* has taken six years to develop just three seasons, which can be a risky outcome for a coming-of-age drama. The four-year gap between the second and third seasons can be felt in the performances on screen; Jacob Elordi, in particular, does not seem to have his heart in it anymore. Why would he? After Oscar and BAFTA nominations, and partnerships with Hugo Boss and TAG Heuer, *Euphoria* may now be little more than a contractual obligation, instead of a significant step up from *The Kissing Booth*. Watching Elordi and Sweeney engage in pet play (yes, really) in the new season's first episode is excruciating, devoid of any sexual chemistry or enjoyment. Thankfully, Zendaya's excellent performance as chaotic masc lesbian Rue is the saving grace of the show, proving the bittersweet point that her carefully-crafted character has been let down by the show's writing.

If the aesthetic, cast, and music of the first two

seasons were irrevocably stripped away to reveal a bland artistic landscape, the writing suffered an even worse fate. Admittedly, *Euphoria* was never a feminist masterpiece, and much can be said about the reliance of the early seasons on Sydney Sweeney's naked body. But, fundamentally, they had something to say about the exploitation of women and the sexual politics of teenagers. Whether it was Rue's drug addiction, Cassie's abortion, or Maddy's experience of domestic violence, *Euphoria* was never afraid to deal with hard-hitting issues and explore the emotional effects of adversity.

Fast forward to season three, and the picture is very different. Sexual scenes are ramped up and appear to be fetish content more than anything else. Rue's reintroduction to the series sees her working as a drug mule, smuggling fentanyl from Mexico to the United States – naturally, this requires that we watch her swallow large balls of drugs, while sticking her fingers in her mouth, gagging, and salivating intensely. Likewise, Cassie attempts to fund her wedding by becoming an OnlyFans model, which obviously means that the audience must see her creating fetish porn. There is no critical lens held up to their actions, as there perhaps would have been in the past. No exploration of how it may feel for Rue to be exploited in this way, no exploration of Cassie's relationship with her body. Rather, we are met with scenes designed to shock, disgust, but also arouse, perhaps a manifestation of the writer's fantasies – the same writer who directed *The Idol* in 2023, which was critically panned for its sleazy approach to "shocking" sexual themes.

The demand for a third season of *Euphoria* was high, given that season two had ended on a cliffhanger, and the plot had captured the hearts of Gen Z. Yet, the time taken for this season to materialise failed to account for the audience's dwindling desire, and the principal actors' introductions to high-brow, award-winning cinema. A lack of interest from the audience seems to have been matched by a lack of interest from the actors themselves, including the few who chose to stay on at all. The show refuses to grow with its audience, instead pandering to the lowest common denominator of horny men turned on by Sydney Sweeney. If season three continues in this way, what could have been a powerful yet hilarious representation of youthful angst and drama will have literally lost the plot.

## FILM AND TV

### What's Oxford watching?



*Frasier*

Amy at St John's recommends *Frasier* (1993-2004):  
*"Frasier is the ultimate comfort show and holds so much nostalgia for me. My older sister and I would get up early to watch it when we were younger (despite being way too young to appreciate many of the jokes). There's something about watching it in Oxford – home to plenty of academic wannabees like Frasier and Niles – that makes it even sharper."*



*Audition*

Gwen at Oriel recommends *Audition* (1999):  
*"An excellent Japanese horror film from Takashi Miike. It centres on a woman who is wronged by literally everyone and decides to get her revenge. Queen!"*

Image credits: 'Frasier' and 'Audition' via imdb.com

# Hail Agnes, full of grace: 'Hamnet' and the perfect mother

RÜYA ORAL

A couple of days ago, I saw an Instagram reel (in the Friends tab, no less) regarding Jessie Buckley's recent Best Actress win at the 2026 Academy Awards. The reel was praising Buckley for the apparent embrace of her most important role as wife and mother, highlighting her talking adorably of her month-old baby, addressing her husband and exclaiming "I want to have 20,000 more babies with you!" in her acceptance speech. The caption on the reel recalls Michelle Williams' Best Actress acceptance speech at the Golden Globes in 2020, wherein she discussed how her abortion allowed her to advance her career, as if to say "look how far we've come!" It is impossible not to be reminded of that meme, which has now been played for irony, depicting two clipart-style women with one holding a trophy and crying, "I won!", while the other swaddles a baby and retorts, "No, you didn't." If not claiming that a successful career and familial bliss are mutually exclusive, it seems clear that within this narrative, one is being valued far over the other.

The discourse surrounding motherhood is a

strange one. The cliché that the left's weakness is its inability to reach a consensus certainly holds some truth, and the issue of reproductive rights is proof of it. For decades, feminists have oscillated between pro- and anti-natal stances, and the crackdown on access to abortion services in recent years has shifted people both ways along the axis. At the same time, the right has unfailingly tokenised the mother figure as a paragon of Biblical femininity, lamenting how she has been cheated and let down by those supposed women's rights activists, whilst they themselves simultaneously strip her of her essential rights and prohibit her from taking on any other label. As a result of this dichotomy, depictions of motherhood in film occupy an equally strange space in the mediascape.

Buckley swept this year's award season for her performance as Agnes in *Hamnet*, Chloé Zhao's adaptation of the Maggie O'Farrell book of the same name. The film centres around Agnes (more commonly known as Anne Hathaway), a magical healer, and her romance with the then unknown town tutor William Shakespeare. The crux of the film comes when Agnes and William's eleven-year-old son, the titular Hamnet, passes away.

The remainder of the runtime explores how each parent deals with the grief as it threatens to tear them apart, both from each other and their own senses of self. It seems unbelievable that even this – a historio-fictional account of Shakespeare that centres not him, but a woman in a relationship with him, which has led not to the hunky white-boy-of-the-month lead receiving accolades, but his relatively less-talked-about co-star – can be milked for 'tradwife' content. Yet it is not the tragedy of the plot or even Buckley's vast success as a result of her performance (one that, by virtue of her gender, she could not have taken on in Shakespeare's time) that people are ooh-ing and ahh-ing over.

Whether by chance or by Freudian fate, I have ended up watching every recent blockbuster concerning motherhood (of which there have been, perhaps suspiciously, quite a few) with my mum. When we watched *Lady Bird* (2017), which consensus dictates is Greta Gerwig's magnum opus, I remember both of us shifting awkwardly in our seats and sniffing as we lamented our failure to understand what all the fuss was about. I managed to get through most of *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022) by myself before she wandered in right as the gorgeous final montage was playing on screen. It took her at least 15 minutes to stop pattering about her day and notice the tears streaming down my face. I hadn't seen her in four months when we sat down to watch *Hamnet* together, one of the longest spans of time we've been apart, and I could anticipate the pain I would feel in my chest in roughly two hours before we even hit play.

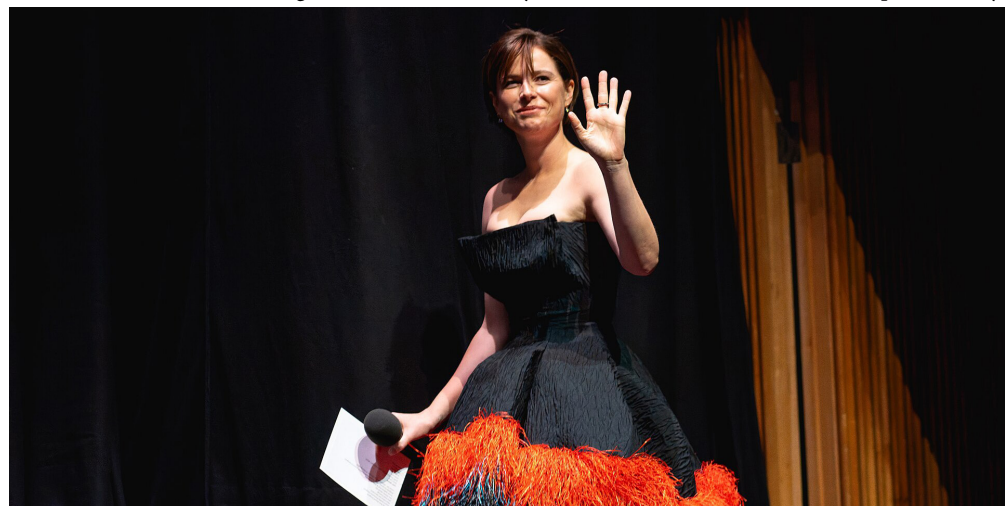
On the one hand, I sympathise with the kind of cognitive dissonance showcased in that reel about Jessie Buckley. I, too, want to see my beliefs platformed by individuals with influence, and I, too, want people with the power to do so to speak out for the betterment of society. It is maybe a simple matter of chance that I've escaped the logical fallacy of using Buckley as a defence for wanting women to return to their rightful places in the domestic sphere, though she is anything but exemplary of that in practice. But the pathos

to which these movies appeal by depicting the complicated but ultimately incomparably rewarding relationship between a mother and her child, along with Buckley's dedication of her award to the "beautiful chaos of a mother's heart", makes me momentarily wonder whether it is a necessary part of my journey through womanhood to experience that dynamic on the other side of it. It makes me question whether I am a worse feminist for not wanting it.

