

Cherwell

Oxford's oldest independent newspaper, est. 1920

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1ST WEEK, TRINITY



The Oxford donors in the Epstein files

Sam Freedman on government, the Conservatives, and writing with his father

Beatrix Arnold and Stanley Smith in FEATURES – PAGES 8-9

Melissa Eddon in PROFILES – PAGE 13



University of Oxford paid private firm for 'intelligence' on student protest

Nuffield JCR condemns invite to controversial Israeli philosopher

NED REMINGTON

Controversial Israeli political philosopher Professor Daniel Statman has been invited to visit Nuffield College for Trinity Term, despite a JCR statement condemning the decision.

The statement, approved by Nuffield College JCR on 12th March and circulated by the JCR President on 23rd April, accuses Professor Statman of producing academic work which "justifies genocide and war crimes" with "an underlying agenda – creating ethical justifications for Israel's genocide". Professor Statman was contacted for comment.

A Nuffield College spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "The college has given serious consideration to the concerns raised, and has taken the view that Professor Statman has not engaged in unlawful speech or conduct."

Professor Statman is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Haifa, Israel, and specialises in "ethics and political philosophy". His time at Nuffield College forms part of a sabbatical from his work at the University of Haifa for spring 2026.

The statement also quoted comments made by Professor Statman on an episode of the 18Forty Podcast released in October 2023, and recorded after the 7th October terrorist attacks by Hamas in southern Israel and the beginning of Israeli military action in Gaza. In a section of the interview highlighted by the JCR, Professor Statman said: "I don't have this very strong moral revulsion or moral sadness or regret by the knowledge of the death of these civilians", and claimed "it's okay to kill them", citing "the principle of collateral harm". In the same

Continued on pg. 2



BEATRIX ARNOLD

The University of Oxford has been named as one of twelve UK universities that paid a private intelligence consultancy run by former military intelligence officials to monitor student activism and protest movements, in a joint investigation published last week by *Al Jazeera English* and *Liberty Investigates*.

Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, sent to more than 150 universities across the UK, have revealed that Horus Security Consultancy Limited was employed by twelve universities to conduct covert counter-terror threat assessments on students involved in protest movements, particularly pro-Palestine activism.

It is alleged that the security firm was contracted by the named universities to collect and analyse open-source data, which included student social media feeds, and to compile intelligence reports

on student protest activity. The investigation discloses that the firm has received at least £440,000 from universities between January 2022 and March 2025.

The other universities that paid Horus to monitor protest activity include Imperial College London, King's College London, University College London, the University of Bristol, the University of Nottingham, and the University of Sheffield. There is no indication, the report specifies, that the purported surveillance is illegal.

This follows a previous investigation, conducted jointly by *Liberty Investigates* and *Sky News* and published last year, which examined the responses of a range of UK universities to pro-Palestine student activism. The University of Oxford refused to comply with the FOI request.

However, the cache of emails disclosed by the FOI request to Oxford Brookes University revealed correspondence, forwarded to Oxford

Brookes, between the University of Oxford and Horus Security. The email contains intelligence about an upcoming Oxford Palestine Solidarity Campaign march.

A spokesperson for the University told *Cherwell*: "Allegations of surveillance are inaccurate. External security consultants are used solely to carry out safety risk assessments for public events and known protests – not to monitor individuals or political activity."

An Oxford University student who was involved in the protest action for Palestine in 2024 told *Cherwell*: "It is disgusting but unfortunately unsurprising to learn that the University prioritised the digital surveillance of its own students over a serious institutional reckoning with its financial support for Israeli apartheid and genocide."

"The University of Oxford, in Trinity term 2024, was confronted with a movement that commanded

Continued on pg. 2

Local election manifestos published as student candidates contest key wards

STANLEY ARLIDGE and HATTIE SIMPSON

The Labour Party, the Green Party, and the Liberal Democrats have released their manifestos ahead of the upcoming Oxford City Council elections, as a number of current and recent University of Oxford students contest seats across the city.

Voters will go to the polls on 7th May to elect half the members of the city council. The council is currently in no overall control, meaning no party (or coalition of parties) holds a majority. Labour is the largest group of the council and (until the resignation of ten councillors over Gaza in 2023) had been in the majority for the past 13 years. According to projections from PollCheck, the Council will remain without overall control, with Labour losing six seats but remaining the largest party.

In some wards, Oxford's residents will have the chance to elect current and recent University students. Holywell, the ward where most central colleges are located, will be contested by Labour candidate Awab Kazuz, a first-year History student at St Edmund Hall, and Green Party candidate Alfie Davis, a 2024 St Anne's College graduate. In 2024, the City Council elections in Holywell saw the incumbent Labour councillor narrowly beaten by a Green Party candidate.

The Green Party are also fielding PhD student Zelalemawee Asheber in Walton Manor – home to Somerville College and St Anne's – and Modern Languages finalist Indigo Haynes in Blackbird Leys.

Continued on pg. 3

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Editors-in-Chief archive deep dive

ARCHIVES – PAGE 5

Oxford's anti-sexual violence campaign

FEATURES – PAGE 10

Going to prison during the vac

LIFESTYLE – PAGE 20

OUCD dazzles in first place

SPORTS – PAGE 23

University of Oxford paid private firm for 'intelligence' on student protest

Continued from Page 1

widespread support among students and staff. Rather than engage meaningfully with the popular movement for divestment, they chose to contribute to the stifling of protest action for Palestine."

Horus Security was founded in Oxford in 2006 by former British Army intelligence officer Jonathan Whiteley, as a project within the University of Oxford's security team. According to its website, Horus provides security screening to "some of the most highly regarded, high-profile organisations in the world", enabling them "not only to conduct

pre-hire checks, but also to protect against insider threats, saving their organisations from disruption and from future and current employee risks".

The director of the firm's parent company, Horus Global, is the former Colonel Tim Collins, who helped to found the right-wing, pro-Israel thinktank, the Henry Jackson Society. In recent years, he has called for non-British protestors for Palestine to be deported from the UK.

Image credit: Archie Johnston for Cherwell.



Plans for new Oxford graduate college approved

ANGELINA WU

Oxford City Council has approved plans for a new post-graduate medical college in Headington. The plans also include a mental health hospital and a modern facility for brain sciences research, forming a new Warneford Park development centred on mental health and brain research. The project represents one of the largest single investments in mental health infrastructure in Oxford's recent history.

The proposal, led by the Oxford University Hospitals Trust in collaboration with the University of Oxford, was approved on 21st April. Permission, however, is not officially issued until details of the conditions are agreed with the council. Once official, phased delivery of the new campus will take place over the next ten years, with healthcare, research, and teaching provision to continue throughout construction.

The new college will be known as Radcliffe College, the first University of Oxford college to be located in Headington, and will admit postgraduate medical students. Plans for the development of the college include restoring the Grade II-listed Warneford Hospital building, which will form the centre of the college.

Radcliffe College will be the first new University of Oxford college founded since Kellogg College was established in 1990 (granted full college status in 2011), marking a relatively rare expansion in the University's collegiate system.

The site is expected to provide newly-built accommodation for around 250 students, including graduates, DPhil, and postdoctoral researchers in medicine, life

sciences, medical engineering, and other related subjects. Researchers and clinicians who currently have no college affiliation are also expected to find teaching roles and membership at the new college.

The plans have drawn criticism from local residents and councillors, particularly over proposals to increase parking provision on the site by more than 50%. Some have described the changes as "egregious" and "catastrophic", raising concerns about traffic, environmental damage to Warneford Meadow, and the impact on children travelling to nearby schools.

The new mental health hospital would replace the current 200-year-old Warneford Hospital, which has been deemed no longer fit to provide modern clinical facilities.

The 200th anniversary of mental health care at the Warneford Hospital will be commemorated with an exhibition on the Hospital's history scheduled to take place at the Museum of Oxford, over the summer. As part of the programme of events for the anniversary, there will also be a new play performed at the Old Fire Station theatre which will focus on those who lived at the institution.

The centre is set to cost £750 million and will focus on mental health and brain sciences, forming a major medical research and innovation facility. Combining Oxford's two Biomedical Research Centres, the research on brain sciences is projected to create an annual growth opportunity for the UK of over £1 billion.

Oxford University has been approached for a comment.

Image credit: GeographBot, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Nuffield JCR condemns invite to controversial Israeli philosopher

Continued from Page 1

conversation, he acknowledged that civilians in Gaza "don't deserve to die", even if they are not "completely innocent".

In the interview, he also rebutted claims that civilians in Gaza had been left with no safe space from Israeli military action, saying, "I'm not very convinced by the claim they have nowhere to go to. They have places to go to. Orchards, the beaches and so on". He claimed there were "zero publications...in serious journals by Arab philosophers" and that Arab academics were "not part of the philosophical discourse at all".

Signatories to the letter included members of the Nuffield College JCR. The JCR statement warned that Professor Statman's presence at the College posed

a risk to students and academics who were "visibly pro-Palestine in College, particularly those who frequently transit through Israel to visit friends and family."

In a comment, the JCR President told *Cherwell*: "The JCR and wider College community became aware of Mr Statman's plans in Week 8 of Hilary Term 2026", and that "the statement passed by a wide, near unanimous margin via anonymous vote [by Nuffield JCR members]".

A Nuffield College spokesperson told *Cherwell* that the invitation to Professor Statman to visit the College was sent in "the summer of 2023...on the basis of his long-standing work on political philosophy".

The spokesperson described the invitation as "part of the College's long-standing programme of regular academic visitorships, through which we host researchers from other UK and

international institutions.

"As a College of the University of Oxford and an academic institution in their own right, we are committed to protecting lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom, and to providing an environment for rigorous academic engagement, open inquiry and critical debate within the law, where all members of our community are supported and treated with dignity, respect and civility."

Professor Statman has written several philosophical works. His book *War by Agreement: A Contractarian Ethics of War* was published by Oxford University Press in 2019.

Outside of academia, he has served on public committees to revise the ethical code of the Israel Defense Force and to review requests for exemption from army service for Israeli citizens on the grounds of conscience.

Second Oxfordshire Patriots protest this term met with counterprotesters

NED REMINGTON

The Oxfordshire Patriots held a demonstration last Saturday in the city centre outside the Oxfordshire County Council offices. They were met by counter-protestors from Oxford Stand Up To Racism (OSUTR).

Speaking to *Cherwell*, Oxfordshire Patriots organiser Aiden Noble referred to the revelation in January that the County Council had spent £15,500 on removing illegally displayed Union Jack flags as a reason for the demonstration. He called on the Council to "work with us [those displaying flags]. Reach some compromise and allow us to at least fly our flag somewhere".

The demonstration began at around 11am, with the last counter-protestors leaving at around 1.15pm and the Oxfordshire Patriots leaving soon after. The protestors stood on New Road facing the Council offices, with counter-protestors appearing on the other side. A couple of counter-protestors could be seen crossing the road to talk to individuals near the right-wing demonstration. Around seven police officers were on the scene, accompanied by two vans.

Asked by *Cherwell* if they had had any interactions with members of the Oxfordshire Patriots, the OSUTR organiser said they "don't debate with fascists". In a comment, after the demonstration, OSUTR told *Cherwell* they "do not accept fascism has a place in mainstream debate... history has shown that fascism has to be stopped at the earliest time".

The organiser of Stand Up to Racism described the Oxfordshire Patriots as following "Tommy Robinson's line most of the time", referring to far-right anti-Islam activist Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, who co-founded the English Defence League under the name Tommy Robinson. The organiser linked the Oxfordshire Patriots to Yaxley-Lennon's 'Unite the Kingdom' march in London in September 2025. In a comment after the protest, the Oxfordshire Patriots told *Cherwell*: "We do not work with any big-name organisations...we are an independent group with our own voice. While there may be others who share similar values and opinions, that does not mean we are affiliated or working together."

Mr Noble accused those counterprotesting of "painting everyone with the same brush". Referencing a post by an anti-fascist Instagram account, Oxford Resists, accusing Oxfordshire Patriots of working with neo-Nazis, Noble told *Cherwell*: "Everyone's entitled to free speech, whatever you believe. I don't believe Nazis seem very good, however, some of our views are the same...I don't agree with everything they say." Following the protest, the Oxfordshire Patriots told *Cherwell*: "We do not support harm towards anyone."

Asked about a Reform UK logo displayed at the protest, Aiden Noble told *Cherwell* that whilst he personally supported Restore Britain, a party recently set up by former Reform MP for Great Yarmouth, Rupert Lowe,

"the realistic option is Reform". He added: "I don't think [Nigel] Farage has got it in him if you want my God-honest truth, but it's our only realistic option for the moment." The OSUTR organiser said he was "not surprised" to see the logo, and said "Reform enables these people - the rhetoric of Reform", even if the party "don't want them" to join as party members. Reform UK Oxfordshire were contacted for comment.

Multiple Union Jack flags were also displayed by Oxfordshire Patriots, with Noble describing them as a symbol of "pride" and "unity" and urging the council to spend the money used for removing flags on tackling homelessness or repairing roads. However, speaking to *Cherwell*, an organiser for Stand Up to Racism claimed their movement had "nothing to do with flags" and was instead a "racist street movement where they can intimidate people".

OSUTR recently organised a petition calling for those illegally displaying flags to be ordered to pay the cost of their replacement, which received almost 500 signatures. Their call was echoed by Liberal Democrat MP for Didcot and Wantage, Olly Glover, who said this weekend that "the cost of removing flags, or anything else, attached to public property without permission, should be paid by those responsible for putting them up - not the taxpayer".

The demonstration followed a similar protest and counter-protest on Bonn Square a week earlier.

Image credit: Ned Remington for Cherwell.



Local election manifestos published as student candidates contest key wards

Continued from Page 1

In Carfax and Jericho – home to Worcester College and Gloucester Green – Oxford University Conservative Association President and Lady Margaret Hall History student Harriet Dolby is running against Reform candidate, and Oriol College student, Vittorio Cuneo-Flood. The Liberal Democrats are contesting the Osney & St Thomas ward with Harry Morgan, a second-year History and Politics student at Pembroke College and last term's Oxford Students' Liberal Association President.

The local Labour party released their manifesto last month, focusing on housing, climate policy, supporting the local economy, and local pride as its four major priorities. It proposes action on second homes and short-term lets, alongside making housing

carbon neutral, and a commitment to campaign for rent control powers in the private rented sector, a policy the Labour government does not support.

Whilst no specific reference is made to the impact of their policies on students, Awab Kazuz told *Cherwell* that housing pressures are central to his campaign, describing scenes of students queuing for accommodation as “absolutely unforgivable”. He said Labour’s plans to crack down on short-term lets and second homes, alongside stronger protections against “bad faith landlords” and an expansion of affordable housing, will ease the strain on student renters. He added that although the council does not have the power to introduce rent controls, the local Labour group would continue to campaign for “tangible, radical action” at a national

level.

The Green Party has proposed an “Oxford Living Rent”, alongside similar promises to campaign for stronger rent control powers and restrictions on short-term lets. Other policies include to lobby central government for the power to introduce a tourist tax, an increase in the Oxford Living Wage, and a commitment to support congestion charges and low traffic neighbourhoods. The party has also called for the closure of Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre (located outside of the City Council boundaries) – the only major party to make such a commitment in their manifesto.

Zelalemawee Asheber and Indigo Haynes told *Cherwell* they would seek to expand Oxford’s “city of sanctuary” policies, criticising recent visa restrictions and calling for greater support for students affected by changes to asylum and immigration rules. They added that a Green-led council would work to increase support for local organisations assisting asylum seekers and push for more community-based housing, with affected students included in these schemes.