I am my mother's only child. She had already been in the workforce, earning a steady income for ten years before I was born. She was financially independent even before that – together, she and my father paid for their wedding by themselves, having saved up a small portion of the stipend they received as government scholars while doing their Master's degrees here in the UK. In her career spanning three decades, she has achieved more success than most, if not all of the mothers in the films we've seen together. Though I am biased, I can make a strong argument for her doing a fine job at balancing her professional growth with her role as a mother. I am certainly a better person for having been raised by her, and I believe she would agree that our relationship is mutually beneficial. However, I think I would be doing her a disservice if I placed myself at the centre of all that makes her a valuable member of society.

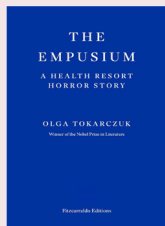
In the final scenes of *Hamnet*, Agnes attends the first performance of her husband William's new play *Hamlet* at the Globe Theatre. The film conjectures that Shakespeare wrote his masterpiece as a way of processing and dealing with the grief of losing his son. The credits roll to the sound of Agnes' laughter, as she is finally able to experience catharsis and let go. Her story is as much about loss as it is about overcoming, about reconciling the complexities of your identity before and after tragedy strikes. Ultimately, a mother is not nearly all that Agnes is. I bet Jessie Buckley, a woman who has been pigeonholed rather than appreciated for her multifariousness, would agree with me.

Image credit: Raph\_PH, CC BY 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



# BOOKS

## What's Oxford reading?



Hannah at Hertford recommends *The Empusium* (2022) by Olga Tokarczuk:

*"There is something about Tokarczuk's uncanny prose which gets under your skin. The Empusium transports us to the mountains of Lower Silesia, a province of Prussia, where a countryside sanatorium is not all it seems."*



Joe at St Peter's recommends *Lynch on Lynch* (2005) by David Lynch and Chris Rodley:

*"I read this a year after David Lynch sadly passed. Such an interesting glimpse into the mind of a once-in-a-lifetime genius, with words from the director himself."*

Image credits: 'The Empusium' and 'Lynch on Lynch' via Amazon.

# Technologies of capture: 'Transcription' in review

BEN O'BRIEN



CW: *Disordered eating*

As an Oxford student, I often think it would be nice to have fewer screens in my life. No more phone, no more tablet – I'd rid myself of these pointless objects and live life to the fullest, rapturously taking in every note of birdsong, every tree, every tiny vein on every leaf of every tree. I'd be fully engaged with the world instead of aimlessly googling whatever happens to come to my mind at any moment of the day. Most importantly, I might even finish my degree. I'd become a productivity machine.

On the other hand, maybe it would be a kind of living hell. This is a possibility that Ben Lerner's short new book, *Transcription* (2026), raises. The book opens with the unnamed narrator travelling to interview his academic mentor and 90-year-old intellectual superstar, Thomas, for a magazine. In the hotel he's staying in, just before he's due to meet Thomas, he knocks his phone into the sink. Cue lots of panicking about how he's not going to be able to record the interview – FOMO of the very worst kind. And yet he's too embarrassed to simply say, "I knocked my phone into the sink and so I can't record you", and instead thinks up a semi-elaborate lie as to why their first meeting should merely be a preparation for the real interview. Not only that, though, the narrator's lack of a phone makes him less attentive, not more. "Shamefully unresponsive to the old media that surrounded me", as he puts it. "Paintings, analogue photographs, a vinyl record spinning somewhere in my mentor's house." He has the opportunity to engage with all these things, but all he wants to do is check his emails. A bit like me when I'm 'working'.

Lerner, who is somewhat of a literary

superstar, at least in the US, is not afraid to take on the big themes. In *Transcription*, we find not only the question of "technologies of capture", in the narrator's words, but also, in no necessary order of importance: paternal abandonment, dementia, anorexia, suicide, Covid, the generation gap, and euthanasia, often all mixed into the same page. It's a lot to take on, and it's not always entirely clear what each of these elements is doing, other than to add a certain seriousness to proceedings. And yet there's something hypnotic about Lerner's trim and often surprisingly hilarious prose, which keeps you reading on.

*"In other words, the 'real' world isn't any more appealing than the online world, precisely because it isn't all that different"*

And the question the book raises is an interesting one, even if everybody has been asking it for a long time now. Are our screens good for us – an infinite source of knowledge which I'd once have had to traipse to the Rad Cam and read actual books to get – or are they gradually destroying our souls and our ability to connect with the world and even with each other? One of the strengths of *Transcription* is that it doesn't give a definitive answer to this. It's not a coincidence that Thomas's anorexic granddaughter only finally starts to eat food once she has the distracting, soothing effect of as much screen time as she could possibly want. "Dad, I want you to cut me an apple", she says one day as she is watching endless ASMR unboxing videos on YouTube. For her and also for her highly privileged parents, screen

time is the greatest of blessings, far more so than books, a university education, and all the organic berries and grassfed beef their money brings them.

In complicating rather than answering the question, the book is very much a work of fiction, and indeed, fiction is another of Lerner's themes. People experience different technologies in different ways, some good, some bad, some in between, but one idea the book raises is that there's a parallel between our screen-dominated lives and fiction.

When the narrator is accused of falsifying what becomes his famous interview with Thomas, the charge against him is that of turning the interview into fiction, as a "defence against the reality of losing" his mentor. Fiction as escape, fiction as a kind of reconstructed, mediated reality. Thought of in this way, it's not clear how much difference there is between fiction and our permanently online world – or whether the one can really be that much worse than the other.

Not unrelatedly, the book also suggests that maybe there isn't that much difference between a life which is mediated by screens and one which isn't. Screens have constructed an alternate reality, one in which we quite literally live online, in the same digital house as millions of others, relating to each other in seemingly peculiar ways, hating them, loving them, completely misunderstanding them. But even when the people in Lerner's book aren't connected to one another via their phones or tablets, their world is a messy, incomprehensible place. People talk past each other, people forget who it is they're talking to, people constantly worry about how others are perceiving them.

In other words, the 'real' world isn't any more appealing than the online world, precisely because it isn't all that different. Where exactly this leaves us on the screen question is difficult to know. And what it means for my degree, I've got no idea. But I think that I'll stick to my devices for now.

# Why you should spring clean your bookshelf this Trinity

ELIZABETH BOURN

In the Northern Hemisphere, astronomers mark the beginning of spring on the date of the spring equinox. This year, it falls on 20th March. For Oxford students, spring begins in our liminal space, the strange weeks that fill our time between the end of Hilary term and the start of Trinity term. Although we might leave Oxford, some of us remain busy bees, revising away for collections or finishing dissertations. Others among us, in spite of our never-ending reading lists, are horrifically bored, burnt-out, and unable to look at anything resembling term-time work without feeling a little bit queasy. Spring is marketed to us as the time for new beginnings, yet it can easily pass us by, all of us so desperate for summer that we charge through March and April without a second glance.

While I, too, long for the warm weather that summer (sometimes) provides, spring is my favourite season and is severely underrated. I love it, not solely for its pink and yellow petals that fill my camera roll or the excuse it grants me to unfold my summer dresses and dungarees, but for its sheer reading potential. Summer is for lucrative lick-your-fingers romances, and winter all but possesses the fireplace mystery market. Spring and autumn are just too fleeting to wholly claim certain genres, and therefore every year holds the possibility of something new.

Spring is especially unique since, in autumn, readers may find themselves returning to the nostalgic tenderness of the back-to-school narrative, squeezing in a read or two before winter has the chance to take hold. Spring, conversely, lacks this definition, its potential is, therefore, joyfully untapped and free for individual interpretation.

Upon coming home for the Hilary vacation, I returned to my childhood bedroom. It was in what can only be described as a state of chaos. I am an English student and have been collecting books since I was 13. It shows. Almost every inch of my room is covered in a paperback, a hardback, or the DVD of the film adaptation of my favourite book. Bookmarks are everywhere, reading journals sit precariously balanced on

every edge, and, as I stood in the doorway, I silently cursed my January self for leaving my room like this.

In the name of spring cleaning, I sat down and decided to dedicate the following minutes, hours, and days to sorting my books, promising to keep only those that brought memories of a happy reading experience to mind. Despite being a self-proclaimed bookworm, I found that I hadn't actually read many of them.

Some were sequels I'd spent weeks waiting for, only for the special-edition hardbacks to accumulate dust behind books I had ordered for university classes. Some were classics I had loved the idea of reading, but their spines were ultimately left unbroken when I struggled with the language, the words left unannotated, unfelt. I found books that family members had recommended, had excitedly shared with the intention of communal discussion, simply waiting – the clearest signifier that the delight I had previously taken in reading had crumbled. Enough was enough. If spring was the time for new beginnings, I would begin again, too. Starting with my bookshelf.

*"Spring lacks a to-do list, lacks a checkbox of books to read before you miss their seasonal window, and it is kinder that way, more welcoming"*

Choosing to do an English degree as an avid reader can cause your love of reading to become irrevocably intertwined with stressful deadlines and job applications. It is easy to become distanced from the hobby, rejecting it over breaks in favour of anything else. My goal every new year is to fall back in love with reading. While January me certainly tried her best, it was this spring that I saw my resolution begin to

take effect. I listened – because audiobooks do count! – to Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* as I browsed bookshops, pausing to take pictures of the poetry anthology I thought my best friend would enjoy. I missed my stop on the sun-drenched bus because I was so engrossed in the final pages of a play I was reading for pleasure. I finished the final chapter of my favourite comic – the one I had been reading since I was 14 – tucked up in bed, birdsong quiet outside my bedroom window.

While, every year, my resolution is to fall back in love with reading, I often overlooked returning to how I first practised the art. With friends and family, squeezed between commuters on the bus, under the covers with a flashlight, stealing moments everywhere. When I was younger, I would carry my favourite books with me to school, not necessarily to read, but to hold, a weight that kept me grounded as I navigated life as a 15-year-old girl. Before reading was productive or competitive, it was a haven, a comfort I yearn for now more than ever

as I enter my 20s. Spring lacks a to-do list, lacks a checkbox of books to read before you miss their seasonal window, and it is kinder that way, more welcoming.

Spring is often swallowed in one quick gulp, dainty blossoms on trees appearing for what seems like milliseconds before waxy leaves take their place. For many of us, spring is small. It is a soft yawn, the world waking up and displaying a swift snippet of what's to come in summer. Before spring leaves us behind for another year, I implore you to make reading a part of this transitional jubilation, a part of the first hike or the first ice-cream. The assigned genre is anything that has gathered dust on your bookshelf or TBR, because reading is more joyful when the rules are bent and you follow your own enjoyment.

Or, as Jane Austen's bookish heroine Catherine Moreland would say: "Oh! I am delighted with the book! I should like to spend my whole life in reading it!"

Image credit: Elizabeth Bourn, for Cherwell.



# Authenticity and the pop genre

*Val Michael discusses the poptimism of Slayyyter's WOR\$T GIRL IN AMERICA*

Originality could be dead in pop music. The genre is so self-referential that it feels like an endless borrowing game, buying into nostalgia for bygone times outside of our own.

Artists' branding in the 2020s has featured copious archival fashion pulls and pop culture iconography, while dominant music trends have included the excessive sampling of throwback hits and iconic melodies. This is an unavoidable aspect of pop, and not necessarily a measure of creative lack. However, it can either give long-forgotten tracks a necessary boost of life, or appear as a cheap way to chase the ever-elusive 'hit'.

Yet, as the decade is proving, generic boundaries are once again breaking down, with dance and electronic sounds becoming the pop standard, and people longing for artists at their most genuine. Of course, this was demonstrated most prominently by Charli XCX's shift between the ultra-conventional *Crash* and the more personal and re-focused *Brat*. However, she isn't the only person creating from a place of greater authenticity, over the pursuit of musical trends.

Catherine Garner, known as Slayyyter, has been chasing fame for almost ten years now. She started out making 'lo-fi pop' from her bedroom closet, before bursting onto the music scene in 2019 with a string of electro-pop tracks such as 'Mine', 'Daddy AF', and 'BFF'. Though her songs all proved TikTok-popular, they never seemed to translate fully out of a chronically online space into the cultural mainstream.

Slayyyter's previous works were great projects that felt authentic within their self-aware pastiche, but all tied themselves to various personas; the music did not necessarily represent the creative voice behind it. Their inability to produce the success she'd hoped for, even when striving for commercial viability, drove her to make a decision – her next album would be the last, one final go at being a star before she called it quits.

After an edgier sonic shift in a single she dropped in 2024 titled 'No Comma', Slayyyter

began working on her third studio album, *WOR\$T GIRL IN AMERICA*. The first single, 'BEAT UP CHANEL\$', was noticed by Columbia Records, allowing her career trajectory to finally change.

The album is an advent of originality, reconnecting Slayyyter to her Missouri roots and the rawer and previously unseen parts of her life, while refusing to chase trends. She focused instead on her own interests and ended up producing her most unique work, unplagued by formula. She describes it as "iPod music", a "sweet spot of 2010s indie electronic", encompassing songs she would have curated in her teenage years, when individual songs were bought and not readily available as in the streaming era.

“  
In Slayyyter's case, authenticity is the motivator, and her refusal to conform seems to be paying off

*WOR\$T GIRL* is intrinsically tied to its DIY approach to visuals. Each song has a self-directed music video, while costumes are hand-made or utilise pieces from her own wardrobe. Nothing feels too put together; instead, it is a patchwork of influences, from her Midwestern upbringing, to Tumblr mood-boarding and her music and film literacy (note the frequency of Lynchian rabbit imagery). She is still provocative and 'trashy', but forgoes hyper-feminine glam and seeks imperfection, her lyricism newly exposed. This is not just an additional layer to the album, but it helps to form its thesis.

The album's cohesive through-line does not prevent it from textural layering throughout its 14 tracks. Distortion is a sonic mainstay, with songs entrenched in grime and aspiration. The

album's opening track, 'DANCE...', cuts in at almost five minutes, its long intro crescendoing into a thumping bassline which transports its listeners to an unrestrained club atmosphere. 'CRANK', 'OLD TECHNOLOGY', and 'YES GODDDDD' are aggressive, the sound dialled up to 100 with maximalist production, heavy bass, and gritty and intense synthwork.

Slayyyter is clearly keen to prove her own musical capabilities, the album pairing back with dreamy indie electronic as in 'GAS STATION', and the wistful, nostalgic 'UNKNOWN LOVERZ', while 'CANNIBALISM!' is more rock-focused but vocally driven, oscillating between screams and hypnotic crooning. *WOR\$T GIRL* seeks out the personal and sometimes ugliest parts of success, lyrically wavering between self-assertion and profound insecurity on 'WHAT IS IT LIKE, TO BE LIKED?' and the satirical, spoken-word hallucinatory journey of 'I'M ACTUALLY KINDA FAMOUS'.

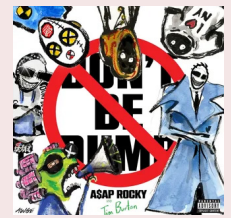
There is also something personal enclosed here, best represented by the final track, 'BRITTANY MURPHY'. Slayyyter has remarked that it encapsulates the album's overall feeling and reflects the message she tried to get across. Its summery atmosphere and almost-robotic vocals conceal an inner depth, with the artist at her most vulnerable, as she ponders feelings of inadequacy and suicidal ideation. The patchwork of *WOR\$T GIRL* finally converges here, allowing the artist herself to shine through.

Maybe pop is a borrowing game, but when influences are being used like in Slayyyter's music, it is difficult to say there isn't still something unique to be found. Perhaps the problem is not creative pastiche itself, but the constraints of formula imposing themselves in the streaming era, making the genre so homogenous.

It seems as though audiences respond far better to work that doesn't try to mould itself, but goes against the grain through the expression of artistic freedom. In Slayyyter's case, authenticity is the motivator, and her refusal to conform seems to be paying off.

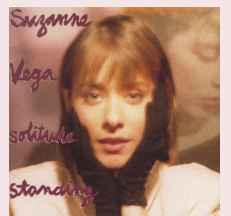
## MUSIC

### What's Oxford listening to?



Emma at Merton recommends *DON'T BE DUMB* (2026) by A\$AP Rocky:

"With no studio album in eight years, the demand for an A\$AP Rocky album was almost as high as the demand for an album from his girlfriend, Rihanna. Braggadocious and cocky, the artist returns to his usual form on his latest project, pushing boundaries in hip-hop. It's the same A\$AP Rocky we fell in love with over the years, but with three children, an acting career, and a new perspective on life."



Clementine at Brasenose recommends *Solitude Standing* (1987) by Suzanne Vega:

"I don't think there is any other artist who does lyrics quite like Vega. Many might recognise her from 'Tom's Diner', which soothes with its gentle poetics, but 'Night Vision' and 'Calypso' are also not to be missed."