The local Liberal Democrats’ manifesto sets out goals including a “fairer Oxford”, “healthier Oxford”, and a “net-zero Oxford”. Its housing plans centre on increasing supply through “densification” of existing buildings and development of underused land. It also emphasises support for Oxford’s status as a “city of sanctuary”. These elections come after the government’s announcement last month of an emergency brake on new student visa applications from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar, and Sudan. Harry Morgan told *Cherwell* that a Liberal Democrat-run council would work with local MPs, including the Lib Dem MP for

Oxford West and Abingdon, to “exert pressure on central government” and prevent visa changes affecting students.

Currently, neither the Conservative Party nor Reform UK have published local manifestos for the Oxford elections. Cuneo-Flood told *Cherwell* that Reform UK opposes the “woke driven policies which make travelling in and out of Oxford both time-consuming and possibly expensive”. On housing, Cuneo-Flood raised concern that “places of accommodation given to illegal immigrants and asylum seekers” resulted in “less houses for locals”.

The Conservative Party is fielding candidates in every ward, whilst Reform UK is contesting all but Holywell. Alfie Davis claimed on BlueSky that Reform were unable to attain the two supporting signatories necessary to stand a candidate, writing “it’s clear young ppl [sic] reject Reform”. Speaking about Holywell, Cuneo-Flood told *Cherwell*: “No candidate is fielded in Holywell because no student candidate was found. To any student who would have voted for Reform had they the chance, I say that a change from the direction in which this country is heading is only possible if those who seek the change are willing to say so.”

Alongside the main parties, a number of independent groups are also contesting seats across Oxford. In the 2024 local elections, independent candidates and groups – including the Independent Oxford Alliance (the largest group) – secured a significant share of the vote, with the Alliance alone winning over 15% and four City Council seats. Several of these groupings are standing candidates again in 2026.

Harriet Dolby and Reform UK Oxfordshire were approached for comment.

Image credit: Peter O'Connor, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



Oxford Mutual Aid reopens after month-long closure

NED REMINGTON

Oxford Mutual Aid (OMA) has reopened after a month-long closure due to “emergency repairs” at the hall they operate out of, which the charity described as “the longest closure period OMA has ever seen”.

The community organisation, founded in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, provides “essential weekly support” to 190 households in Oxford, supporting around 750 people. They have distributed 30,000 food parcels since 2022, including around 250 emergency food parcels per month. The group also distributes toiletries and baby supplies to those in need. They described themselves to *Cherwell* as “Oxford’s biggest direct food support provider”, supporting over 2000 people, or 1.2% of Oxford’s population, every year. The majority of those supported are children.

OMA reopened on 27th April after “the repairs and safety issues” to the hall were resolved. In a comment, OMA told *Cherwell* they were “very grateful” to those who donated to cover the costs of repairs, with donations exceeding a “stretch goal” of £4,000 during the month of closure. All donations not spent on financing repairs have “gone to purchasing more supplies to ensure we can fully provide everything our community needs” during a time of “heightened demand”.

OMA told *Cherwell*: “We have had to replace much of our food stocks and replace a substantial amount of

shelving amid other equipment... Support from the community to cover these costs has ensured our financial stability has not been put in jeopardy.”

OMA added that their closure had been “devastating” for the community: “OMA is the only support they can access. We are the only org to deliver across the entire city, meaning we’re able to reach people with disabilities, health issues, stringent childcare or work responsibilities and/or low mobility – people who find it hard to reach more traditional food support.” The charity added that they have referred those in need towards alternative provision where possible during their closure.

On their website, OMA describes “two Oxfords”, with the University and surrounding “wealthy districts” making the city “one of the most expensive places to live in the UK”, whilst also being home to “some of the most deprived wards in the country”. According to OMA, between 9% and 14% of the city is estimated to be experiencing food poverty.

The organisation has described itself as a “grassroots action network... born out of LGBTQ and trade union organisers, and local community groups”, believing in “solidarity, not charity”. Following their reopening, OMA told *Cherwell* they “will continue to support everyone we can in Oxford, across the whole city”.

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



NEWS SHORTS

Falafail

Najar’s Place was hit with a one star rating by Oxford City Council environmental health officers after a routine check. The kiosk, known for its Lebanese and Mediterranean falafel and halloumi wraps, was told it needed “major improvement” in terms of management of food safety. However, they were given “generally satisfactory” in terms of hygienic food handling and cleanliness and condition of facilities and building.

Trini-tree falls

If a tree falls in Broad Street and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? This question remains yet to be solved, as pedestrians and cyclists bore witness to the iconic tree of Trinity College falling onto the road. The incident, which occurred on the 21st April, led to no casualties, meant, however, that an iconic lunch spot is now no more.

Causing a Newtstance

Residents in the OX14 postcode have been left with no water and a primary school has been closed after the discovery of newts delayed repairs to a burst pipe. A temporary repair allowed water to start running from Tuesday, with work for a permanent fix beginning on Wednesday.

Labradanger

Thames Valley Police (TVP) rescued an elderly and blind Labrador from a road in Steventon, Oxfordshire, last Monday night. Poppy was spotted by officers on a routine patrol, and was reunited with her “furry siblings”. Photos of Poppy were shared by TVP on their Rural Crime Team Facebook page, along with a statement to update residents.

CROSS CAMPUS

Semester of discontent

Discontent is rife across both the University of Cambridge and the University of Edinburgh’s campuses this month. Over 500 staff from Cambridge will walk the picket line over the next week in the hope of tackling wage supplement discrepancies compared to the University of Oxford. Simultaneously, Edinburgh will see a marking boycott, in protest against budget cuts and job losses.

Generative competition

Harvard University’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences has confirmed its plans to phase out its use of OpenAI’s generative AI model ChatGPT in favour of Anthropic’s Claude. The move responds to low student intake, and the desire to remain at the cutting edge of developments in artificial intelligence.

University to make changes to consent training modules

ANISHA MOHAMMED

The University of Oxford has reported that 38% of new students completed its online consent training in the 2024-25 academic year, according to the latest Student Welfare and Support Services (SWSS) report. The figure represents an increase from 33% the previous year and an almost 80% increase in the number of college staff accessing the training, showing clear improvement in the development of the training scheme. The report also outlines plans for mandatory training for all students to start in the next academic year.

The University has strongly encouraged students to complete the 'Consent for Students' module developed by the charity Brook, which covers issues such as harassment, boundaries, and bystander intervention. While some colleges require completion, approaches have varied, contributing to uneven uptake.

The Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service (SHVSS) told *Cherwell* of their plans to further change the

module to "a bespoke, in-house online training programme to strengthen how Oxford prevents and responds to harassment and sexual misconduct" that has been "co-designed with Oxford students and is grounded in the context of Oxford's collegiate community, signposting to collegiate as well as central University support".

This includes plans to make consent training mandatory for all incoming students for the 2026-27 academic year as part of the registration process and strongly recommended for returning students, in line with new regulatory expectations under the Office for Students' Condition E6. The regulation, which came into full effect last August, requires universities to take stronger action to prevent and respond to harassment and sexual misconduct, including thorough training, clear reporting processes, and student support.

Alongside the online module, the University has expanded in-person provision with 'Healthy Relationships and Consent' workshops. The SHVSS team told *Cherwell* they have been "delivering the programme across 18

colleges this academic year (up from 15 colleges in 2024/25), with 118 student facilitators, and trained around 2,000 students", with this being "in addition to any local arrangements that colleges may make." The SWSS report describes this as part of a "significant expansion" of preventative activity, intended to complement support services and promote cultural change.

The University has framed the expansion of training as part of a broader strategy to strengthen awareness, reporting confidence, and institutional response to harassment and sexual misconduct.

The annual report of the SHVSS further highlights rising demand for support. The service received 201 new referrals in 2024-25, continuing an upward trend in recent years. The report notes increasing complexity in cases and emphasises the importance of prevention and early intervention alongside reactive support.

With continuous improvement on the content, enforcement, and monitoring of the new requirement and consent module, the completion rates are on an upward trajectory.

Oxford MP takes Ultimate Picture Palace campaign to Parliament

GABRIELA JUNQUEIRA GONCALVES

The MP for Oxford East Dame Anneliese Dodds, raised the ongoing campaign to save the Ultimate Picture Palace (UPP) on Jeune Street in Parliament last Monday, urging the government to "go further" to protect "community assets like the UPP".

The independent cinema is struggling to go ahead with renovations to the premises on account of uncertainty over the length of its tenancy. Its landlord, Oriol College, has so far refused to extend its lease beyond 2037, citing plans to create a "Fifth Quad" to accommodate graduate students.

"Too often, as in the case of the UPP, we see a David and Goliath situation for communities that want to control local assets", Dodds told the House of Commons in an adjournment debate last Monday. She argued that the challenges faced by the UPP reflect wider difficulties experienced by community-owned assets across the UK. The dispute has also raised broader concerns over the University's gradual encroachment into the town of Oxford.

The UPP's management told *Cherwell*: "We very much welcome Anneliese Dodds raising the situation

facing the Ultimate Picture Palace in Parliament, and we are hugely grateful for her support as her comments are an important recognition of the serious challenge we face. Without a longer lease ... our community-owned cinema - recognised nationally as a leader in cultural cinema for its programme, access, and audience engagement - cannot unlock the investment it needs to survive."

The lack of long-term security has already prevented the cinema from accessing major grant funding, raising concerns that it could become financially unviable before its current lease expires. Executive director of the UPP, Micaela Tuckwell, told *Cherwell* that she hopes both the College and Picturehouse can "collaborate" and incorporate the cinema "within their Fifth Quad plans".

Dodds echoed this in Parliament: "There are some brilliant examples of higher education institutions working with arts organisations in the UK, and such co-operation could make the UPP an even more special place. So far, Oriol College appears not to have recognised the potential benefits of engaging with the Ultimate Picture Palace in this way. I urge it to reconsider, and to grant the UPP its long-term lease."

In response to Dodds' comments, Oriol College told *Cherwell* it had "no

plans to extend the lease at this early stage in the tenancy." The College added: "We are very proud of our heritage cinema and are in dialogue with the new managers about how to ensure it remains open to the wider public."

Founded in 1911, the UPP is the oldest picturehouse in Oxford. It is currently owned by over 1,200 stakeholders in the local community and is a registered Asset of Community Value (ACV) by Oxford City Council, which recognises places of social or cultural significance to a local area. The petition to keep the cinema open surpassed 20,000 signatures this week.

Dodds' appeal comes amidst the government's proposal for an English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, which aims to introduce stronger protections for ACVs such as the UPP. The bill would create a 'Community Right to Buy' provision, giving local groups the first opportunity to purchase such assets, alongside a fair market valuation and additional time to raise funds. However, as currently drafted, the policy would apply only if the asset were to be put up for sale by its owner, meaning the UPP, which is facing an unrenovated lease, would not be protected under the Bill.

Image Credit: Motacilla, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



Honorary Degrees recipients announced for 2026

NED REMINGTON and ILYA ROSENBAUM

The University of Oxford has announced its 2026 honorary degree recipients, with seven individuals to be conferred with degrees at the Encaenia ceremony on 24th June.

The honourees come from a wide variety of careers. Those awarded include former world number one tennis player Billie Jean King; economist and Nobel Laureate Professor Daniel Acemoglu; and former chief executive of GSK, Dame Emma Walmsley DBE. They are joined by dancer and choreographer Carlos Acosta CBE, biochemist Professor Katalan Karikó, Nobel Laureate Professor Shuji Nakamura, and Emmy-nominated filmmaker and historian Henry Louis Gates Jr.

The University has been granting honorary degrees since the 1400s, whilst the Encaenia ceremony can be dated back to the 16th century, assuming its current form around 1760.

Recipient Billy Jean King won 39 Grand Slam titles, and campaigned to equalise prize money in professional competitions across both women's and men's professional championships. Carlos Acosta was awarded a CBE in 2014 and retired from Classical Ballet in 2016, but continued to choreograph and perform.

Professor Acemoglu was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2024 alongside two others for "studies of how institutions are formed and affect prosperity". Fellow recipient Professor Nakamura was also awarded a Nobel Prize, for Physics in 2014, for emitting energy-saving efficient blue light-

emitting diodes, whilst Professor Karikó was awarded a Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for discoveries enabling nucleoside-modified mRNA vaccines.

Dame Walmsley worked at GSK for 15 years and served as Chief Executive Officer of GSK for nine years, retiring in December 2025. She is joined on the list of honourees by Henry Louis Gates Jr, known for his work as a literary critic, professor, and history, as well as film producer. Gates was nominated for an Emmy Award in 2022 for his work as Executive Producer for the documentary *Frederik Douglas: In Five Speeches*.

Honorary degree recipients are recognised for their distinction in their field or service to society. Previous honourees include former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, and *Monty Python* comedian Sir Michael Palin. Decisions on recipients of honorary degrees are made by a selection committee. Encaenia 2026 comes after Lord Hague awarded eight honorary degrees in February this year in a Special Honorary Degree Ceremony to celebrate the beginning of Lord Hague's term as Chancellor at the University.

The ceremony involves heads of colleges, university dignitaries, and holders of Oxford doctoral degrees in Divinity, Civil Law, Medicine, Letters, Science, and Music. The honourees assemble and walk in procession to the Sheldonian Theatre, where they are finally granted their new degrees by the Chancellor, Lord William Hague. Students at the University may attend the ceremony, with tickets released on 5th May.

Image Credit: Hattie Simpson for Cherwell.

Plans announced for Centre of Korean Studies

ISAAC GAVAGHAN

The University of Oxford announced plans to establish the Oxford Centre for Korean Studies, at the official opening of the Schwarzman Centre over the weekend.

Approved last month and set to open in October, the centre - which will have an estimated budget of £3.76 million - forms part of a gradual increase in Korean language and history academic provision at the University over the last two decades.

In 2006, the University also created an Associate Professorship in Korean History, followed in 2007 by a Professorship in Korean Language and Literature. The new centre is being led by the two current holders of University of Oxford professorships in Korean history and language, Professor James Lewis and Professor Jieun Kiaer, respectively, as well as Dr Young-hae Chi, a Korean language lecturer.

For undergraduates, Korean can be taken as an additional language if they are on a course with Japanese or Chinese as the primary language, whilst for graduates, a Master's of Korean Studies program is available. Since Michaelmas Term 2024, Korean classes have also been offered by the

University's Language Centre.

Korean media outlets have depicted the centre as a response to the "Korean wave" in global popular culture, referencing the growth in popularity of South Korean cultural exports, including films, K-pop, and K-dramas. The Centre for Korean Studies also reflects a broader trend in increased study of East Asia at Oxford, with the Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies opened at St. Anthony's College in 1981 and the opening of the University's China Centre in 2008.

Professor Jieun Kiaer, of Hertford College, described the centre's future English-language scholarship into Korean culture as important for the long-term continuation of Korean studies.

The opening of the Centre included a free day of events and performances, including performances by the Scottish Ensemble and Chamber Choir Scola Cantorum, alongside the display of artwork created using artificial intelligence and theatre productions. Speaking ahead of the opening, John Fulljames, director of the Schwarzman Centre's cultural programme, described the Centre as a "new public home for the humanities" and "a place where we can all come together to make sense of what it means to be human in today's world".