Image credits: 'DON'T BE DUMB' and 'Solitude Standing' via Amazon and Wikipedia respectively.

## WHAT'S ON

### STAGE

*Oleanna*

Long Room, New College  
29th April - 2nd May

*Macbeth*

Somerville Chapel  
29th April - 2nd May

### MUSIC

*Schola Cantorum of Oxford*  
De Jager Auditorium, Trinity  
College  
26th April, 2pm

### FILM

*The Drama*  
Ultimate Picture Palace  
Until 29th April

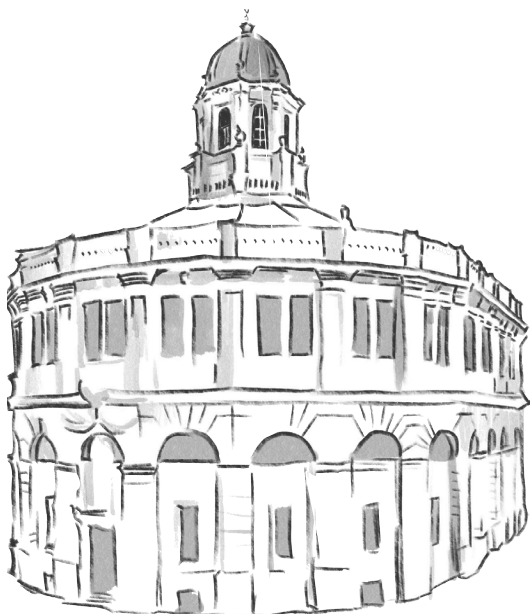
### LITERATURE

*Lily Dunn on INTO BEING*  
Blackwell's  
30th April, 5:30pm

### ART

*Pets & their People*  
Weston Library  
Ends 27th September

*Roman Oxfordshire*  
Coins Display  
The Ashmolean Museum  
Ends 29th November



## The Source

### Peacocks

Their grounds abut a large colonial on Staten Island:  
Five or six of them  
Swaggering along verdant lawns,  
Brick walkways, man-made ponds –  
Such bravado. What pretty boys!  
Pets of somebody, clearly.  
They preen each other,  
The astonishing blue of their feathers,  
Slashed with generous reams of gold and emerald.  
They make spectacles of themselves – oh the notions!  
Little quivers ripple through them, like air in a desert.

No peahens, no audience but us.  
Limbo full of pick-up artists.  
It is indeed their mating season, I am told  
By the woman with the long nails and Red Bull  
Who owns the house.  
"Who's this all for, then?" I ask.

RORY MAGUIRE

## How places are made: A meditation in the City of Love

REBECCA BUSHEE

Springtime bloomed around me, pink and bright. Soft white petals were adrift on the warm afternoon breeze, slanted April sunlight glanced off my cheek. The city, too, was magnificent. Looming buildings decorated with artifice and care, streets paved with stone – the greenery only added to the majesty. The botanical gardens unfurled before me, rolling with colour and life. A man was humming quietly to himself on a nearby bench. It sounded romantic, sort of high and yellow like those sweet, bright tulips. I lost myself in the sprawl of Paris for a time, eyes permanently glued upwards. My latte was perfectly rich and sweet, the air was warm and clear. It was an idyllic day.

Still, there was something missing. Even amidst all its splendourous sights, the city held no memory. The echoes of a previous trip came to me in moments: that distinctive intersection, a particular building, or the crêpe shop on Île Saint-Louis. But mostly the streets felt empty. They didn't evoke much feeling at all. It took me time to understand the vacant feeling in my chest. I was awestruck, certainly. Yet the lack of memory felt striking. I began to think, how can I feel nothing for a city as beautiful as Paris? What is it that really makes a place?

At some point, I wandered into a ceramics shop, packed with a zorn palette of creatures large and small: frogs with gazes turned towards the sky, cats in raincoats standing in terrified anticipation. Reds, yellows, whites, and greens; they clinked and rattled as my steps shook the floor. There was something warm and deep about this room – I felt their eyes upon me as I ran my hand across their glazed and sculpted forms. Cluttered and cramped, it felt a bit like home. The shopkeeper told me that they made

the pieces just upstairs, and that it had been her passion project for the past decade. There was character to that room. The bright colours and careless arrangement; everything was exactly where it should have been.

“*To be made is to be remembered, filled with personhood and character*”

I think that places are made. Natural beauty, grand architecture – they're all important, but they only go so far. Places are formed from memories etched into streets, from ghosts which dwell in between moments. They're shaped by the dreams and aspirations which have been poured into quiet, hidden hollows, like that shop in Paris. I think of cities I've called home: Philadelphia, Providence, Oxford. Each holds a different version of myself.

In Philadelphia, passing through the square by the fountain conjures our laughing voices in the dark – eyes straining towards the starry sky, trying to catch a glimpse of Jupiter. I remember lying down in the early dawn light, laughing at Perry's blue van, and the telescope he could never seem to place just right. I feel full and warm, lingering in that park where I had my first date. For me, that was the essence of springtime: eating iced treats, just nervous enough to be unsure of where to put our hands. The eventual clasp of his fingers in mine, his shining brown eyes and the cherry blossoms which were just beginning to flower.

In Providence, the walk to our café was always carefree; sunlit pilgrimages

to warm pastries full of flashcards and gossip. The main green usually ripples in the autumn light – full of familiar faces, music, and games. I picture lying on a blanket among people I care for deeply, and watching the afternoon slip by. The pool holds my highest highs and the depths of my sadness: each emotion picked through relentlessly in between sets. His apartment – learning one esoteric ancient language or another, in between trips to the pizza shop next door. We must have talked until the store closed. Each building holds a different subject I studied in the early hours of the morning, a different coffee which carried me through the term.

Even Oxford holds memories, now. Walks from Lincoln, Brasenose, or Balliol accommodation at 3am after a particularly spirited afters, tracing the well-worn path to my room down by the river. Drawing ridiculous caricatures on menus, somehow turning a Wetherspoons into a site of great sacredness. Debriefs in our coffee shop, sipping lavender-infused drinks and refusing to get any revision

done. Then there's the late nights in the Schwarzman, spinning on stools underneath that unblinking eye, and telling secrets in the dark.

It hit me when I walked down Cornmarket for the first time since the vac: the weight of all of these memories. Oxford has always had grand architecture, peaceful paths down by the river, and whispering meadows. But in the beginning, it had not been made yet. Not for me, at least. It felt empty. Full of possibility, sure, but vacant. Now, going into Trinity, I feel the strength of each emotion, each recollection. To be made is to be remembered, filled with personhood and character. That shop in Paris was made, shaped from the weight of passion and care. Philadelphia and Providence were made by the people and places that matter to me. Oxford has been made by all of these things, good and bad. I feel every moment as if I am living it again. Perhaps that is what it means to make a place.

Image credit: Rebecca Bushee for Cherwell.



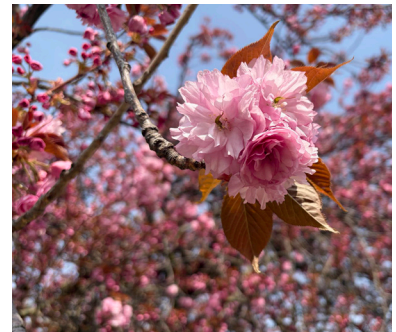
## Spring at last: A study on the seasons

Barbara Kempny explains the scientific reason why your mood may have improved

The skull-numbing alarm rang out in the darkness. I fumbled for my phone: 8.21am. The rain pattered against my accommodation window, and I could hear gusts of wind blowing outside. It would be a soggy walk to my 9am lectures, and a cold one at that. It was peak January. Swiping snooze, I lay in bed, wishing very hard that I could hibernate.

The high point of winter is always Christmas. The preceding three or four weeks are filled with Christmas markets, mulled wine, and mince pies. And then it crashes. Following New Year's Day, there is not a hint of winter festivity in sight, while freezing weather stubbornly remains for the next two months. Is it any surprise that up to 10% of people living in the UK experience winter seasonal affective disorder (SAD)?

SAD is a recognised mental health



condition, defined by experiencing depressive episodes during certain seasons of the year. However, although winter depression is 30 times more common than summer depression, it is important to acknowledge that SAD is not confined to winter months. SAD is typically characterised by persistent feelings of sadness and emptiness. In the winter, it can present as oversleeping, overeating (with a particular inclination to carbohydrates), and social withdrawal. These elements of SAD might go unnoticed, though, as they are reflected within broader elements of culture. For example, hearty, more filling meals are associated with colder months, and lounging in bed for longer periods of time is more socially acceptable in the winter.