FROM THE ARCHIVES

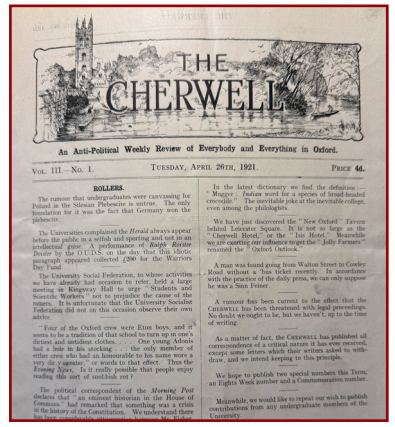
1921

As the term got underway, we did what one does when faced with a mildly chaotic office and a vague sense of purpose: a spot of spring cleaning in the OSPL office, informally known as the 'Choffice'. This quickly turned into something far more interesting. Buried under rotting bananas and old tissue paper, we stumbled across the *Cherwell* archives. It seemed only right that a paper with more than a century behind it should make a little more of its past. Much, of course, has changed since Cecil Binney and George Adolphus Edinger first launched *Cherwell* as a space for independent, unconventional writing. Not least, we found ourselves wondering what they would make of the fact that the paper is now run by two women, with a predominantly female staff. One suspects they might have had opinions.

entire cost of running the *Cherwell*. By the 1930s, the paper had acquired

Cherwell received a letter from then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher,

students were encouraged to give a percentage of their grants to the "Third World", while a 1989 front cover simply declared, in large uncompromising type "YOU'RE SICK" if you're in the Tory cabaret.



a far more theatrical look: a vermillion background and a pantomime-style cartoon front page designed by Evelyn Waugh.

while founder Cecil Binney reflected on its origins. Writing of post-war Europe, he noted how "the impact of the hunger and distress" they witnessed during relief work "did colour our approach to the *Cherwell*". (Incidentally, Binney himself called it the *Cherwell*, so if you've ever been corrected on that point, you may take quiet satisfaction in being historically justified).

And then there are the lighter moments. A 1967 interview with Pink Floyd featured the band reflecting that their music, "like drug taking, is a total experience. But we make no claim to be a reconstruction of one's feelings under acid". Syd Barrett added, with admirable confidence:

"Psychedelic music is not here to stay, but the Pink Floyd are"

The first issue appeared on 9th November 1920, founded in part as a reaction to the perceived low quality of the *Isis*, and carrying the subtitle: "An anti-political weekly review of everybody and everything in Oxford." Its editorial mission was lofty and faintly combative: "to exclude all outside influence and interference from our University - Oxford for the Oxonians." Rivalry, it turns out, is a long-standing tradition. In 1926, *Cherwell* complained with mock injury:

"We had always taken it as the understood policy of the two papers that, while the Cherwell freely attacked the Isis, the Isis should never attack the Cherwell"

Early *Cherwell* looked rather different. For its first few years, it appeared in A5 format, slate-green, and simple black lettering. By 1921, photographs and classified ads had arrived, along with jokes of a distinctly period flavour, among them the proposal "to make Germany pay the

The Second World War brought practical constraints, "twelve small pages and a general economised format", but *Cherwell* persisted. By the 1950s, its literary ambitions had faded somewhat as it drifted towards a "general interest magazine", before fully embracing tabloid form in 1953 with the gloriously punchy headline: "OUCA President arrested." If there

Across its lifetime, *Cherwell* has reported on events well beyond Oxford: the 1926 General Strike (as



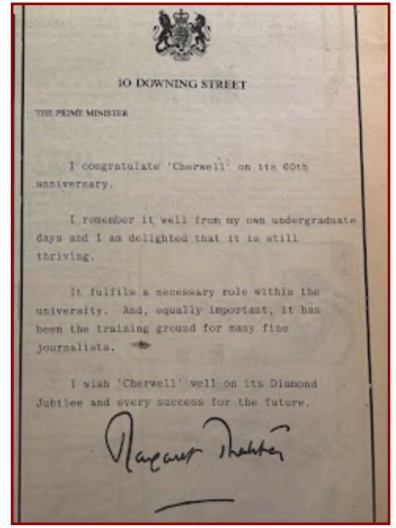
is a moment one can pinpoint where *Cherwell* decided it was, definitively, a newspaper, this might be it.

one of only three newspapers still printing), the Second World War, and even the fall of the Berlin Wall, where its correspondents offered the slightly dubious observation that East Germans could easily be identified by their "always plastic" shoes.

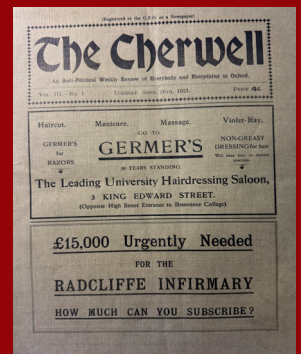
Looking back through these archives, what stands out is not just the history but the tone: playfully irreverent and occasionally bizarre. There is a willingness to experiment with design, with voice, and what a student newspaper can be. If anything, there is something to learn from that earlier *Cherwell*. From the unapologetically strange advertisements to the careful (and sometimes pointed) clarifications that something was "not the opinion of *Cherwell*" to the proliferation of odd, delightful mini-sections that have since disappeared, the paper once embraced a kind of organised chaos.

The 1960s were less about format and more about agitation. Within a decade, *Cherwell* found itself campaigning for a remarkable range of causes: trousers for St Anne's students, women's admission to the Oxford Union, and more relaxed drug rules; efforts that culminated, briefly, in the paper being banned by the proctors. It's not every publication that can claim institutional censure as a badge of honour.

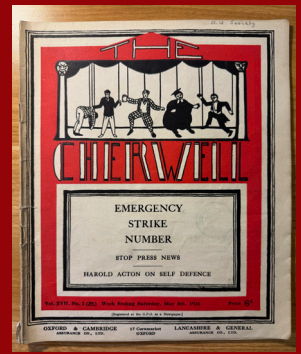
For a paper that styles itself as "anti-political", it has been rarely shy of taking a stance. A 1958 issue prompted an H-Bomb protest campaign, including the memorably impractical suggestion of a "nationwide appeal to the women of England to renounce all sex contact until the H-Bomb is banned". In 1969,



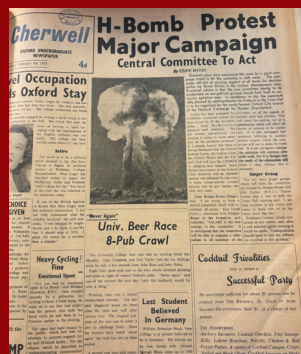
It becomes clear that *Cherwell* has always been at its best when it allows itself to be a little unruly. A hundred years on, that feels like a tradition worth reviving.



1926



1958



1972



1988



2000



Oxford's Career Connect is failing northern students

ESTHER BIRD

The north-south divide is alive and well at Oxford's railway station at the end of term. While students heading south crowd the opposite platform, those of us heading north have enough room on the other side of the tracks for a quick kick-about.

The University of Oxford suffers from a severe lack of representation of northern students, with almost 50% of UK-domiciled undergraduate students coming from London and the South East, while students from the North-West, North-East, and Yorkshire and the Humber made up just 7.6%, 2.5%, and 5% of admissions, respectively, from 2022-2024. There appears to be an inbuilt bias, however unconscious, against the North, the implications of which can be felt in a plethora of ways.

Accent prejudice in Oxford, for instance, has been well-documented. Bias can start even before the first day – a friend of mine was asked if all the mines were closed yet in the North-East during our offer-holder day. Not exactly a great first impression. These attitudes reflect an ingrained social prejudice that just won't come unstuck. Nor are they confined to the University. When doing my research for this article, it didn't take long before I was hit with blatant assumptions about people from the North in the byline of a 2021 *Daily Telegraph* article, synonymising "bright young things from the North" with "students from poorer backgrounds".

So you can imagine the pleasant surprise that I

felt when the recent careers emails were sent round proudly advertising the "over 50 exciting summer opportunities available across the UK" that were about to drop. A quick browse on Career Connect, though, brought me back down to the (southern) earth, as the claims of placements "across the UK" didn't come into fruition.

Of the 60-odd opportunities advertised in the first round of domestic summer internships, only one was an in-person placement in the North (an opportunity in Newcastle seems to have slipped through the net – otherwise, the map seems to have been erased north of Watford).

We're undeniably very lucky at Oxford to have so many internships organised and shared by the careers service. It is heartening to see that many of the placements available are remote, widening opportunities and improving accessibility. It's also good to see that three regional alumni groups (The Oxford University Society of Cornwall, East Kent, and East Sussex – all, unfortunately, in the south) are offering bursaries to support students from these areas to access internships, while there are also routes within colleges and the broader University to apply for financial support and travel grants. But the implication that I would have to commute to the South in order to conduct a worthwhile in-person internship seems to ignore the many interesting and insightful organisations doing important and varied work in the North.

While an online placement is certainly better than nothing, the idea that just because I'm from the North, I can't access the same in-person insights into a workplace as my southern counterparts seems pretty unfair. Because even if commuting into London, or forking out for a place to stay,

was an option (it certainly isn't for me), at the end of the day, it is the careers office that is missing a trick here. Through failing to advertise placements in many of the hundreds of fantastic organisations that are doing wonderful things in the North, the University's students who are missing out.

Given that Oxford is a southern university, it is both reasonable and to be expected that the domestic internships are therefore weighted towards the South. It would be fantastic, though, if there were even proportional representation, offering a similar percentage of placements in the North as there are northern students.

In recent years, the University and individual colleges have been making a concerted and commendable effort to improve northern representation in the student body, with programmes like Oxford for North East, Oxford for North West, and Oxford for Yorkshire and the Humber offering "workshops, application support, mentoring, and residential visits" in order to boost intake. Through making connections with organisations based in the North, for instance, through linking up with the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, the University could go one step further, cementing relationships with the regions and, in doing so, taking a more holistic approach to boosting northern admissions. Offering internships in the North would demonstrate long-term support for northern students that goes beyond the application process, ensuring equal provision once students are in the door.

For now, though, I had best get back to my search for a placement in those seemingly little-known, off-the-map backwaters like Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Blowing smoke

It's honestly impressive how a fairly ordinary habit can be stretched into a haughty, and at best wobbly, theory about identity, with vaping cast as some kind of misunderstood, stigmatised rebellion. You'd think vapers were a marginalised subculture, rather than people standing in perfectly visible clusters outside lecture halls or next to their cigarette-enjoying friends in the smoking area of Bridge. The whole argument tries so hard to assign meaning that it ends up inventing it. If you play your cards right, you can actually save money by smoking cigarettes instead of paying seven quid for Juul pods. The piece was also undoubtedly a missed opportunity for the title 'Putting the 'king' in smoking'. That being said, hold your Lost Mary high and enjoy it with absolute shameless pride. ('There really is no smoke without fire')

Winston Chesterfield, Medicine, Lady Margaret Hall

In support of reading weeks

Despite being frequently ridiculed for my degree being 'easy', I am in full support of a reading week ('I was wrong. Oxford needs a 'reading' week'). There have been two weeks during my three years at Oxford in which I have not had an essay due. As someone who is ill almost constantly, it truly felt like these 'reading weeks' allowed me to breathe (literally – I recovered from an awful cold.) The best essays of my degree were those produced after those 'reading weeks' – not because I'd done extra work, but because I'd been able to get eight hours of sleep for the first time since collections.

As I approach the end of my degree, I get two weeks to just exist in Oxford. As my friends and I list everything we want to do after Finals, I feel increasingly aware of everything we've been unable to do during our time here. A reading week wouldn't make students lazier. Arguably, improved mental health would improve productivity.

Lucy Pollock, History, Somerville College

THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts

Brief reminder Oxford had him up for election for Chancellor in 2024. And 10-13% of people voted for him before his elimination. In 2024, when we were well aware he was a very close Epstein associate ('When I met Peter Mandelson', Week 1)

[_harry_dewhurst_](#) via Instagram

Who the hell goes to Oxford and doesn't expect smoking to be part of an aesthetic? ('There really is no smoke without fire', Week 1)

Bartholomew Gregory Ignatius Stanizewski via Facebook

Oriel not guaranteeing the future of the only community owned cinema anywhere near here and not paying its staff enough to live a decent life in Oxford, what a surprise ('Twelve colleges do not pay all staff the Oxford Living Wage', Week 1)

[jimipluscamera](#) via Instagram

As the job description for Chancellor of University of Oxford is pretty much "Turn up for encaenea, Don't do anything to embarrass the University" how was it that Mandelson was allowed to stand if his relationship with Epstein was known about? ('When I met Peter Mandelson', Week 1)

John Wadson via Facebook

MOM'S BETTER HAVE MY MONEY ('Oxford Union announces Trinity term card')

[magica.despell_](#) via Instagram

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

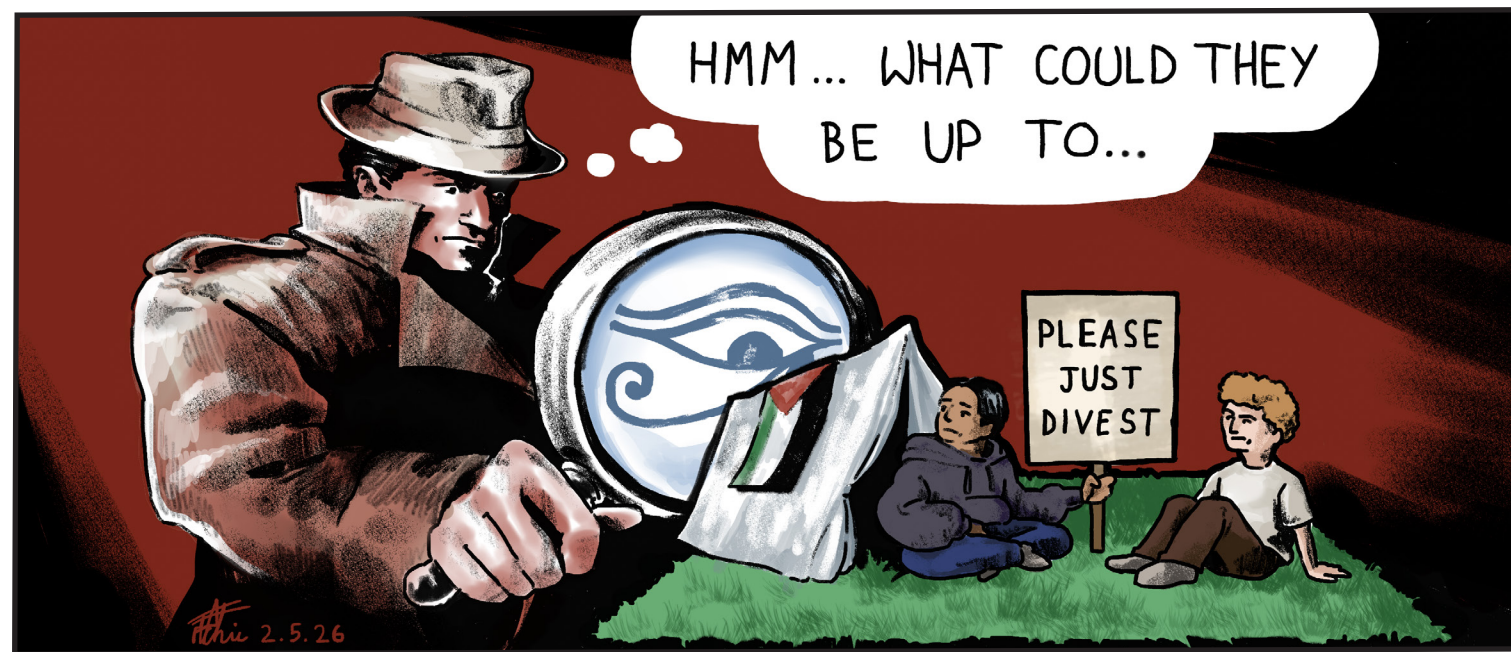


Image credit: Archie Johnston for Cherwell.

I became more at home when I left home

NEVILLE LAI

I never felt more at home than when I was living thousands of miles away from home. It is indeed a paradox that many Chinese people living abroad know too well. Distance does not dilute identity – it sharpens it. What once felt ordinary at home suddenly becomes important, deliberate, and worth defending when you surround yourself with a different culture, language, and rhythm of life.

It started with something as simple as food. Back home in Hong Kong, I took good Chinese food for granted. Pu-erh tea was just what we were used to. Sauces were just sauces. But abroad, I began to hunt for authentic flavours with an almost religious fervour. I developed a true appreciation for well-aged Pu-erh – the deep, earthy taste that reveals itself gradually. I, too, craved the exact balance of spiciness found in specific Hong Kong-style sauces, like the difference between "spicy oil and spicy sauce". The way of eating "Siu Mai" has to be balanced with sesame oil, the specific chilli oil, and the right amount of soya sauce. I wasn't just eating – I was preserving a piece of home.

Even the tableware started to matter. I became genuinely disappointed when a waiter handed me a fork and knife instead of chopsticks and a spoon. It wasn't snobbery – it was the small daily reminder that the most natural way I interact with food was being replaced by something foreign and inappropriate. I also found myself paying attention to the blue and white porcelain plates and bowls in Chinese restaurants – quietly assessing whether they were cheap modern replicas or carried the elegant simplicity of Yuan or Ming dynasty aesthetics.

Food became my daily act of cultural resistance and reconnection.

The same shift happened with language and communication. At home, we used Chinese proverbs casually, without much thought. Abroad, I started researching their origins and backstories so I could explain them properly to my international friends. I wanted them to understand not just the words, but the centuries of wisdom and humour packed inside. At times, my Chinese friends and I would banter in Cantonese, playfully roasting Chinese stereotypes in that affectionate, insider way that we could. These gatherings felt like warm, familiar bubbles in an otherwise chilly, misunderstood setting.

Living abroad made me acutely aware of how much I missed the cultural shorthand – the jokes, the references, the unspoken understandings that don't need explanation among the fellow Chinese. We sought each other out not out of exclusion, but out of a deep need for that 'safe haven' where we could relax, be ourselves, and speak freely without translating our souls, as though we want a hot meal for lunch, not a Tesco meal deal.

Even something as simple as colour took on new meaning. Back home, wearing red during the Lunar New Year was mostly about tradition. Abroad, it became an act of joyful compliance. I started wearing red more often – not just during Spring Festival, but whenever I felt the need to inject some vibrancy and cultural warmth into grey, British winters, a good way to remind myself, and perhaps others, that we ought to look beyond and celebrate colour, luck, and renewal.

But it wasn't merely about preserving tradition.

Living abroad also made me appreciate my home city in a way I never had when I was immersed in it.

I am writing this piece while waiting at Paddington Station for a train that has already been delayed by 20 minutes. The contrast is almost comical. In Hong Kong, I had grown used to the seamless efficiency of the metro and rail networks, good public services, and perhaps, the general sense that things simply "work". The punctuality, the convenience, the speed – I didn't fully value them until I stood on a cold platform watching yet another departure board flicker with delays.

While writing this piece might risk me being told to either "go back to my country" or questioned about my motivations to be in Oxford pursuing my studies, I would urge those people to reconsider. It is indeed a great privilege and opportunity to go abroad, but this feeling is the unexpected underbelly that comes with just that. It forces you to see your own culture with fresh eyes. You stop taking things for granted. The small rituals (the right tea, the right sauce, the right chopsticks) become acts of identity. The proverbs and banter become bridges rather than assumptions. The frustrations abroad become quiet reminders of how proud one ought to be about human progress and connections.

I became more Chinese while abroad because distance stripped away the complacency that familiarity breeds. It turned passive belonging into active appreciation. What used to be "normal" became "mine" – something worth comprehending more deeply, preserving more consciously, and promulgating more proudly.

And perhaps that is the hidden strength of living abroad. We don't just carry our culture with us. In many ways, we rediscover it, refine it, and sometimes even love it more fiercely than we ever did at home.

The gap between funding and belonging at Oxford

Oxford's funding model opens doors, but leaves its culture largely unchanged

LEO JONES

Oxford is keen to tell a particular story about itself: that it is open, that it is trying, that it is changing. Without a doubt, this rings true, particularly on a financial level, as exemplified by the generous Crankstart Scholarship and the University's many hardship funds. And to be clear, they matter. For many students, that money is the difference between being here and not.

But there is a quieter problem in how this support is structured and discussed – one that reveals a set of assumptions about working-class students that the University has yet to fully confront. At its core, the issue is not the existence of financial support, but the expectations that come attached to it.

Schemes like Crankstart tend to operate on the premise that financial disadvantage is primarily a matter of shortfall. Give students money, and the problem is essentially solved. This sounds reasonable until you consider what it assumes – namely, that recipients already possess the knowledge, confidence, and cultural fluency to manage that money “correctly” within Oxford's opaque financial landscape.

But money at Oxford is not neutral. It comes embedded in systems like battels, college charges, book grants, rent schedules, vacation storage fees, formal wear expectations, unpaid internships, and the subtle but constant pressure to spend in ways that signal belonging. Knowing how to navigate these is not intuitive. It is learned often informally, sometimes through family experience, and long before arriving here.

Working-class students are far less likely to have had that exposure. Yet the structure of support assumes they will simply “figure it out.” This assumption shows up in small, but consequential, ways. Funds are frequently disbursed in lump sums, with little guidance beyond generic budgeting advice. Hardship applications require students to anticipate and articulate financial needs in a system they may not yet understand. There is an implicit expectation that students will know when to save, when to spend, and when to ask for more

– all the while managing the social pressures of a university where spending norms are rarely explicit.

This gap is intensified by how difficult it is to earn money while at Oxford. Term-time work is typically discouraged in favour of prioritising academic commitments, leaving many students with little flexibility to respond to unexpected costs or social pressures. The assumption is that financial support will be enough. When it is not, there are few alternatives. The option to simply “work more” – a common fallback elsewhere – is largely closed off, further narrowing the margin for error.

When things go wrong, the burden quietly shifts back onto the student. Overspent? You should have budgeted better. Didn't apply in time? You should have known the system. Struggling socially because you can't afford to participate? That's unfortunate, but invisible.

“*The underlying message is subtle but powerful: you have been given the opportunity, now it is your responsibility to make it work*”

But is it not natural that, upon receiving extra money in your bank account – possibly more than you have ever had before – you would be tempted to spend dramatically? Those Ryanair flights for a European city break? Suddenly affordable. Tesco Finest over their value products? Why not treat yourself?

Initially, it might seem obvious to respond to this gap with more “support” in the form of budgeting workshops, financial literacy sessions, or compulsory guidance on managing money at Oxford. But this risks reproducing the same problem in a different form.

If framed incorrectly, these initiatives can feel

deeply patronising. They rest on the assumption that working-class students lack basic financial competence, and that they need to be taught how to budget, rather than supported in navigating a system that is itself unusually complex. In reality, many students from lower-income backgrounds arrive at Oxford already highly skilled in managing limited resources. The issue is not ignorance, but context.

Budgeting at Oxford is not the same as budgeting at home. It involves decoding unfamiliar charges, anticipating irregular expenses, and negotiating social expectations that are rarely spelled out. A workshop on “how to manage your money” does little to address this, and risks talking down to the very students it claims to support.

What's needed instead is not remedial education, but structural clarity. Clearer information about likely costs, more transparency from colleges, and a recognition that the difficulty lies not in students' abilities, but in the University's complexity, at both a social and institutional level. We all have different relationships with money, which therefore makes blanket advice on budgeting pretty pointless. We all know what we should be doing, but how we implement it when suddenly able to afford that round of shots, dinner out, or a last-minute ticket, is far less straightforward.

The issue is not a lack of discipline or understanding, but the collision between individual financial habits and an environment where spending is both highly visible and socially loaded. In that context, generic advice about restraint offers little real guidance.

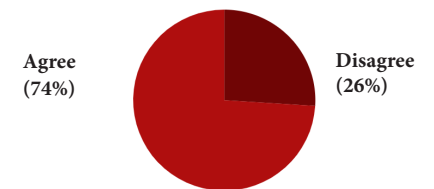
What students need is not to be told how to budget, but to be given a clearer sense of the landscape they are budgeting within – one where expectations, pressures, and costs are made explicit, rather than left to be inferred.

Until that visibility exists, the burden will remain unevenly distributed. Students will continue to arrive equipped to meet the academic demands of the University, but left to decipher its financial and social logic alone.

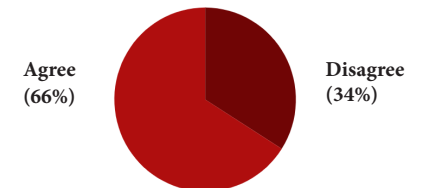
Access without understanding is not access at all. And that is a gap no scholarship, however generous, or life-changing, can fully close.

THE VERDICT

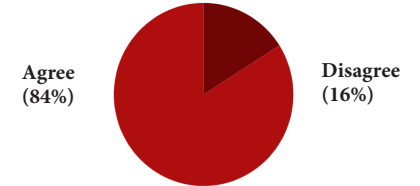
Oxford's anonymous gossip pages are toxic



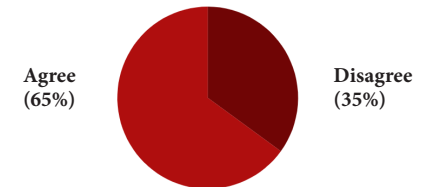
We connect more to our homes when far from home



University opportunities are centred in the South



Oxford's funding solves money not belonging



*According to over 400 Instagram respondents

We need to talk about Oxford's gossip problem

FREYA ROBSON

Gossiping is an innately human pastime, existing long before our generation, and a beloved form of social interaction that teeters on the boundary between harmless fun and cruelty. Yes, we all understand how damaging gossip can be when taken too far, but a sprinkling of rumour-exchanging is nothing but a guilty pleasure. In fact, as young people trying to build a community, gossip can be a tool of social necessity, building bonds with one another over the latest overheard dramas. However, in the age of social media, a new and improved variety of circulation has had a surge in popularity: the highly celebrated university gossip pages. What began as a handful of university-wide Instagram accounts recounting stories of minor scandal and light-hearted humour has quickly snowballed into countless pages that thrive upon shock-horror value and often vicious invasions of privacy. This phenomenon must be brought to an end.

The concept of circulating gossip from an anonymous source has perhaps been sensationalised by the media. Shows like *Gossip Girl* and *Bridgerton* paint a glorified image of a world in which the intricacies of people's personal lives ought to be brought to light, often in the name of truth-telling or bringing about justice. Storylines like this appeal to us, as we cheer on the Lady Whistledowns of the world while sitting under a blanket with a cup of tea, comfortably outside of the realms of a world where secrets are freely exposed. But suddenly this world isn't so separate from our own as the popularised university gossip pages have taken on the responsibility of uncovering what many would rather stay hidden – without an “XOXO, Gossip Girl” sign-off in sight.

The key ingredient in social media gossip accounts is anonymity. The anonymous creators deliver their news from behind a screen, controlling an account that cannot be linked to them in any way. Mysteries such as this inspire excitement, allowing the mind to wonder who could possibly be behind the mask – all of a

sudden, anyone around you could be leading a double life. But the power of anonymity turns sour all too soon as the concealment of a screen separates people from the impact of their words. This can clearly be seen with gossip accounts, where any morsel of scandal – no matter how viciously articulated – is made public with the simple click of a button. The anonymous writer gets the rush of causing a stir and simultaneously the freedom from being tied to any real-world consequences, without even a second to check the truthfulness of any submissions. I doubt oxscenes existed in the Spiderman universe, but it is true that “with great power comes great responsibility”... a responsibility dodged by the cloak of social media.

“*The subversive tone to these rumours incites a sense of danger that can be addictive. But when we take a step back, it is clear that this danger is all too real*”

Another element that fuels readers of these gossip pages is a growing hunger for increasingly shocking tales. It is a human trait to seek out greater shock value, but as we become attuned to scandal, we crave even more absurdity in the tales that are being fed to us. And with demand comes supply, leading to the owners of these accounts spitting out submissions day after day, with a constantly lowering bar for what is permissible.

This is certainly evident in some of the crude, hateful, and divisive language that has been normalised by gossip pages. Many may look away from this issue, seeing gossip pages as nothing more than light-hearted fun between students and



a source of entertainment in our often gruelling academic lives. Such supporters often fall back on anonymity, not of the writers, but of the victims. Secrets shared or rumours overheard are never explicitly linked to individuals, so no harm can follow. However, not only is this naive, but it is also inaccurate. Even unnamed revelations have damaging consequences, as we see a culture of shame and ostracisation beginning to form. Also, with the development of more and more gossip pages that relate to specific cross-sections of Oxford University, such as college or subject groups, the blanket of anonymity for victims thins until the identities of those being exposed are barely veiled. Indulging in these rumours is always fun up to the point where you become the butt of the joke. When that time comes, can your secrets really stay safe with you?

In this environment in which we feed on improprieties and intimate revelations, the strongest effect is perhaps that had on personal relationships. Secrets have become our currency, and as a result, holding your cards close to your chest is a necessary survival tactic to

avoid being the newest laughing stock of the Oxford community. Where students once felt comfortable confiding in their friends, a twinge of apprehension creeps in as we are led to wonder who we can truly trust. Clearly, there are those who are willing to brandish what other people want to keep hidden for the sake of cheap entertainment. No one wants to believe it could be their friends – but it is someone's.

Gossiping is an innately human pastime, but a line must be drawn between casual conversations amongst friends and widespread platforms inciting cruelty and fear. With social media's normalisation of this kind of discourse, our private lives have been ripped from us and placed under constant examination. We are not ruthless criminals being brought to justice, nor are we corrupt politicians being exposed for our true selves; we are just young adults trying to get by and inevitably making mistakes. So let's stop playing the righteous truth-tellers and recognise that some things deserve to stay a secret.

Image credit: Delphin Enjolras, in Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

The Oxford donors in the Epstein files



The appearance in the 'Epstein files' of the names of a number of Oxford University's most prominent benefactors raises questions about the University's priorities and the sources of its funding

BEATRIX ARNOLD and STANLEY SMITH

CW: Rape, sexual violence, sexual assault.

Stephen Schwarzman, Reid Hoffman, Len Blavatnik, David Reuben. These four billionaires have collectively donated over £340 million to the University of Oxford. They are the faces of the University's financial strategy, which readily accepts the philanthropy of the rich and powerful, notwithstanding the controversy this can sometimes generate. In return, their names have been plastered across the city: from the Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities to the Blavatnik School of Government to Reuben College.

The 'Epstein files' – the documents held by the United States Department of Justice regarding the criminal investigations into the paedophile financier Jeffrey Epstein – feature the names of these donors amongst the various emails, schedules, and guest lists. All of these are dated after 2008, when Epstein was publicly accused and prosecuted for soliciting prostitution from a minor. While there is no evidence of wrongdoing on the part of any of these wealthy benefactors, the release of the files in the winter of 2025/2026 has undoubtedly added a new dimension to the perennial debate about the role of billionaire benefactors at Oxford University.

The release of the 'Epstein files'

The process which eventually resulted in the release of the 'Epstein files' began more than 20 years ago. Investigation into the financier's crimes was initiated in 2005, after a parent reported to police in Palm Beach, Florida, that Epstein had paid her 14-year-old stepdaughter to remove items of clothing and massage him.

They soon identified more than 30 girls between the ages of 14 and 18 who had similar accounts of sexual abuse. This proved sufficient for a Palm Beach County grand jury to indict Epstein in 2006 on a state felony charge of soliciting prostitution.

The case was referred to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), raising the possibility that Epstein could be convicted on a federal charge, which could have landed him with a life imprisonment sentence. However, the US Attorney's office for the Southern District of Florida instead offered Epstein a plea deal, promising to end its investigation if Epstein pleaded guilty to two state charges, agreed to accept a prison term, and was registered as a sex offender.

“
The release of the files has added a new dimension to the perennial debate about the role of billionaire benefactors at Oxford University

Crucially, the deal included a now-notorious non-prosecution agreement, in which the federal prosecutors' office granted immunity against federal charges to Epstein and “any other co-conspirators”. Epstein's victims were not informed of the non-prosecution agreement, which was filed under seal, and only became public knowledge in 2009 after a judge ordered its publication. Taking this deal, Epstein

pleaded guilty to state charges of solicitation of prostitution and solicitation of prostitution of a minor under the age of 18 and was sentenced to 18 months in jail. During his imprisonment, he was granted leave for twelve hours a day to work at one of his foundations. In July 2009, he was released from jail, having served fewer than 13 months.