SAD is a multifactorial condition, with both genetic components and disruption to circadian rhythms, as a result of natural seasonal changes, thought to be potential causes. A circadian rhythm is the body's biological clock, regulating a person's sleeping and waking, as well as their metabolism and internal temperature. It makes sense that the changing seasons disrupt this. In the winter, it feels counterintuitive to wake up when it is still dark outside, and bizarre to leave the Rad Cam at 5pm to find out that night has already fallen.

One of the biggest struggles of winter is that outdoor activities, some

of the usual remedies for low mood, must be squeezed into a very narrow eight-hour window of daylight. One could go running after dark, but this is not always safe, especially when alone. And on top of lectures, practical classes, and tutorials during term time, it is nearly impossible to fit in a 5k run with such limited daylight. Another important factor to consider is the weather.

“*As spring firmly takes root and Trinity term looms, I envision myself reincarnated*”

It doesn't matter if there is still daylight, or if I have spare time, if it is pouring buckets and five degrees. Not much could convince me to put on a skort and play netball at that point. It appears that the UK population and I are in agreement, as it has been reported that two in five adults spend less than an hour a day outdoors. As a result of less outdoor-seeking behaviour and lower UV levels, the NHS recommends Vitamin D supplementation for everyone during winter and autumn months.

This year, the early weeks of March brought abnormally sunny weather.

My friends and I ruthlessly capitalised on this, flocking to Trinity gardens and plotting our first Pimm's of the year. Hilary term gave us a small, tantalising taste of what the oncoming term could offer: early morning rowing sessions with the sun reflecting off rippling water; days spent studying in college gardens; evenings topped off with cocktails on benches outside the King's Arms. It sounds heavenly.

As spring firmly takes root and Trinity term looms, I envision myself reincarnated. Gone are the days of thick jumpers and jeans worn for the tenth time in a row. Instead, they are replaced by pretty tops and white linen trousers. Gone are the days of carb-loading on jacket potatoes and cheesy chips. Now there are only smoothie bowls and salad. The longer days and shorter nights represent a new start, a self-renaissance of sorts.

The ultimate conversation starter in primary school was a real antagonist: “Which is better, winter or summer?” The winter faction would diligently argue their case: summer gets sweaty, sunburns are painful, and hot nights are a faff to sleep in. But I stand armed with my sunscreen and handheld fan. I'll take summer any day.

The blaring alarm rings out once more. This time, the sun falls through the curtains into my bedroom: 8.21am. I'm awake and ready, it's spring at last.

Image credit: Rebecca Bushee, for Cherwell.

## HOROSCOPES



Aries

Wearing shorts already?



Taurus

They say 2:2s on collections predict firsts in Finals and Prelims...



Gemini

Surely you'll have time for one more society (or three)



Cancer

Therapists need therapy sometimes



Leo

There will be no evil situationships



Virgo

Treat yourself to some retail therapy

# HOROSCOPES



**Libra**

Confront more people over text. Embrace the chaos



**Scorpio**

Broke Thursdays here you come



**Sagittarius**

Take that Week 0 vacation, collections are for freshers



**Capricorn**

“Only one club night a week this term”



**Aquarius**

Four hours on reels? Rookie numbers



**Pisces**

Locked in? Do you need a key?

# ‘Making the most’ of university life

OLIVIA-MAE BUTTERFIELD

As I write this, I’m hurtling down the East Coast Mainline at 120 miles per hour – the speed at which I feel I’m travelling through my university experience. Only nine weeks to go, and that’s it: the final year. Things start getting serious.

But, from my experience of Oxford life thus far, this ‘seriousness’ is a thing worth keeping at a safe and respectable distance. As a bright-eyed fresher, determined to excel academically at one of the best universities in the world, I forgot to look for the things outside the curriculum last year. I signed up for societies that I never went to, events that I would miss, balls that I was too exhausted to enjoy. The reality was that I forgot about the ‘normal’ university life, and pursued what I thought the ‘Oxford’ life should be. In the mind of my over-eager first-year self, Oxford was about the work, about the grind, about the 101% academic effort.

“*You cannot be in control of the rapid pace of Oxford life, but you can be in control of your own pace*”

To some extent, I still believe that this is true. The Oxford experience is slightly different from what most of us expected from university. We were told to ‘make the most’ of our time here, told that it would be the best years of our lives. For lots of people, such a sweeping statement is overwhelming; it contains too much, it has the potential to spiral into a never-ending train of sports clubs, socials, projects, trips. But, for me, this sort of mindset was exactly what I needed after the burnt-out academic frenzy I had mixed myself up in throughout my first year.

The demand on Oxford students is obviously immense, and I had convinced myself that university life at Oxford should be purely academic, that anything else was a distraction from the real reason I was here. I would be undeserving of the place I’d worked so hard to gain if I wasn’t wholly and completely committed to the degree. I would be lying if I said that I’m not a little sore about the comparative lack of work my friends at other universities have – in my mind, other universities were about drinking, socialising, and exploring. Oxford had no time for that. Here, I stand corrected. I have been thoroughly surprised by the

wealth of things people get up to at this university.

When I began my second year, I was determined not to make the same mistake again. This time, I would commit myself to the societies I had abandoned last year. I would go to the events, I would take on all these opportunities. I threw myself into everything that I thought I would never have time for, just to prove my past self wrong. And I realised that it was possible to thrive academically as well as to have an enjoyable life outside the tutorial. I joined the college choir, wrote articles, edited student publications, took days out in the Cotswolds, joined independent bands. All of this, and I have actually achieved better grades than last year, and have had more time off. Now, more than ever, I feel that I am living the true ‘university experience’, and I haven’t had to sacrifice any sleep or grades to get it.

But the truth is, no matter how many societies we join, how many clubs we attend, articles we write, or places we go, many of us will still feel as though we aren’t fully taking advantage of the vast wealth of opportunities that Oxford has to offer. For everything you try, there are five things that you haven’t. With such short terms, it can feel impossible to taste every flavour of university life. And that’s because it is.

At this point in my degree, I’ve come to accept that the most important thing to figure out is what you want your university life to look like. Whether that’s pure academic commitment, exploration of societies, or developing skills beyond the degree. I know people who are involved in more societies, sports, and social events than me. I know people who are involved in fewer. Yes, it can be exhausting to even consider every possible way to spend your time at university, especially at Oxford.

But, isn’t it just as bad rotting away behind a laptop screen, staring blankly at a document titled ‘Week 6 Essay’? For me, taking a step back from the academic side of university life and learning to explore the world outside books was the best thing I could have possibly done for myself; the benefits have been enormous. I’ll never remember an afternoon spent tucked away in the Rad Cam, poring over PDFs. But the memory of a trip to Charlbury, spent wading through mud on a cold day in February, will stick with me even after I graduate. Others may find the opposite, but, at the end of the day, nobody is missing out.

You cannot be in control of the rapid pace of Oxford life, but you can be in control of your own pace, in control of what you can and can’t take on. You can learn what it is that you want to remember from these ‘golden years’. And that’s the beauty of university life – there is no one way to do it.

# CHERWELL-FED

## Where is the best vegetarian lunch in Oxford?

NORA MILES

For those of us still hung up about the loss of Leon, the answer to the question of where to find a quick, high-quality vegetarian lunch may not be an obvious one. This week, I set out to solve it.

I chose to rank independent (ish) cafés in the centre of Oxford, because I’m lazy enough not to want to walk far from college, but enthusiastic enough to want to support local businesses over chains. My rubric was uncodified and unclear, but what I was after, approximately, was a cheap, tasty, and filling vegetarian lunch. Honourable mentions (options no worse than the following list, but too obvious to be worth including): a Taylor’s baguette, a last-minute punt for Itsu maki, and a classic Greggs vegan sausage roll.



curry. But once again, it’s just not the kind of thing you can afford to rely on regularly (affordability is coming, stay tuned), since a small bowl costs £8.

### 2. Gloucester Green

“This was the no-brainer. This was the banker, this was the one that couldn’t fail, this was the one that never failed” – Gary Neville, I would imagine, if he ever visited Gloucester Green. If you want my specific recommendations, the £7 vegan momo from Momo King are insanely good. £7 appears to be the going rate, and for that price, you could also get the vegan plate from Ceylon Spicy, or the gnocchi from Polentista Italian, if spice isn’t your thing.

Since my last visit, it seems a stand devoted to tiramisu has also appeared, which is also a vegetarian option. As I say, lunch is a subjective concept. But I am forced to discount points on account of the difficulty of finding seating during busy months, and the unpleasantness of eating outdoors during the cold, quieter months. And if, like my sister, you possess a mortal fear of birds, this is one to avoid altogether.