In the following years, more accusations emerged alleging an organised sex trafficking operation run by Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, his partner. The latter is now serving a 20-year prison term for conspiring with Epstein to sexually abuse minors. In July 2019, Epstein was arrested again and charged by federal prosecutors in New York with having sex trafficked minors, to which he pleaded not guilty. Before his trial could begin, however, Epstein was found dead in the Manhattan detention centre in which he was held; his death was ruled a suicide by New York authorities.

Since 2019, Epstein's crimes have become the centre of a political maelstrom, partly on account of the litany of famous figures with whom he was frequently associated. In the United States, calls came from both sides of the political divide between Republicans and Democrats for the information held by the Department of Justice to be made publicly available.

This culminated in both houses of the US Congress voting in 2025 to pass the Epstein Files Transparency Act, which ordered the Justice Department to release all the material it had pertaining to the criminal investigation into Epstein by 19th December that year. The bill was signed by President Trump, whose position on it had been unclear; something many attributed to his own personal connections to the deceased financier.

The release of these 'Epstein files' has already unleashed significant political fallout on both

sides of the Atlantic. In the UK, it resulted in the dismissal of Peter Mandelson – an Oxford University alumnus, former honorary fellow of St Catherine's College, and, in 2024, candidate for Chancellor of Oxford University – from his position as British Ambassador to the US, raising questions about the process of his appointment, which now threatens to destabilise Keir Starmer's premiership.

Reid Hoffman

While Mandelson's links to Epstein have given rise to headlines across the UK, and the University has sought to distance itself from association with him, another high-profile figure associated with the University of Oxford, and mentioned in the 'Epstein files', has received comparatively muted attention, namely Reid Hoffman. After graduating from Wolfson College with an MA in Philosophy in 1993, Hoffman accumulated his estimated net worth of \$2.6 billion by founding LinkedIn, the career networking service. In 2016, he shared a portion of these profits with his alma mater, donating \$1 million to establish The Oxford Foundry, an initiative to support entrepreneurship at the Saïd Business School.

The publication of the 'Epstein files' revealed that Hoffman's ties with the convicted sex offender were more extensive than Hoffman had previously stated. After initially meeting through Hoffman's efforts to fundraise for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the LinkedIn founder's relationship with Epstein included exchanging gifts – among them dumbbells and a metal surfer statue – as well as staying at Epstein's island in the Caribbean.

Not only was Hoffman aware of Epstein's criminal offences, but he actively sought to help protect the convicted paedophile from reputational damage. In 2014, Epstein was

To: Peggy Siegal [REDACTED]
From: Jeffrey Epstein
Sent: Sun 3/21/2010 8:51:39 AM
Subject: Re: David Reuben

bring him over tomorrow for tea

On Sat, Mar 20, 2010 at 11:11 PM, Peggy Siegal [REDACTED] wrote:

I am sitting next to him. He lives in London and Cannes. Has a yacht called Siren that is 242 feet. He is going to Antigua tomorrow. He has done business in Russia for many years- he was the first western investor in Russia...he is into many fab scientific investments ...you need to meet him. How far is your island from Antigua? He is a major nice guy. You would like him...how does he meet you...

EFTA01826629, US Department of Justice.

accused by a court filing in Florida of trafficking an underage girl to Andrew Mountbatten Windsor and forcing her to engage in sexual acts with him. Virginia Guiffre later revealed herself to be the girl in question. Mountbatten Windsor has repeatedly denied that he was involved in any wrongdoing.

“ Not only was Hoffman aware of Epstein’s criminal offences, but he actively sought to help protect the convicted paedophile from reputational damage

The Department of Justice files show that Hoffman not only did not disassociate himself from the financier but also offered to help with the media attention that had concentrated around him. In January 2015, Hoffman emailed Epstein saying, “been giving a bit of thought to how I can help with recent press fu. mostly looking for help on the on-line front [sic]”. “Nothing to do during a storm, but hunker down, and wait until it blows over”, came Epstein’s response.

Hoffman has issued several public statements about his “regret” over his relationship with

According to the released documents, Epstein’s interest in Schwarzman dates back to at least 2010. In one email exchange, the redacted correspondent suggests approaching the billionaire for a business venture: “I think attaching to Blackstone might be good idea. What do you think ? [sic]”. Epstein appears to agree, though not without some reservations: “at the right level , yes. , however the egos their are rampant [sic]”. Concerning Schwarzman himself, however, Epstein’s assessment seems to be rather more positive, calling him “terrific”. The cache of emails does not contain evidence of direct correspondence or interaction, either prior to or following this email exchange, between the two men.

The Department of Justice files show that, in February 2013, Epstein received an email from an external Public Relations (PR) agency purportedly inviting Epstein on behalf of Schwarzman, Jared Kushner, Donald Trump, Harvey Weinstein, and 24 others, to “cocktails and light supper” to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the *New York Observer*. It is not known whether Epstein ended up attending the small gathering.

Nor was this the last invitation the convicted paedophile would receive. In January 2015, Epstein received another email from the same PR agency inviting him, on behalf of Christine and Stephen Schwarzman, among eight others, to “attend our gathering at Christine and Stephen Schwarzman’s home” to celebrate the “incredible success” of the film *The Imitation Game*, which was produced by Schwarzman’s son. It is not known whether Epstein

The University of Oxford has benefited substantially from the philanthropy of the Reuben brothers. In 2012, the Reuben Foundation established the Reuben Scholarship programme for undergraduates from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2020, the University received an £80 million donation from the foundation, which they marked by renaming Parks College, the first new Oxford college since 1990, to Reuben College. In 2022, the University awarded the Reuben brothers the Sheldon Medal, the highest honour the University can bestow upon donors.

David Reuben seems to have appeared on Epstein’s radar in 2010, less than a year after the paedophile’s release from jail. Peggy Siegal, an American media and entertainment publicist and regular correspondent of Epstein, described Reuben as “a major nice guy”, and told Epstein

offers a number of postgraduate courses in public policy. The University’s acceptance of the donation was met with significant controversy at the time, largely on account of the billionaire’s alleged links to sanctioned Russian oligarchs.

As far as can be ascertained from the email exchanges found in the released files, Epstein sought to foster an association with Blavatnik over the course of several years. On 16th September 2010, Epstein’s executive assistant, Lesley Groff, extended an invitation to the billionaire to his New York townhouse for dinner with Epstein and Ehud Barak, the Israeli Defence Minister. The meeting was described as “very private , no agenda [sic]”. On the same day, Blavatnik responded, confirming receipt of the invitation. A few days later, he emailed again: “it seems like i will not be able to be there. many thanks and say hello to Jeffrey [sic]”.

In 2012, the former US Secretary of the

From: [REDACTED] on behalf of [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Subject: COCKTAIL PARTY INVITE FOR THE IMITATION GAME
Date: Fri, 02 Jan 2015 14:51:40 +0000
Attachments: IMITATION_GAME_-_JANUARY_7_(VERSION_1).pdf

Dear Mr. Jeffrey Epstein

Please join our hosts Michael Bloomberg, Eric Schmidt, George Stephanopoulos, Christine and Stephen Schwarzman, director Morten Tyldum, screenwriter Graham Moore, producers Teddy Schwarzman, Nora Grossman, Ido Ostrowsky and members of the cast on January 7th, 2015 for an evening of cocktails and company as we honor *The Imitation Game* and its incredible success to date.

The Imitation Game is a historically fascinating account of Alan Turing inventing the modern day computer which resulted in the breaking of the enigma code, and then suffering the indignation of homosexual discrimination. Alan Turing saved 14 million lives and had a tragic ending that will break your heart.

We would so appreciate if you would attend our gathering at Christine and Stephen Schwarzman’s home as we celebrate the New Year and a wonderful cast. Please let us know as soon as possible if you’re available.

Happy Holidays.

xoxo,
Peggy

EFTA00355074, US Department of Justice.

“you need to meet him... you would like him”. This appears to have piqued Epstein’s curiosity, as he tells Siegal to “bring him over tomorrow for tea”.

On the same day, prior to their proposed meeting, Epstein can be seen attempting to find out more about Reuben; in one email, the redacted correspondent mentions his “very murky past”, as well as his “huge assets”. In addition to this, Epstein contacted Peter Mandelson in an effort to dig up more information on Reuben: “david reuben, wants to come see me today,, do you know him [sic]”.

David Reuben has not been accused of wrongdoing by any alleged victims of Jeffrey Epstein. There is no evidence of direct correspondence between David Reuben and Jeffrey Epstein.

David Reuben did not respond to *Cherwell’s* request for comment.

Len Blavatnik

The billionaire business magnate, Len Blavatnik, the third richest man in Britain as of 2025, is one of the most recognisable names among the University’s primary benefactors. In 2010, he donated £75 million to the University to fund the Blavatnik School of Government, which

Treasury Larry Summers, in an email exchange with Epstein, informed him that he “visited Len Blavatnik he is your neighbor”. In the same year, an email from Allison Reddington details Epstein’s schedule for his visit to Cannes. The itinerary for the 20th May includes “Harvey Weinstein and Len Blavatnik lunch on boat”. There is no indication of whether this lunch took place.

The chain of correspondence seems to indicate that Blavatnik remained in Epstein’s social sphere. An email from Groff to Epstein on the 12th May 2014 titled ‘Reminder: Possible Dinner Party Mon. May 19th?’ lists “Len Blavatnik” under the heading “Guests”. Other invitees included Woody Allen, Larry Summers, and “Schwarzman [sic]”. Epstein’s regard for Blavatnik appears to have continued well into the 2010s. In an email exchange dated to the 24th September 2017, the redacted correspondent asks Epstein: “btw, do you know any adequate Russian oligarchs?” Epstein replied: “adequate? len blavatnik”.

Len Blavatnik has not been accused of any wrongdoing by alleged victims of Epstein. Blavatnik declined to comment.

The University of Oxford was approached for comment.

Image credits: Martin Cooper, CC-BY-2.0 via Wikimedia Commons; PDM via the US Department of Justice.

From: "jeffrey E." <jeevacation@gmail.com>
To: Reid Hoffman <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re:
Date: Thu, 08 Jan 2015 18:20:21 +0000

i loved the gift and though it had no name attached , it emanated" Reid." nothing to do during a storm , but hunker down , and wait until it blows over

On Thu, Jan 8, 2015 at 1:50 PM, Reid Hoffman <[REDACTED]> wrote:

my gift to you - thought that it might strike your sense of humor. (and have an appropriate nature to the island.)

if you put it outside, say on the beach, then either (a) rust-proof it or (b) paint it. it rusts.

been giving a bit of thought to how I can help with recent press fu. mostly looking for help on the on-line front.

EFTA00867052, US Department of Justice.

Epstein. After the publication of the ‘Epstein files’ by the Department of Justice, Hoffman said on X: “I only knew Jeffrey Epstein because of a fundraising relationship with MIT which I very much regret.” Reid Hoffman has not been accused of any wrongdoing by the alleged victims of Epstein.

Hoffman did not respond to *Cherwell’s* request for comment.

Stephen Schwarzman

Another influential businessman who appears in the ‘Epstein Files’ is Stephen Schwarzman, co-founder of Blackstone and the principal donor behind the Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities. His £150 million gift to Oxford, announced in 2019 (later increased to £185 million), was celebrated as transformative. However, his political and social entanglements have long provoked controversy. His connections to Republican politicians have drawn criticism from parts of the University community, notably leading to the formation of the campaign Oxford Against Schwarzman, uneasy about the optics of accepting funds from figures associated with polarising administrations.

accepted this invitation. There is no evidence in either case that Schwarzman himself personally sought or knew of the attendance of Epstein.

Stephen Schwarzman has not been accused of any wrongdoing by the alleged victims of Jeffrey Epstein. There is no evidence of direct correspondence or association between Schwarzman and Jeffrey Epstein in the released files. A spokesperson for Schwarzman told *Cherwell*: “It would be categorically false and grossly irresponsible to claim or imply that Steve had any relationship with this despicable individual... Blackstone is one of the world’s largest financial institutions and it is hardly surprising that someone working in finance would be aware of our firm. But that does not in any way suggest a relationship between Blackstone and this individual.”

David Reuben

David Reuben is another influential Oxford donor whose name makes an appearance in the files released by the Department of Justice. Having made his billions with his brother Simon in the metals business, David Reuben now focuses his efforts on venture capital, private equity, and the real estate business.

From: Len Blavatnik [mailto:[REDACTED]]
Sent: Thursday, September 16, 2010 5:23 PM
To: Lesley Groff
Cc: Mira Finkelstein; Fran Kambitsis
Subject: RE: Jeffrey Epstein-Ehud Barak

Hi, many thanks. I am in london now, will know if in NY Tue by Mon.

brgds

From: Lesley Groff [mailto:[REDACTED]]
Sent: 16 September 2010 19:28
To: Len Blavatnik
Cc: Mira Finkelstein
Subject: Jeffrey Epstein-Ehud Barak

Hello Mr. Blavatnik. Jeffrey Epstein is having Ehud Barak, the Israeli Defense Minister, over to his house on Tues night the 21st. very private , no agenda. he thought you might like to join in, IF you want to speak directly to Jeffrey I can have him call you , if you give me a time.

EFTA02421173, US Department of Justice.

‘It happens here and it’s our responsibility to stop it’

Oxford’s student-led anti-sexual violence campaign on intersectionality, the collegiate system, and the barriers that survivors of sexual harassment and violence face at the University



BEATRIX ARNOLD

CW: Rape, sexual violence, sexual harassment.

With each headline, the world becomes increasingly desensitised to sexual violence. 62 million men go unnoticed, swept up by the information overload of the online sphere; the reality becomes ineffable, obfuscated by over-saturation. Memes about Epstein, jokes about Clavicular, and discourse on the manosphere have seeped into our digital vernacular, such as to become ubiquitous, and, consequently, normalised. Nor, in the University of Oxford, is abuse of power, on the level of both students and staff, an alien concept. The result of this over-abundance is not to destigmatise a sensitive topic, but to train us out of outrage and into critical stultification. For the co-presidents of It Happens Here, Aparna Shankar and Maddie Gillett, and the two policy officers, Isobel Cammish and Abby Smith, literacy about consent and sexual violence is needed now more than ever.

It Happens Here, established in 2013, is an anti-sexual violence campaign led by Oxford students, which advocates for policy change at the University, as well as running events and offering support services for students. They were instrumental in the 2021 launch of the Safe Lodge Scheme, providing a point of refuge for students in distress. Likewise, their campaigning played a major role in effecting the University’s ban on intimate relationships between academics and their students in 2023.

The very structure of the campaign’s team – including a BAME rep, a Class rep, a Disability rep, and an LGBTQ+ rep – is shaped by their recognition that an individual’s experience of sexual violence is influenced by the confluence of all aspects of their identity; reprising an ossified approach in each unique case risks forfeiting nuance and sensitivity. By embedding their values into their team’s set-up, the society has committed itself to an intersectional approach.

Aparna, who began working on It Happens Here as BAME rep, is keen to emphasise that “people of colour face intersectional barriers when it comes to reporting sexual violence”. Not only do people, and particularly women, of colour experience higher levels of sexual violence, but, furthermore, issues of self-blame “can be compounded by racial differences”.

Nor is race the only factor which can aggravate such cases. For Maddie, who started out as LGBTQ+ rep, the work of It Happens Here would be incomplete without nuanced consideration of how queerness can influence how a person experiences sexual violence. “You can’t talk about sexual violence without talking about the practice of safe sex”, she notes. This becomes a problem when, as is all too often the case, “safe sex is taught from a very heterosexual lens”, generating additional hurdles in the process of coming to terms with, or even recognising, instances of sexual violation.

It Happens Here, along with numerous other student societies, including Class Act and OULGBTQ+ society, was disaffiliated from the SU a few years ago, as part of a broader transformation of SU structure. The change had profound ramifications for the campaign: having lost their funding, “for a while we just weren’t really up and running”. Without this stable source of income, Aparna explains, “we rely a lot on college JCRs which can be unreliable. And so when we’re putting on events, it’s a bit more difficult. We are managing it, and that’s why it helps to have such a large network, because it’s not just committee members who can apply, anyone could apply to help us get funding from their college”.

The challenges induced by the dearth of funding as a fallout from the SU disaffiliation are only compounded by concomitant struggles to ensure engagement. It Happens Here is, Maddie admits, “not a very well-known society”, and losing the network that came with the support of a centralised administrative body meant that “we went a bit underground, because it’s a big structural change to navigate”.

Yet the problem has its roots in something beyond the practical. It is, perhaps, an inevitable corollary of the nature of the campaign itself. Sexual violence is necessarily an uncomfortable topic, but just as commonly a misunderstood one as well. The new presidents are intent on addressing “the many intricate and complex ways that sexual violence goes unreported and not talked about in society”.

As a result of the myriad misconceptions that surround the issue, the campaign suffers from a lack of consistent engagement. “I’ve had a lot of people come up to me and go, oh, I haven’t, you know, I haven’t been a victim of sexual violence, so can I still come to the events? And absolutely you can.” Aparna explains. “It’s a collective effort. So, I want people to feel comfortable coming to our events, even if they’re not a survivor of sexual violence”.

Yet the problem with engagement is not limited to those who have no experience with sexual harassment. Even survivors often face difficulties, whether external or internal, when seeking help from the community. “There’s another barrier to sexual violence. It’s not an obvious thing that happens to people, as in sometimes it takes people a long time to realise if they have been sexually assaulted or raped, or if they’ve survived some sort of sexual violence”.

It’s difficult to keep the thread of the narrative taut within the chaos of university life, of events large and small, of conflicting emotions. After all, everything blurs when held too near. The realisation can take months for some – for others, it takes even longer.

“I always think of it as, you know, if someone walks past you on the street and just slaps you in the face, you’ve been slapped in the face, you know?” Yet sexual violence is rarely so clear-cut, particularly since, as Aparna notes, “you’re made to feel like what happened to you doesn’t matter.” The tendency to complicate the issue with introspection is dangerously

prevalent, in large part attributable to “that inherent self-blame reaction towards it”, and the “challenges of invalidating yourself”.

Often, this is exacerbated by semantic difficulties, as Aparna explains: “I think that even the term sexual violence can be unhelpful sometimes, because people tend to have an idea of what they think sexual violence looks like, I don’t know, a stranger in an alley who uses a weapon, for example.” The harsh picture that the term conjures up belies the reality. It is an inherently violent experience to have one’s boundaries crossed, regardless of whether there was physical injury involved, regardless of who the perpetrator might have been. A hazy conception of what falls within a certain definition “can stop people from accessing these forms of support. They might see something like the Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service [SHVSS] and think, oh, that’s not for me, because my experience wasn’t inherently violent, there’s probably someone else who might need it more than me”.

Reporting sexual violence is inevitably a harrowing process. Pain requires proof, consent becomes a negotiation, and the burden falls on the survivor to explain a story they never asked to tell. Yet for every psychological barrier to seeking help overcome, an institutional complication arises. Safeguarding provision at the University, as well as the process of dealing with a case of sexual violence, all too often becomes mired in bureaucratic reticulation, an oppressive complexity that is, on the whole, exacerbated by Oxford’s collegiate system. When responsibility for student welfare is divided between individual colleges and the central University, a transparent procedure to follow when seeking help is elusive.

“Reporting sexual violence is inevitably a harrowing process. Pain requires proof, consent becomes a negotiation, and the burden falls on the survivor to explain a story they never asked to tell”

“The college system means there’s a lot of inconsistency in policy”, Maddie points out. “Whereas in some universities there’s a centralised policy on spiking, for example, each college is different here”.

When students are immersed in the microcosm of a particular college, they are less likely to be familiar with wider university resources. “I don’t think many people know about the Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service. I don’t think people know about centralised welfare, things other than uni counselling”.

The tendency towards insularity inherent within the collegiate system, as Isobel notes, carries the potential to help or harm: a close-knit community can provide a crucial support network in a time of crisis, or, conversely, entrap a survivor in oppressive proximity to the circumstances, or even to the perpetrator, of what they’ve experienced. Oxford’s landscape narrows with the ever-hovering possibility of confrontation, or familiar places become corroded by association.

Yet this is only part of the picture. For Oxford’s postgraduates, who make up just over 50% of the student body, the structure of the University generates additional problems. “At least in my experience, postgrad students feel really disconnected from central university bodies”, Abby explains. In her fresher’s week, the topic of sexual violence “wasn’t even covered”.

“There’s an assumption that because we’re all older, there are just things that you don’t have to lecture people about and you just assume that they know, which I think can be really harmful... everyone’s coming from a different background, a different system, a different structure, you can’t assume that

we are all on the same understanding.”

Beyond the college system, antiquarianism, inevitably, characterises much of the University’s make-up. Apart from inculcating an intimidating atmosphere of grandiose severity, which, rooted as it is in patriarchal tradition, can act as a deterrent in reporting cases of sexual violence, Oxford’s long-standing prestige and distinctive practices give rise to additional problems.

“Oxford’s structure is more likely to allow members of staff to keep their positions, like we’ve heard a lot about this in the news”, Maddie points out. “And it’s very hard to get fired as a fellow. And you’re someone who’s interacting often one-on-one with your students, whereas you wouldn’t be at another uni. So I think the employment structure of Oxford is something that is problematic.” The status of Oxford’s colleges as individual legal entities often works to fragment accountability. Many academics have employment contracts with both their college and their faculty, adding a further layer of complication to the handling of allegations.

Isobel notes the atypical dynamics engendered by the relationships between students and tutors at Oxford: “You have drinks with your tutors, your tutors will buy you alcohol, you’ll have dinner with them, you’ll maybe be in these like one-on-one situations with them a lot more, which is a bit weird.”

A spokesperson for the University told *Cherwell*: “Sexual misconduct, violence and harassment have no place at Oxford. We strive to ensure that Oxford is always a safe space for all students and staff and take concerns seriously, applying clear, robust procedures. Support for those affected is a priority, and we take precautionary and/or disciplinary action where justified.”

A survey published in 2023 by the ongoing project OUR SPACE found that half of Oxford students report having experienced sexual harassment. Within the University support system, the 2024-25 academic year saw an increase in student referrals to the Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service. It is easy to resort to despondency in the face of such a seemingly unassailable challenge. When the personal is reduced to the numerical, tangible impact becomes difficult to discern. But Aparna notes that the metric of their success has different aspects: “I think a lot of it can be quite individual sometimes, in terms of individual people reaching out to kind of tell you, hey, this helped, you know?”

“It’s hard to see the long-term impact of what you’re doing when you’re doing it. But it’s reminders like these of people, because if there are a few people who are being vocal about it, chances are the vast majority of the rest of them think it, but don’t say it.” To live as a survivor of sexual violence, especially when faced with an impression of institutional inaction, is “an isolating thing, but to have a campaign in Oxford and people that care about this very deeply, so that they give up their own time. It’s a validating connection”.

As the presidents begin the new term, they are not overwhelmed into inaction, but focused on the concrete next steps they can take. “Right now, we want to get our name out. We want people to know that we exist. If you’re a survivor of sexual violence, it’s an isolating feeling, because you don’t feel like the world is on your side. It feels like you’re the only person that’s going through this. So to have a network available to you, to have other people that are willing to go to events and make time to support you – it’s a feeling that’s unmatched for a survivor”.

“A lot of it’s so slow going in policy work, and we’d rather have a campaign that is very useful and well thought-out”, Isobel adds, “but I do really love the idea that it’ll be having an impact on each generation of students. It’s a slow-moving process, and we’d rather do it right”.

Protecting students against all forms of sexual violence, and providing support for those who have survived it, is a duty that falls not only on the University as an institution, but on the individuals who make up its body, both staff and students. “This is an ongoing issue that requires everyone to pitch in”, Aparna emphasises. “It’s everyone’s problem. It affects everyone in your life”.

“I always like the phrase, it happens here, and it’s our responsibility to stop it. Because it is the responsibility of each and every one of us.”

Image credit: It Happens Here, with permission.

Cherwell

TT26

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John Evelyn



JOHN EVELYN, DIRECTOR OF JEST (stomp stomp stomp), has been summoned once again to provide a fair and reasonable perspective on the recent foreplay for next term's Appellate Board. It was so civil that MJ's Band of Suspiciously Merry Men couldn't even finish a day without a 51(a). Every testimony had a tenuous relationship with reality, and indeed I cannot blame Homelander's rep for painting her nails rather than advising Homelander at literally any point. After this point, 33 Reasons Why's hint at contacting the Chinese embassy mid trib may well be my own 34th reason. I would give my predictions, but I find the prospect of infinite suspensions far more appealing than the prospect of becoming a partisan column.

Elsewhere, term has started with peace, love, and a rendition of the *Gravity Falls* theme tune on the Morris Room piano. It is so peaceful that Human Poached Chicken could not even speak in TSC, as Homeless Masters has laid a claim to the Treasurer's business he will not let go of. Peace and love has begun to resemble Ground Hog Day, as most committees have turned into a presidential candidate PV-measuring contest. Much like last term, the Presidential Puppy will present a half-baked idea which would definitely torpedo his own campaign if sent to the press. This is then met with a mind-numbing filibuster

courtesy of Joey Essex.

Filibustering seems to be his primary skill; despite initially effective slating, the coffees have "fell off", as the kids say. Instead, Joey Essex fights for maximum paper speeches for maximum PV, his first attempt with Solarhow devolving into chaos, but ending well. On the flip side, Human Poached Chicken and Starmer's Stooze have sacrificed their degrees at the altar of seccie coffees, waiting for the tribunal (read: AB) to finish first. What is more boggling, in fact, is why the Presidential Puppy is not present at any of these meetings, despite supposedly being their Top Guy.

Editorial



Beatrix Arnold Editor-in-Chief Trinity

The night before we were due to receive our Week 0 print, I had a very vivid nightmare that we'd somehow made a spelling mistake in our front page headline. I woke up, shaking with adrenaline, and couldn't get back to sleep until I'd checked the PDF version to make sure we hadn't, even though I knew that we'd proofed all 24 pages countless times.

It's not that I think anyone would particularly care, or even notice, if a pull quote were incorrectly formatted, or an image credit were misaligned. It goes without saying, of course, that hardly anyone reads print journalism anymore, and absolutely no one reads student print journalism. I'd be surprised if anyone ever looked at this editorial beyond its final proof.

Prior to the physical manifestation of our print, I was overwhelmed with despondency, burnt out by weeks of work that had not yet produced anything tangible. I'm not conceited enough to imagine that what I write will meaningfully impact anyone's life. I was ready, in short, to give up and accept that the greatest achievement of my short-lived journalistic career would forever be 'Timothée Chalamet appointed Visiting Professor of the Arts'.

As we were looking through the *Cherwell* archives, however, in spite of all the bizarre content and antiquated

humour (of its time, I'm sure), I was struck with an impression of continuity. As long as this paper has existed, there have been people who have cared enough to keep it going. Through a World War, through a pandemic, through endless threatened lawsuits – against all odds, *Cherwell* has stayed in print. As much as I doubt that the original founders of the publication would approve of its being run by an 'Editress', let alone two, it's true that we're linked by the same passionate, pointless pursuit.

I often find myself having to repress the instinctual response: "That would make a great piece for *Cherwell*". My vac was spent, in large part, looking through the Epstein Files. Over the last few weeks, I've messaged Mercedes more than my own family. Obviously, all of this is impractical. But pragmatism has never been the point.

And so I will keep on pedantically adding Oxford commas, fixing every Americanism, and trying to print stories that some people, at least, might care about, even if there's not much logic behind any of it.

Cherwell has, for better or worse, utterly and irrevocably taken over my life. And I wouldn't have it any other way.



Ruby Barenberg Features Deputy Editor

On 20th April, almost 30,000 people ran the Boston Marathon. As they hit kilometre 20, they passed by

ARCHIVES

Editorial

1920

"Those of you whose happiest hours here are spent on the *Cherwell* will know why we have taken our name. For us the *Cherwell* personifies all that is most truly Oxford – it is all our own, the Undergraduates' river, that is why we take its name for our Undergraduate pair. The Isis is only partly our own... No one could call the Isis, which is the Thames, an Oxford river. It is just as freely associated with a hundred other places, and it brings its profit to London... But we appeal to you in the name of the river whose name we bear to help us in our undertaking. The *Cherwell* is financed, staffed and run entirely by Undergraduates, and its profits (?) are divided among its contributors. And our purpose? In these days everything must have a purpose. It is to exclude all outside influence and interference from our University – Oxford for the Oxonians."

Wellesley College, a historically women's liberal arts college whose 'Scream Tunnel' is traditionally the loudest part of the marathon route.

I always feel most connected to my college community on 'Marathon Monday'. It feels like the entire campus is out on the sidelines of the race, holding handmade signs, cheering for, high-fiving – and maybe even kissing – the runners. This year, however, I spent the day reading for my tutorials and working on the lay-in for the Week 0 *Cherwell* print.

Studying abroad in Oxford will undoubtedly be one of the highlights of my university experience. Over the past seven months, my world has constantly been expanding with new people to meet, books to read, and places to visit.

Yet visiting students occupy a strange space in the University, operating just outside of the 'real' Oxford student experience. The academic system is far more isolating than anything that I've ever experienced before, the jargon people use is different, and the societies are filled with internal politics that I'm not privy to.

As I begin my final term of my junior year abroad, I've been reflecting a lot about the way in which we as university students create community, how we attempt to connect to our peers and our institutions at large.

For me personally, regardless of the university, that place has consistently been the student newspaper. The processes of sourcing, writing, revising, and formatting, create a system of constant collaboration, one that extends to the readership as well. Student journalism also allows you to be connected not just to the University as it currently is, but also to its history, the way in which an institution is defined over time.

It is my hope that through our work in *Cherwell*, and in the Features section in particular, we may help you to reflect a little about the ways in which you fit into Oxford, how you become part of the narrative of the institution, no matter how long or how permanent your stay at the University might be.

It's fun to run in the race, even just for a mile or two.

James Marriott on books, broadsheets, and a changing Britain

'I think we're hurtling into a new era'



GAVRIELLA EPSTEIN-LIGHTMAN

It seems to me that James Marriott is cut from cloth that has fallen out of fashion. He is no proselytiser for any particular political creed, but a sceptical observer and interpreter of the political battlegrounds of our age. More into Keats than clickbait, his instinct is to think deeply rather than rush to formulate a viral opinion.

Marriott is a columnist at *The Times*, where he reviews books and podcasts and writes about society and ideas. We meet at the British Library, where he has been working on his upcoming book, *The New Dark Ages*, due to be published in September. Marriott's debut expands on his Substack essay, 'The Dawn of the Post-Literate Society', which sparked debate with its exploration of how the decline in reading may impact Western civilisation, democracy, and intellectual thought.

As we speak, it strikes me that Marriott's words seem careful and considered, almost as if prewritten. We begin by discussing his upbringing in Newcastle. He inherited his interest in poetry and literature from his father, an English teacher. As a child, he dreamed of studying at Oxford; an aspiration that was fulfilled when he got a place to read English Literature at Lincoln College. "Like a lot of people who went to Oxford, I had all kinds of fancy ideas about what it was going to be like", Marriott says. "It was going to be like *Brideshead Revisited*. I was going to make all these marvellous, eccentric friends." Marriott was understandably disappointed when myth turned out to be a poor guide to reality. He's disarmingly honest about his initial difficulty at Oxford: "I felt very lonely and shy. It took

me a year and a half to really start enjoying university."