### 1. Salsas del Sol

We’ve made it. The GOAT. £6 to fill a small bowl, which I can personally attest fits enough for a filling lunch (especially if you detour to the Organic Deli for a cookie, then you’re really cooking). Pictured above is my most recent effort, which also serves as proof of their leniency regarding overfilling. The serving station is refilled with fresh options for your bowls or pitas, which include halloumi, aubergine, mushrooms, and chickpeas, as well as a whole host of different grains and salad bases. You can help yourself to sauces, and there’s no surcharge for hummus. If you are a vegetarian who hasn’t been to Salsas del Sol yet, trust me, I have found your new favourite lunch.

*Image credit: Nora Miles for Cherwell.*

### 5. The Schwarzman Centre

Stay with me. What it lacks in ambience it makes up for in ease. Plus, there’s the added bonus of being able to eavesdrop on conversations between Google executives (true story) whilst you do the reading for your seminar 20 minutes before. Its main drawback is that it will cost you about £10 for a full lunch. Not one for everyday. It’s also slightly embarrassing to turn up to your 2pm class and respond, when asked about the stain on your shirt, that it is butterbean purée.

### 4. Organic Deli Cafe

Tucked away in the alley between Tesco and Gloucester Green lies a fab little café with plenty of veggie options – no less than five different options for sourdough sandwiches! Once again, the drawback here is the price (although I sympathise with the challenge of being a small business owner in the current economic climate), as one such sandwich costs nine Great British pounds. I will say, though, that the Organic Deli’s (£4) chocolate cookie was one of the best things I have ever eaten in my life. A cookie can be a lunch; it’s a subjective concept.

### 3. The Alpha Bar

One of my all-time Oxford favourites is the Alpha Bar, located inside the Covered Market. I’ve tried and enjoyed both the build-your-own bowls and the hot meal options, many of which are vegetarian, hearty, and delicious. If tofu is your protein of choice, then the Alpha Bar is the place for you. I will also note, though, for accompanying carnivores, that on this particular day the Alpha Bar was also serving coq-au-vin and beef rendang

# AGONY AUNT

Why do I forget about uni the second I get home? I am incapable of prompting myself to revise and I’m going to fail collections!

*Sincerely, Dee Motivate*

*Dear Dee Motivate,*

With most colleges kicking students out bright and early on a Saturday morning the day after classes finish, it is no wonder you want time to decompress after a busy term. It is normal for anyone to experience burnout after weeks of tutorials, essays, problem sheets, and lectures, and the worst thing you can do is to go home and immediately push yourself further. I would advise you to stop beating yourself up during the time you should be reserving for rest, so that you can recover properly.

The best strategy, in my humble experience, is to allocate time during the middle weeks of the vacation to do work. Set yourself achievable goals, go to your local library (even if it is a downgrade from the Rad Cam), and get a little bit done every day. Don’t worry about Collections until 0th Week, and even then you shouldn’t be stressing: though it is overstated, they are simply a way to assess where you are and prompt you to get better. Don’t see them as the goal, but a step along the way.

*Lots of love,  
Agony Aunt*

# Performative sociability: Does Oxford favour the extrovert?

*Maggie Patmore reflects on being an introvert at university, and the underrated benefits of a quieter pace*

As a university characterised by exemplary achievements, Oxford tends to cultivate an environment where you feel you must perform at your best in every aspect of life – and your social life is no exception. This pressure is more acutely apparent to the introvert. College activities like attending BOPs, or even meals in hall, can start to feel like checking off a box, one that proves that you are meeting the minimum social criteria expected of an adequate student. Hearing other people in your accommodation getting ready for Indie Fridays while you're watching *Friday Night Dinner* alone is enough to make anyone feel like they are somehow failing. And yet, despite this ever-present pressure to socialise, some of us find ourselves deliberately choosing the latter option most evenings.

Moving from home to a new city, meeting new people, and adjusting to new routines can be a jarring transition for any student, but above all for the introvert. After hearing about one of my more extroverted friends thriving during her university's freshers' week, I had hoped that my experience would be just as positive. But as someone who prefers spending most of my time alone, talking to multiple strangers day after day, with the additional challenge of not instantly forgetting their names, proved to be taxing. Although meeting as many people as possible is a perfectly reasonable way to settle in at university, I quickly grew tired of the endless cycle of "what is your name?" and "what do you study?" In fact, I found myself oddly frustrated at this sensible series of initial questions. I could not understand how so many people seemed to be having the time of their lives with people they barely knew; this is where the introversion-extroversion distinction became so apparent to me.

Most people comprehend these terms in an overly simplified way, with the prevalent stereotypes being that extroverts are the 'life of the party' while introverts remain the 'wallflowers' (that is, if they attend the party at all). The reality is more complex than this: introverts don't necessarily avoid social interaction but rather prefer the company of a smaller group in an environment that is not so overstimulating, resulting in a general reluctance to go into any potentially overwhelming situations. It's evident that a bustling place like Oxford tends

to favour the extrovert. I distinctly remember having a conversation where I was complaining to a friend about the concept of networking, to which she responded that networking is "just talking to people", not realising that is, in fact, the part I find off-putting.

It's not the talking that introverts hate, though. Rather, it's the constantly being surrounded by people, the expectation that you join various societies and go on regular nights-out, while also getting to know everyone in your college. Suddenly, you go from being in the comfort of family members and friends to living in a building with close to 100 other students, all of whom you have never met. With everyone forming friendships so quickly, it can be hard not to feel that you are falling behind, and no one wants to be seen as boring. Although Oxford has a reputation for being an academically rigorous institution, when I mentioned that I was looking forward to visiting the libraries more than meeting new people I received judgemental looks from some of my peers. This, in addition to the romanticisation of university as the 'best years of your life', when it is not an environment that is catered towards you, can leave an introvert feeling out of place.

Although university is widely expected to be the pinnacle of your social life, it is often described as a lonely time for a lot of students. An article recently published by *The Guardian* reported that two thirds of students experience loneliness at university, with many attributing this to the set-up of their accommodation not encouraging social interactions. Perhaps this is unsurprising. With greater independence also comes the greater responsibility to seek out friendships in a more intentional manner, rather than relying on school settings to facilitate this.

Yet Oxford's collegiate structure and regular events seem to compensate for this transition – many people find their friendships from being part of the same college, a characteristic that most other universities lack. And despite being an introvert and feeling largely content alone, all humans require some social interaction. Oxford does feel like it promotes some performative sociability. Being part of a college community means you are constantly confronted with people who seem to have more friends, are part of more societies, and go to more events than you, exacerbating the feeling that you should



be doing more – a feeling that I expect is not unfamiliar for most Oxford students. However, the college communal set-up does have its benefits, as it does encourage connection and serves as a helpful reminder to introverts that there is value in having friends to share the highs and lows with.

Even with that in mind, it can feel natural to be envious of extroverts in such a setting. It feels like there is an invisible boundary between the people who thrive in Oxford's social climate and those who find it overwhelming. Outside of university, the separation is rarely this distinct. Instead, we have to adapt to the situation we are presented with, which is why I, one of the most introverted people I know, am often assumed to be an extrovert by my peers. Yet Oxford is not exactly optimal for extroverts either: long hours studying alone in a library, with nothing but the sound of occasional coughing, are likely to be much more difficult for those who prefer to be surrounded by the chatter of their peers. And during life after Oxford, there will be situations

in which being an introvert is beneficial. It is likely that the transition to living alone and being more independent after university will be much easier for the introvert than the extrovert. In my experience, there is some comfort in knowing that no matter where you go – to another university or another country (or both as I am intending to do) – you will be able to shape your experience as you please, without relying on the presence of others as an extrovert might do.

So, to any introverts, do not fret about Oxford being the best years of your life. Whilst it is important to embrace the 'university experience', you will have many years ahead of you to soak in your own company without the constant pressure to present a thriving social life. My advice would be this: do try to go on the occasional pub trip or night out (it'll do you good, I promise), but also remember that an evening alone reading, crocheting, or simply rotting in bed, can be an evening well spent.

Image credit: David Illiff, CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

## OXFORD TINY LOVE STORIES

I'll probably miss you until the end of time. I'm sorry I could never say these words. But I realised it, when you looked at me with sweet russet eyes and that lopsided grin and I felt so complete. I had forgotten how warm it felt to pass a slow evening across from you, talking about matters of little importance, but great intellectual interest. I fell asleep on your couch because I could not make myself leave. Being with you again made the months fall away like sand. It felt as if I'd never gone away.

I know your heart is your family. The way you describe home is magic: rainy and familial and suffused with an ancient sort of quiet. I wish I could shrink the Atlantic. I wish we were not always an ocean apart.

Rebecca Bushee, St. Peter's College

## CHERPSE.

Oxford's blind dating

An evening at Jude the Obscure.  
Can "better than expected" turn into something more?



### Mr Jitterbug

#### First impressions?

She seemed stylish, and I really liked her hair! I'd zoned out waiting outside the pub where we met so was worried I'd made a bad impression.

#### Did it meet your expectations?

Definitely exceeded them! I had been apprehensive about the concept of a blind date and potentially getting matched up with someone really weird but it was the opposite. We ended up chatting for almost three hours over a couple of pints, which was really nice.

#### What was the highlight?

Trading stories about bizarre Oxford tourist encounters.

#### What was the most embarrassing moment?

When I asked her if her accent was Scottish (I was off by quite a long way).

#### Describe the date in three words:

Longer than expected.

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

I hope so, but revision may get in the way...

### Miss Coppola

#### First impressions?

Goes to Christ Church but claims he didn't know the reputation when he applied... bold statement.

#### Did it meet your expectations?

Considering my friends signed me up for this, better than expected.

#### What was the highlight?

Finding out we have the same opinions on movies (which suggests my friends might know me a little bit).

#### What was the most embarrassing moment?

When my friends 'coincidentally' showed up to the same pub and I had to ignore their heads poking out from behind the extortionate Greene King menu.

#### Describe the date in three words:

Brief but wholesome.

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

Some films are perfect as standalones.

# SPORT

## DnB On The Bike travelling rave returns to Oxford

*Hattie Simpson reports from Broad Street as it booms with Drum and Bass*



**H**undreds gathered on Broad Street in the afternoon of Sunday 10th April for the return of Dom Whiting's travelling bike rave. Otherwise known as 'Drum and Bass On The Bike', Whiting has built a following of more than 800,000 across his social media by riding through cities on a custom-built bicycle with speakers and decks, turning public roads into a moving "community-driven explosion of positivity and high-energy music".

The ride, which saw crowds amassing outside the Clarendon Building from just before 2pm, drew almost 1,000 people. Cyclists, skaters, and scooters all assembled in a loose crowd that soon stretched down to the Sheldonian Theatre, around to the Bridge of Sighs, and up towards Wadham College, with families, newcomers, and returning attendees forming a rather mixed group. The format is remarkably simple: Whiting and his DJ decks and speakers lead, and the crowd follows.

Simplicity is what has allowed the event to grow, gaining such rapid popularity. Since emerging in 2021 as what Whiting describes as a "creative outlet during lockdown", the rides have exploded across the UK and internationally, amassing huge turnouts. Oxford was one of the first places where Whiting brought the concept. Addressing the crowd, he appealed to Oxford's identity: "It is a cycling city, we can do bigger and better than last year."

The event has grown into a well-managed and structured affair. Regular announcements were made over loudspeakers asking for the crowds to part to let cars through, while a set of 'dos and don'ts' was briefed before the group set off to, as Whiting described it, "set a good example and keep everyone happy". The result is something that sits uniquely between spontaneity and structure.

Participants came from across Oxfordshire and beyond. One attendee remarked that he'd

flown over from the United States to take part. One rider, who had signed up to Whiting's newsletter and seen the event advertised on Facebook, said she had attended multiple times. "I'm a mother – I don't get to go out to nightclubs. This is as close as I get." Another attendee celebrated the chance to connect with others: "I like the idea of a critical mass more than the music." Having lived in Oxford for several years, they described the ride as an annual fixture in their calendar.

**“***The format is remarkably simple: Whiting and his DJ decks and speakers lead, and the crowd follows***”**

Unlike many large gatherings outside the Clarendon Building, the tone of the event was not defined by politics but instead by a clear emphasis on shared participation. Attendees consistently described it as something anyone could join, regardless of background, with one noting that "anyone is welcome to come" – a sentiment reflected in the diversity of the crowd. Inclusivity is built into the event's structure itself; there are no tickets and minimal distinction between organiser and audience. The result is a crowd that is unified by a shared decision to be part of a community, even if only for a couple of hours.

At the same time, small pockets of political expression surfaced at the margins. One attendee referenced online posts suggesting far-right groups might appear, prompting informal calls to bring flags; they had attached a Progress Pride flag with a skull and crossbones to their bike. On the other end of the crowd, members

of the Socialist Workers Party had set up a table after seeing the event advertised online. Nearby, someone held a sign reading "FCK ICE".

The event was made even more striking by its overlap with Oxford Folk Festival, held on Broad Street that same day. The contrast was brilliant: as you moved between the two, traditional English folk music and Morris dancing bells gave way to drum and bass from portable speakers, each occupying different ends of the street.

Despite their differences, both events drew substantial crowds with attendees drifting between them. Proximity produced a strange coexistence between these two distinct collectives, perhaps a testament to the shared demand for in-person gatherings that cut across genres and traditions.

Sunday's turnout demonstrates not just the popularity of these particular events, but the durability of public gatherings that emerged from the constraints of the pandemic. Events like the bike rave depend on high participation, creating spaces that are temporary and collectively sustained, simply relying on people eager to show up.

As Broad Street returned to normal by the early evening, all that hinted at the day's festivities were the scraps of confetti puddle-floating outside the Clarendon Building. Nevertheless, the scale and variety of the crowd that day embodied something abstract, but lasting: a shift in how public space is used and experienced.

As Broad Street hosted the temporary convergence of people who might never otherwise occupy the same space, we too witness a story of people brought together through shared movement. In that sense, the event falls naturally into the sports column; it represents the simple act of participating in something larger than oneself.

*Image credit: Hattie Simpson for Cherwell.*

## SHOE THE TABS

**Oxford University Ultimate Frisbee leap to Varsity victory**

Oxford University Ultimate took the overall Varsity at the end of Hilary with a total score of 8-3. A result like this is not always clear-cut for the team; nevertheless, they snatched the victory in both the Indoor and Outdoor matches by the end of Varsity season, boasting an impressive eight wins of the eleven indoor and outdoor fixtures. Whilst success was not to be for the Men's or Women's first teams, wins for both second teams and in the open matches testify to the club's broad strength.

## PREPPING FOR POLO

**OUPC train amongst the wildlife of South Africa**

Over the vac, Oxford University Polo Club spent a week at Sparta Polo Club in Free State, South Africa, riding and talking strategy. Trialling horses for use over the week and practising their hits on metal horse models and chukkas, the team has made great technical progress. Players were spoiled by South Africa's beautiful scenery in their downtime, witnessing nyala and springbucks amongst the brush. Preparations in the bank, morale is riding high for Trinity Term.

## TOWN VS GOWN

**OUCCC perform takedown at Teddy Hall relays**

Clubs from Oxford and beyond came to try their chances at Teddy Hall Relays Week Eight of Hilary term. With over 150 entrants this year, the atmosphere at Iffley Road Track was alive with adrenaline. OUCCC finished the whole relay in 1 hour and 28 minutes, once again dominating the event. Though Town beat Gown, the community united to put on an outstanding display of running.

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

**Flaherty faces the vac with full force**

Rebecca Flaherty was among many Oxford University Cross Country members who travelled to the Isle of Man Easter Festival of Running in early April for three days of intense competition. Flaherty stormed to victory in the Douglas Women's 5K on the second day of the festival, topping off her success with second place in the Peel Hill race. Her Easter feats did not stop there: Flaherty then travelled south to win the Elite Women's Bristol Track Club 5K in a time of 15.56 minutes, walking away with £1,000 in prize money.