Journalism was not Marriott's first aspiration. "After I graduated university, I was full of the idea of being a poet", he explains. "But it quickly became clear that being a poet is not a viable career option in the 21st century, so I abandoned that." Marriott's route into journalism was somewhat unconventional: his first job was in the rare books trade at Bernard Quaritch Ltd in London. He found himself surrounded by priceless manuscripts – including a first edition of Milton, a legal document signed by Napoleon, and a children's book dating to 1807. It was, he emphasises, "an amazingly fortunate position to be in".

“
I'm aware things could have gone very differently for me. I could easily have not ended up being a journalist – life is all sliding doors and coincidences

Marriott, however, had his sights set on *The Times* Books section. He wrote reviews in smaller outlets until he was noticed by the paper's Literary Editor, who took him on. Sheer luck and persistent determination played their parts. "I'm aware things could have gone very

differently for me", Marriott reflects. "I could easily have not ended up being a journalist – life is all sliding doors and coincidences."

Column-writing, he admits, is an odd discipline. "It's partly a nightmare to say something new every week." A colleague told him that "every opinion column is either obvious or wrong". It's a worry he can never truly escape. "You always fear, am I just saying something incredibly obvious and incredibly banal?" Yet Marriott is keen to emphasise the rewards of his job. The lifestyle is strikingly similar to that of an Oxford humanities undergraduate. "I spend my entire life reading books, trying to have ideas, turning in my weekly essay", he says, before adding with a smile: "It's a pretty lucky way to live."

That life, however, exists within a media landscape in flux. No longer are print newspapers a product of widespread consumption; *Apple News* is simply more convenient than buying a *Times* subscription. The world in which books and broadsheets claimed cultural preeminence is no more. Journalists have had to adapt. Indeed, Marriott tells me that he is scheduled to film two TikToks the following week. It is hard to imagine his restrained, literary style competing with the churn of short-form video and algorithmically amplified outrage. "Being a newspaper columnist 20 years ago was a big deal, and columnists were household names", he observes. Yet today, they occupy a smaller corner of a far more crowded media ecosystem.

Marriott fears that lost amidst this shift is a shared cultural and moral reality. "Historically, newspapers helped form the nature of a modern nation state", Marriott explains. "Everybody read the same newspapers in the same language, and disparate groups began to think of themselves

as a nation." Now, as reading declines and media fragments, people are less likely to identify with a national public and more likely to belong to diffuse political tribes. "Can you have modern national democratic politics in that environment?", Marriott asks. "I think we genuinely don't know."

“
It's partly a nightmare to say something new every week. You always fear, am I just saying something incredibly obvious and incredibly banal?

But the fracturing of the media landscape is only one strand of a broader unravelling of the liberal world order. The technocratic, optimistic politics of the post-WWII era have been replaced by the populist politics of the present. The edifice of democracy is cracking; we are watching a page of history turning.

Does Marriott think the post-war liberal consensus is gone for good? "I think we're hurtling into a new era", he replies. "Since the end of the Second World War, we've experienced 100 years of liberalism, stability, functioning democracy. And I think we can too easily assume it will last forever." Yet he cautions that "the lesson of history is that societies change all the time". He points to 600 years of social transformations – "the printing press, the

Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution.” Throughout this history, he says, there has not been an example of “an ideology as dominant as liberalism fading out and coming back”. It’s that recognition of the transience of our political age that so often characterises Marriott’s writing.

“*Historically, newspapers helped form the nature of a modern nation state. Everybody read the same newspapers in the same language, and disparate groups began to think of themselves as a nation*

So, why do people often view liberal democracy as the natural endpoint of political evolution? “In the late ‘90s, it wasn’t a mad thing to think”, Marriott notes. “The world was becoming more democratic and more wealthy. Everything just seemed to be working very well.”

He adds that we are prone to a “human bias”: “We get used to our lives, and we find the idea of change very hard to believe. We’ve read our local sense of stability into a kind of wider universal law that just doesn’t exist.” Marriott argues that the universe does not bend inevitably towards liberal democracy; there is no ‘end point’ of political evolution, only the volatile vicissitudes of political systems rising and falling. All political systems eventually decay, so why should democracy be the exception?

Before political systems fall, the habits of thought that sustain them begin to unravel. In his viral 2025 essay, Marriott argued that we are living through a counter-revolution against reading driven by smartphones. His argument is not simply that people are reading less, but that this shift alters the very structure of thought. Put simply, the way we communicate shapes what we can communicate.

“*Since the end of the Second World War, we’ve experienced 100 years of liberalism, stability, functioning democracy. And I think we can too easily assume it will last forever*

We are not, Marriott points out, short of information. Quite the opposite: we are overwhelmed by it. In pre-literate societies, forgettable ideas simply disappeared. Today, the bulk of information sinks into what Marriott terms the “great swamp of the archive”. This is an information environment which prizes memorability over accuracy and contrarianism over nuance. One is rewarded for being striking, provocative, and emotionally charged.

Populism is a natural beneficiary of this shift. In our conversation, Marriott points out that social media algorithms “favour a particular kind of content, which is angry, loud, simplified”. In contrast, “broadsheet newspapers traditionally provide nuanced context and analysis, and that just doesn’t fly”. Whereas writing rationalises thought, short-form videos allow one to bypass logical argument. Populism, with its emphasis on style of communication and simplicity of message over substance of policy, is uniquely situated to take advantage of the social media algorithm.

“*The lesson of history is that societies change all the time*

Yet Marriott maintains that this is not the whole story of populism’s ascendance. An inescapable reality is simply that social media

has democratised the information environment. The erosion of traditional media has removed the “gatekeepers” that once filtered and framed public discourse. “Liberal ideas have been imposed in society artificially from above, via the BBC and *The Times*”, Marriott suggests. Yet now, those very institutions are receding from their former preeminence in public life. Without these institutions and norms, “liberal ideas don’t come naturally to people”, he explains. “I don’t think people are behaving like good liberals when you throw them all together in a big mass on Twitter.”

“*Liberal ideas have been imposed in society artificially from above, via the BBC and The Times. Liberal ideas don’t come naturally to people; I don’t think people are behaving like good liberals when you throw them all together in a big mass on Twitter*

“Human beings are naturally dogmatic”, he adds. “People don’t like changing their minds. They don’t like having their points of view challenged.” Yet humans are responsive to environments that reward open-mindedness. Perhaps, then, the problem with social media is not that it reveals our innate nature, but that it incentivises and amplifies our most illiberal instincts.

At the same time, the beliefs people hold are not always adopted through careful reasoning. Marriott points out that columnists writing about ideas can “overestimate how committed people are” to them. “We are social apes, and we care much more about social status than we do about the truth”, he observes. “We are much more likely to adopt ideas because they seem status-enhancing and will help us fit in in our groups.”

“For a lot of people, there was no point at which they changed their mind and wrestled with the ideas of progressivism.” What actually occurred, he suggests, is that people suddenly believed these ideas “because everyone else believed it”. Ideas are often embraced less for their intrinsic merit than for the social advantages they confer and the sense of belonging they provide. What looks like ideological conviction may, in practice, be a form of social alignment.

“*We are social apes, and we care much more about social status than we do about the truth. For a lot of people, there was no point at which they changed their mind and wrestled with the ideas of progressivism*

This presents a paradox for the columnist. To write about ideas is to assume that ideas matter and that people arrive at their beliefs through argument and reflection. Yet the more seriously one takes ideas, the harder it becomes to value how most people come to hold them.

As our conversation ends, Marriott seems acutely aware that the world which shaped him is receding. This sense is only sharpened when I point out that he, as a columnist, is writing for an audience that is increasingly insouciant about reading. “I’m feeling a bit sad watching something that I grew up believing was the most important thing in life turning into an antiquarian endeavour”, Marriott says, despondency crossing his face. He adds that his interest in poetry is, in this age, seen as “an eccentric hobby, like collecting Victorian China”. One can only hope that the cloth he’s cut from comes back into fashion.

Image credit: James Marriott, with permission.

OXFORD SPOTLIGHT



Sam Freedman speaks to Melissa Eddon about government, the Conservatives, and writing with his father

Sam Freedman is one of Britain’s foremost political analysts. As co-author of Britain’s most popular political Substack ‘Comment is Freed’, Senior Fellow at the Institute for Government, and a contributor to a number of respected British publications, Freedman has the opinions of a journalist and the knowledge of a policy maker.

In our discussion, Freedman’s answers are measured and carry a certain nuance, a habit from a life “half in that world” of Westminster and Whitehall, but stabilised by one foot firmly planted in academia and research.

His passion for politics was clear even from childhood. Freedman was twelve at the time of Norman Lamont’s resignation as Chancellor in 1993: “I remember running through my school trying to tell everyone in excitement, and everyone was like ‘what the hell are you doing’”. He laughs fondly: “I was an unusual child, always very obsessed with politics.”

Freedman is an Oxford alumnus, having completed an undergraduate degree and a subsequent MPhil in History at Magdalen College. He looks back at his time in Oxford with great fondness: “Probably like quite a few students, I look back and think: why did I wake up at one o’clock in the afternoon every day, and not take the opportunity to have the time to think and read in the way you never get when you’re actually working?” For Freedman, university was packed with amateur dramatics – directing and producing – as well as meeting his wife.

His transition from academia to employment was driven by a desire for change. After a stint at the Independent Schools Council, he continued to focus on education and moved to a research role at Policy Exchange in 2007. He describes it as “luck” that this coincided with Michael Gove, one of the think tank’s founding chairmen, being promoted to Shadow Secretary of State for Education. “I was in a very odd position, being a policy person in a political world”, Freedman says. “Gove knew that, and hired me anyway.”

Though much of his time was spent developing ideas that would find themselves in the Conservative Party’s 2010 manifesto, he takes care to distance himself from a particular affiliation. “I was never actually a Conservative, and I was never a member of the Conservative Party”, Freedman explains. “I had been a member of the Labour Party, and I liked what New Labour had done on education policy.” For Freedman, his work with the Conservative Party was an attempt to “create some continuity between what I thought New Labour would have wanted to continue doing on education policy, and what a new government would do”.

Upon the Conservative victory in 2010, Freedman became a policy advisor, spending three years working on the new Conservative Government’s policy agenda. His colleagues from this time have become well-known, and highly controversial characters in British politics, but Freedman’s insight cuts through their facades. “Some people present in public exactly as they are in person”, he notes. Here he points to former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who in Freedman’s eyes is “performing constantly, even in private”.

He sees more nuance in the character of those like Dominic Cummings, former chief adviser to

Johnson, whose “cunning genius” facade falls in private. Often getting into fights with people online, Cummings would “have these manic episodes, where he would...get very hysterical”.

Freedman’s time in Westminster taught him that politics is less about the individuals and more about the institutions. “A lot of them were designed in the 19th century for a completely different kind of politics.” Freedman jokingly adds that wanting to be a politician in this system makes one “slightly crazy...a sociopath”. From what he’s seen, the job is exceedingly tough: one must endure an “astounding” level of abuse and the entry-level position as a backbencher is “pretty thankless”. “Either you have to be obsessed with attention and status...or you have to really, really care about changing the world in a positive way.”

I ask him how the deep-seated public hatred of Keir Starmer sits with him in this context. “I don’t quite know where it comes from... but I don’t think he’s been a particularly effective prime minister.” He attributes part of the uproar to a hostile media set-up. The “clickbait” culture has drawn on our more pessimistic instincts. “It’s shifted everything towards a much more aggressive and negative posture, which then makes politicians more defensive”. Ultimately, it’s a vicious cycle, and one he tries to avoid with his Substack. “I just try to be accurate...I’m not campaigning for any particular point of view.”

His own role in the UK media ecosystem is shared with his father, co-writer at ‘Comment is Freed’. So how does that dynamic work? “We read each other’s pieces, but we cover quite different areas, and we have quite different styles.” Any reader of ‘Comment is Freed’ will know that Sam Freedman focuses on domestic politics, whereas his father takes an international focus. “Dad is a military historian...and he has a proper historian’s way of writing about these conflicts...whereas I’m more of a kind of journalist, so I tend to be more opinionated in my pieces.”

I ask him what Substack offers in journalism in comparison to the average newspaper column. Not only is there more freedom when choosing what to write about, but Freedman finds he can write “at a length that no newspaper would ever allow”, with most of his pieces averaging around 3,000 words. “I prefer the freedom and the space to go into depth.”

In the world of 24/7 media, public memory is much weaker than it once was, and scandals quickly recede from memory. For Freedman, a key example of this is the 2008 Financial Crash. “We have this way of talking about economic policy, as if Keir Starmer should just be fixing the economy, without ever really talking about the underlying structural problems... that the financial crisis threw up. Since it happened, we have just gone back to a fairly similar financial system to what we had before, which feels very vulnerable... We had the crisis, it passed, and now we are sort of pretending it didn’t happen.” This willful ignorance, on the part of both politicians and the public, is the root of many political problems.

Whilst Freedman predicts change within his lifetime, by the end of the conversation, I’m left with the feeling that the flaws of contemporary British politics won’t be “fixed” anytime soon. Freedman, however, seems to be the kind of voice we need in the current political climate: one of nuance, pragmatism, and integrity.

Image credit: Sam Freedman, 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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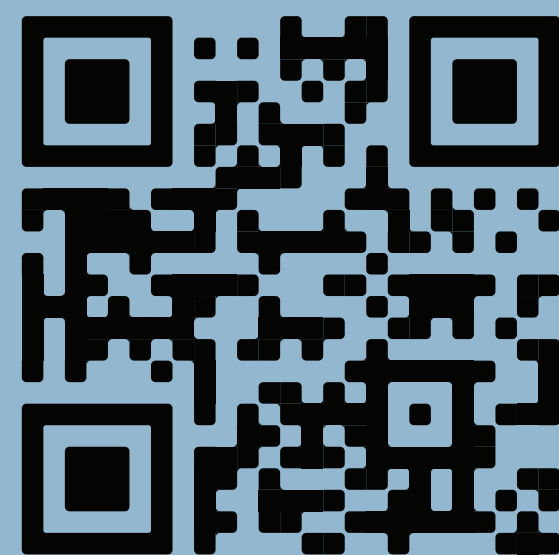
For those who are interested, please send your curriculum vitae to johnny.cheung@bearing-academy.com and christina.ou@bearing-academy.com

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



We're excited to connect with ambitious and fresh talent ready to make an impact on our team.

DA VINCI



‘Macbeth’ previewed: What makes a show great?

Arun Lewis speaks to Cross Keys Productions ahead of their upcoming performance of ‘Macbeth’

Arriving at Somerville College in its full summer pomp, Stanley Toyne and Cameron Spruce, the co-directors of Cross Keys Productions’ rendition of *Macbeth*, walked over with me to the college chapel as we discussed the transient bother of collections and the issues of trying to work amidst glorious sunshine.

Once in the space, with the fitting set-up of three grand thrones in the middle of the chapel’s walkway, it was easy enough to understand why the two have decided to stage their modern, mafia-set take on *Macbeth* here. There is an other-worldly feel to the chapel, a non-denominational space, shorn of ornate religious trappings yet clearly somewhere to be treated with reverence. Everyone knows the basic storybeats of *Macbeth* – duty, pride, betrayal, downfall – but the use of a chapel played a key role in transposing the core of the story to a new modern setting.

Discussing the setting, Stan highlighted that, as with the mafia context, the use of the chapel was a deliberate choice, and had in fact been the cause of some difficulties in securing a location for the production, with several chapels either being too expensive or unwilling to host a mafia-themed production. He highlighted the similarities in the power relations between the feudal system of medieval Scotland, in which Shakespeare’s original play was set, and the inner workings of the mafia – a veneration

of violence, an emphasis on family and religiosity – that allowed the play to transpose well. Chiming in, Cameron highlighted that the transverse staging of the chapel with nave, transepts, and chancel offered not just a sense of fluidity to the play, but an interactive feeling, placing the audience in and amongst the drama.