## UPCOMING

### Athletics Cuppers

Sunday 26th April  
Iffley Road Sports Centre  
President: Natalie Groves

### Bannister Miles

Monday 4th May  
Iffley Road Sports Centre

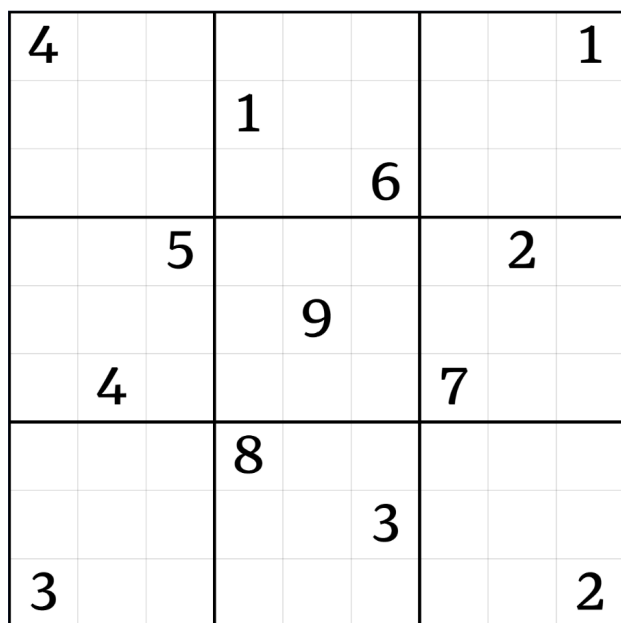
### Triathlon

Sunday 10th May  
Windsor  
President: Rosie Thorogood

**Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?**

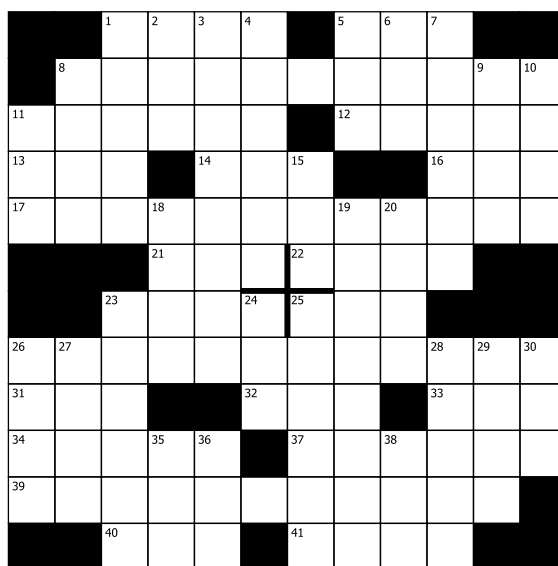
Email [sportcherwell@gmail.com](mailto:sportcherwell@gmail.com) to write up a match report

## Sudoku: Ring of Fire by JADEN LEE



Normal Sudoku rules apply. Additionally, cells may not share a number with cells that are a distance of exactly two squares away in any direction, including diagonals or a knight's move.

## Crossword by ZOË MCGUIRE



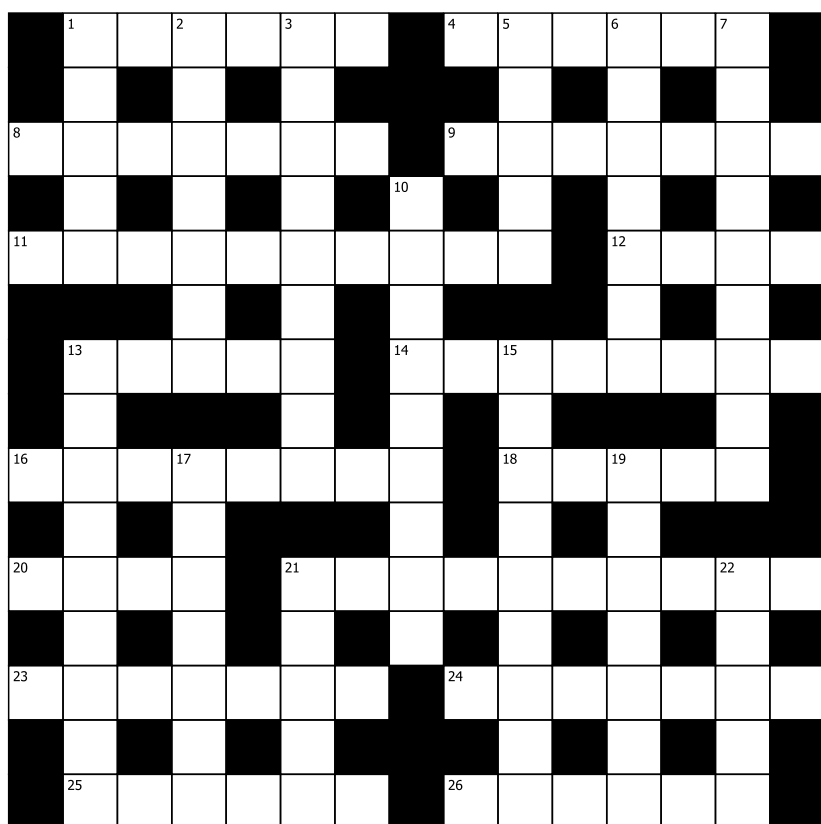
### ACROSS

- 1) Sunday seating
- 5) Gal pal?
- 8) \* "Great" Russian queen
- 11) Exchange program participant
- 12) Counterpart to crannies
- 13) In the style of
- 14) Yet to be scheduled (abbr.)
- 16) Grassland
- 17) When you might see the starred answers?
- 21) Alias abbreviation
- 22) Picture of your family, perhaps
- 23) Part of a Cornish holiday town that might fit the theme of this crossword
- 25) Golf or Polo, for instance
- 26) \* "Hey Lois! I'm a crossword answer! Hehehe"
- 31) OxSci or OxBlue employees
- 32) No. on a business card
- 33) Type of pen you really shouldn't leave at home
- 34) Rib
- 37) Knob on a long-range radio
- 39) \* **Forcible take-overs**
- 40) Oxford's number, vis-a-vis Cambridge
- 41) Slip road, maybe

### DOWN

- 1) Re: Leo XIV
- 2) Greek glyph or punctuality prediction
- 3) Oscar-winning Forest
- 4) Tesla origin
- 5) Rummy variety
- 6) 40A, in Ibiza
- 7) Words before "Shoppe"
- 8) Select, in a sense
- 9) Meatball restaurant (I'm told they do other stuff too)
- 10) "Good heavens!"
- 11) Some game developers
- 15) Unwelcome picnic guest
- 18) de Gea's duty
- 19) Hiking snack
- 20) Dark ages dogsbody
- 23) Frequent Simon Cowell quote
- 24) Pepper, for instance
- 25) Fashion
- 26) Group whose members might wear daux leather
- 27) Arcadia, Utopia, et cetera
- 28) Pugilist's ploy
- 29) Your editor's go-to pub orders
- 30) Half of a boring football match, perhaps
- 35) American legislator, for short
- 36) Devon river (with a namesake "ter")
- 38) "Boy, \_\_\_!"

## Cryptic Crossword by ALESSANDRA EDWARDS Difficulty: 2/5



### ACROSS

- 1) Graze on pears, accidentally swallowing bit of core (6)
- 4) Setter gets into a CD following palm's odd serene feeling (6)
- 8) Opposite of shouting "There's bug on that guy!" (7)
- 9) Iconic characters from Star Wars following Ava (7)
- 11) Starred in action series with David Tennant and Anna Kendrick initially (10)
- 12) Church in hospital department causes discomfort (4)
- 13) Part of Jesus hints at raw fish (5)
- 14) The email's about a certain island, perhaps (8)
- 16) Send off of Diana's stomping ground (8)
- 18) AI's creation followed by energy decline (5)
- 20) River with reportedly slow flow (4)
- 21) Nat recalled wacky tagline which is slightly off-topic (10)
- 23) Son invested in hero cricketer (7)
- 24) Wanted gentleman to enter contract (7)
- 25) Previous stance of whistleblower (6)
- 26) Settled for back half of stag over deer (6)

### DOWN

- 1) Rising sun is producer of mucus (5)
- 2) People causing disturbance? Uncouth Tories embodying right (7)
- 3) Reinvent spicy shit like Einstein (9)
- 5) Olivia and current date are fuming (5)
- 6) Sword type includes unsheathed juts (7)
- 7) Unlikely candidate is sharked, surprisingly getting with old fourth year (4, 5)
- 10) Chinks get ironed out in planning (9)
- 13) Electrify last minute unnatural make-up (9)
- 15) Bonus content Teresa created near spawn (6, 3)
- 17) Exercise before bringing cat back (5-2)
- 19) Picture is nothing until restyled by English (7)
- 21) Revolution of Sparta lacks any original tricks (5)
- 22) Prayer close to man's heart to fix break (5)

### Hilary Week 7 Cryptic answers:

**Across:** THANK YOU; EVERYONE; FOR; SOLVING; WADHAM COLLEGE; ULNA; DISPROVE; UMPIRES; PASSENGERS; ASMODEUS; PLAZA; GOD; SHIRAZ; BOSS; RISOTTO; NURSE; IN-GROUP; FROM; HYBRID; THE; LIMBO; CHERWELL; BASKETBALL; PUZZLES; GO HALVES; TEAM; OBLIVIOUSNESS; LATINAS; FFA; LYSOSOME; ADENOIDS. **Down:** TISSUE PAPER; ALL-IN; KNIT; ONGOING; VIDEOS; READER'S DIGEST; ONCE UPON A TIME; ECLIPSED; FREER; RHEOSTATS; SWIPER; REGATTA; SPA; SLO-MO; ASTRIDE; GOODY TWO-SHOES; DENDROLOGISTS; AGILITY; STOIC; PROBLEMISTS; FIREPROOF; MIA; SEA LEVEL; AT LAST; KNEELED; PHLEGM; ZELDA; ENNUI; ETON.