The mafioso setting of the play raised questions – how would some of the main characters, particularly Lady Macbeth and her husband, Malcolm, Duncan, and the witches, translate into this new, 20th century setting? They both talked at length about how Malcolm, rather than merely being the hapless heir to the amiable Duncan, was to be portrayed as an actor in his own right, more than capable of manipulating those around him in advancement of his own goals, particularly the vulnerable MacDuff, when news of his family’s murder reaches him. The three witches each aspire to capture an element of mob life and also allude to the Greek mythology of the Fates. Each represents something Macbeth lacks and wants at certain points in the play; authority, love, and excess, capturing the cycle of Macbeth’s character without denying him the agency of his choices. In this production, Macbeth is not solely the unwilling tool of fate – though elements of the fantastical do endure in this plot – but rather an independent agent, influenced not just by his surroundings but



also by himself, and so too is Lady Macbeth.

Of note should be the ease with which the two directors bounced off each other, and how the arrival of two cast members, playing Lady Macbeth and Macbeth, did not prompt any great change of character or slip into a new persona. Instead, they genially integrated their cast into the interview, allowing me to enquire about how they found the role, the directorial methods, and their own approach to the characters.

Working within the setting dictated by the directors, both felt range to explore the emotional depth and breadth of the characters. This is particularly evident with Macbeth being stylised as more a bruiser in this play, substituting sword and rapiers for pistols and knives. In turn, Lady Macbeth was made to be more than the particularly reductive versions produced in certain modern adaptations, like the Patrick Stewart-led modern take on *Macbeth*. The actors lean into the stereotypical mob depictions of their roles; Lady Macbeth, however, exploits it far more knowingly as a public facade. Her ability to occupy a sweeping veranda of opinion towards her emotionally

complex, yet explosive, husband forms a core part of this rendition’s characterisation.

Both of the directors, Cameron and Stanley, have acted in OUDS productions before, with Cameron giving an excellent turn as Wriothsesley in last year’s production of *Wolf Hall* at Christchurch. They each spoke candidly of how their experience on the other side of the dynamic influenced their open, approachable attitude towards their cast, and how an unexpected delay over the spring vacation allowed the actors to further develop their characterisation.

Of further note is how the play’s newly composed organ score, courtesy of Peter Hardistry, functions as what Cameron described as, “motivic glue”, highlighting the changing power relations and positions of the character as the play moves towards its ultimate conclusion. Cross Keys Productions promises an innovative and insightful take on the classic play-that-must-not-be-named, a rendition that will be well worth seeing.

Image credits: Maya Flint with permission (right) and Stefan Schwarz, CC-BY-SA-4.0, via Wikimedia Commons (left).



‘What is going on?’: ‘Pets & their People’ at the Weston ART

MILES OLESAK

For the first time in human history, a giant wolf guards the entrance to a Weston exhibition. Its snarling will set the tone for your visit, because you won’t be able to escape its gurgling, growling noises, and the corresponding harsh panting of the spaniel it is cursed to repeatedly morph into. The screen asks, with a lofty, enigmatic authority that doesn’t feel earned: “Would we want a truly tame pet?” Veteran Weston-goers might sensibly take this to be the organising principle of the new exhibit, *Pets & their People*, but in this, at least, they would be disappointed.

At one point, an uncanny image of a ‘Bark Mitzvah’ is shown alongside other photographs, with absolutely no indication of its origins. Is anything in here real? This uncertainty might make you feel a bit crazy. I tried to recover in front of the wonkily formatted slides of various college pets. It was nice to see every single college cat’s ‘favourite thing’ be listed as treats, with the exception of Teabag, who likes chargrilled chicken. (Incidentally, what is the name of that black cat at Hertford? The slides say Simpkin IV, but I swear a porter once introduced it to me as Moo Moo.) Another exhibit designed to similarly tug at the heartstrings is the collection of odes written by children to their pets, including one honouring a giant snail.

There is also some important recognition of more serious issues in keeping pets, such as unhealthy breed standards, accompanied by X-rays of brachycephalic dogs. Nevertheless, introducing the

metaphor of trapping animals in their own bodies is a strange move for this exhibition to make, given it makes no mention of broiler chickens (or any of the one-million-or-so domestic fowl kept as pets in the UK). Exhibition curator Charles Foster seems squeamish about farm animals.

“More broadly, there is a total absence of any discussion of the distinction between animals we mourn and those we consume”

More broadly, there is a total absence of any discussion of the distinction between animals we mourn and those we consume. Instead, the exhibit confines them to one scrap of accusatory rhetoric: “You probably eat dead animals. Isn’t it good that your pet continues to serve a purpose as a fur coat, rather than being buried or cremated?” I was, and remain, baffled by this jab. The question here is surely why we are comfortable not offering the same respect to all animal life, surely? But this is the million-dollar question Foster is clearly not comfortable tackling – what makes an animal a ‘pet’?

This issue is part of a larger pattern, which is that

this otherwise promising exhibition is consistently let down by its noncommittal and strangely skewed curating. As always, the Bodleian archives shine through the muddle; one memorable moment places an ancient Egyptian papyrus receipt for a camel toll alongside a one-penny tram ticket for a dog in Blackpool. The exhibit also contains, allegedly, the first depiction of a stick being thrown for a dog.

The use of pets as symbols of good children is interesting, though Foster mostly avoids the gender politics of such depictions; though it is pointed out that only the girl cat wears a bow, no mention is made of why a cat must represent ideal femininity, and why only the cat – and not the rough-and-tumble ‘boy’ dog – is depicted with an additional accessory. For an exhibit explicitly about both pets and ‘their people’, Foster seems largely to sidestep critical analysis of human culture, and the full range of inter-species relationships that a culture might make acceptable or even intelligible. An otherwise interesting presentation of a medieval Flemish illustration, which depicts a blind beggar using a service dog, is undercut by its status as the only mention of assistance dogs whatsoever – this kind of human/animal relationship should surely have merited further attention, particularly in light of the disturbing choice to elsewhere exclusively foreground the moral ‘dilemma’ posed by canine mobility aids. Once again, this exhibition refuses to linger on the more complex aspects of human/pet relations, choosing instead to make, simultaneously, frustratingly vague sidesteps and frequently irritating elisions.

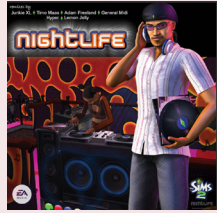
In exhibit 89, ‘Human adults dress up too’, there is an honest-to-God pup hood. Foster tries valiantly to grapple with the question of why human adults would dress up, too. I do think he’d have been better off with a sports mascot head, or at least a fursuit, than a kink mask in his otherwise PG exhibit. In any event, using a pup hood and not mentioning gay people feels like a slight, though of course, I have no proof of this.

Foster wonders why people wear things like this: “Is it a return to our evolutionary origins” or “an effort to understand what we are and where we’ve come from?” Is it “a return to childhood”? “An assertion of our fluidity” or “dissatisfaction with being human”? Actually, it’s to get off, but I do like these questions. I wish we’d got some answers, but that would have involved interviewing a member of the pup play community, and that might have seemed a step too far for the Weston team.

Overall, *Pets & their People*’s repeated obsession with narratives of naturalness, origins, and primitive/savage mythology means it seems to lose sight of the fact that humans are still animals, and the distinction between us and other forms of life is, in large part, a culturally constructed one. At one point, a plaque asks, “boundaries between humans and pets seem to be blurring. What is going on?” What is going on? I did have this question on my mind a lot during my 20 minutes or so wandering around this dimly lit room, watching some kids poke at the toy cat and Tamagotchi set up in the corner. Oh well. It’ll take a different exhibition to answer it.

MUSIC

What's Oxford listening to?



Emma at Merton recommends *The Sims 2: Nightlife (Remixes) (Original Soundtrack) (2005)* by Mark Mothersbaugh:

"An unexpected gem which I can't stop listening to. I can't wait for the day when they finally play it at Bully."



Flora at Christ Church recommends *((((ultraSOUND))))+* (2026) by The Neighbourhood:

"The album had little success on the artist's 'popular' songs on Spotify, but I thought it was some of their best work yet – melodic, cinematic, and full of yearning."

Image credits: 'The Sims 2: Nightlife' and '((((ultraSOUND))))+' via Amazon.

Internet babies: Meet the students of subculture

Sharon Wilson examines the rise of internet-born stars such as PinkPantheress

There's a certain kind of artist that I keep coming back to lately: artists who seem to know exactly what I want to hear before I do. Not algorithmically, but instinctively. Their music feels hyper-specific yet universal; familiar, but not quite verging on nostalgic. I've started thinking of them as 'internet babies' – artists born and raised online, whose creative instincts have been shaped not by a single scene but by years of immersion in fragmented, overlapping subcultures.

What defines these creators is long-term exposure to subcultures. Years of YouTube rabbit holes, Tumblr aesthetics, game soundtracks, and online music recommendations. A cultural collage of sorts, an environment in which emo sits comfortably next to UK garage, and indie sleaze bleeds into rap. Nothing feels out of place because everything was encountered together.

There's also a practical shift underpinning all of this. Music-making has never been more accessible. Any kid with an iPad can stumble across YouTube tutorials, free sample packs, and intuitive software that can quickly turn curiosity into something more structured. While barriers to music careers still exist, the act of creating music is no longer subject to gatekeeping in the same way. More self-sufficient artists are emerging outside traditional industry pipelines, marked by a notable increase in artists from working-class backgrounds – particularly female producers – breaking through via online platforms.

All of this marks a clear break from older models of music culture. For internet-native artists, taste is no longer shaped linearly, but accumulated and in flux.

Jim Legxacy: A student of everything, bound by nothing

Jim Legxacy is one of the clearest examples of this shift in the UK right now. The Lewisham artist, of Nigerian heritage, makes music that on paper shouldn't cohere, with rap, emo, Afrobeats, indie, R&B, even folk elements all pulling in different directions. And yet, on his genre-fluid album *Black British Music* (2025), it comes together in a kind of effortless logic. You can hear echoes of Britpop and indie alongside more contemporary rap and club influences. The album's title – often shortened to BBM – nods not just to Black British identity, but to the BlackBerry Messenger era that defined a specific

kind of 2000s UK youth culture. It's nostalgia, but not in a heavy-handed way; it's embedded in his sound and aesthetics, but never allowed to define them.

What makes the MOBO-winning artist's work land is not just the range of influences, but the way they're carefully stitched together. UK rap, especially in its underground iterations, can sometimes risk collapsing into its own conventions. Legxacy sidesteps that entirely. His music feels raw and unpredictable, yet intentional. It reflects a broader shift away from scene-based identity towards something more fluid.

PinkPantheress: The algorithm made human

If Jim Legxacy represents the collage, PinkPantheress represents the algorithm. Her rise was inseparable from the internet: posting snippets on TikTok and SoundCloud while still at university, initially without even showing her face.

Her music pulls from a wide range of influences: emo's emotional directness (seen in artists like My Chemical Romance and Paramore), K-pop's polish and melodic precision, and the rhythmic backbone of UK garage and drum & bass, all filtered through a distinctly British pop lens. The result is deceptively simple – short, hook-driven songs that feel immediate and endlessly replayable, built from a complex set of references. Her songs feel designed for how we now consume music: in fragments, on loop, through clips and snippets – a natural extension of growing up with a musical and cultural landscape that's constantly reshaping itself.

At the same time, PinkPantheress is acutely aware of the downsides of this hyper-online existence. In 'Internet baby (interlude)', she gestures towards the dissonance of being both shaped by and exposed through the internet, a tension that sits quietly beneath much of her work. Still, her impact on modern British music is undeniable. We see her breaking through to international audiences, with a recent showstopping performance at Coachella, and being the first woman to win Producer of the Year at the BRITs. She feels like a frontrunner in any conversation about defining stars of the 2020s.

Natanya: Genre as a palette, not a boundary

Natanya offers a slightly different angle on the same phenomenon. She was classically trained in piano from a young age, with clear jazz influences, but also draws from Amy Winehouse, Aaliyah, and even Vocaloid artists. However, her work doesn't sit neatly within any one lineage. It moves between neo-soul, R&B, indie, even touches of grunge, without ever fully settling.

On *Feline's Return* (2025), that fluidity becomes the point. The project feels ambitious and deliberately uncontained, drawing from both formal training and eclectic, internet-driven listening habits that define her generation. Her songs refuse to resolve into a single identity.

What's striking about Natanya is that she doesn't just draw from different subcultures – she moves between them so seamlessly that they begin to lose their boundaries altogether. In an interview with Exeposé, she said: "I think in worlds. Instead of genre, I'd rather imagine I'm somewhere." When listening to Natanya, you are transported to the scene that she sets with her diaristic lyrics and unique sound.

Taken together, artists like Jim Legxacy, PinkPantheress, and Natanya point towards something broader. Their work is defined by how it processes influence, reassembling fragments of culture shaped by years of online immersion. What emerges isn't just collage, but music that feels both widely legible and unexpectedly personal. What these internet-native artists are doing isn't simply repackaging the past – it reflects a different mode of cultural consumption, where broadly ranging influences are accumulated, reworked, and made intuitive.

To me, this generation has a distinct creative instinct: music is rooted in shared cultural memory but not limited by it. With the right level of craft and imagination, it becomes generation-defining. It makes me think about how I listen, not just what I'm listening to. I've grown up on everything from FIFA soundtracks to Paramore to K-pop – a constant stream of sounds that never really resolved into one identity, but gradually moulded my taste through constant exposure. Maybe that's why this music feels so familiar. It reflects that same way of consuming culture: scattered, overlapping, always in motion. I'm hearing it not just as a listener, but as a fellow internet baby.

Greening the Met Gala at Oxford's May Morning FASHION

CERYS BENNISON

With Anna Wintour trotting around New York and cosying up with Lauren Sanchez Bezos, it is no surprise that the 2026 Met Gala is hitting highly controversial seas. The gala itself needs no introduction: as the Metropolitan Museum of Art's fundraiser, it is undoubtedly the world's highest profile fashion event, with the red (or pink, or blue) carpet rolled out every first Monday in May to a galaxy of camera flashbulbs. Instantly dubbed the party of the year, it was founded in 1948 by publicist Eleanor Lambert to establish the self-funded Costume Institute. High-flying dictators of fashion – like Diana Vreeland and Anna Wintour today – have turned the Met Gala from a New York high-society dinner into a global phenomenon pumped with star power.

Wintour has co-chaired almost every gala since

1995, icily manning high fashion's gates. Even the Kardashians – having become a fixture at the Met – were barred until they had seemingly 'proved' their fashion force in 2013. However, Wintour's endorsement of Sanchez Bezos as co-chair and lead sponsor has led many to question the Met Gala's stance on Trump's tech-tycoon administration, enabling the purchasing of cultural capital alongside political power. Their combination of sunglasses and cinched Galliano is a poor formulation for this year's glamour. The price of a ticket is \$75,000; a table, \$350,000. Seeming increasingly in the pockets of America's billionaires, the Met Gala is no longer the escapism it used to be.

All that said, this year's theme of Costume Art posits an interesting stance on fashion. The newly released catalogue cover speaks volumes about the complicated stance of the body as an artistic and biological symbol: Jacques Fabien Gautier's Dagoty's flayed image of a woman's back (with her coyly –

and very oddly – looking over her shoulder at the viewer) draws on corsetry fashions rather than actual anatomy, evoking fashion's aestheticising power on art – even in the slightly gory case of a woman's ribs. Robert Wun and Thomas Browne Couture have since offered their own interpretations, with muscular, dressed embodiment implied through sequins and tissue-thin leaves of fabric.

However, bodily shapes also resurface in art, with Niki de Saint Phalle's exuberantly coloured, full-figured woman in her sculpture *Nana and Serpent*, adversely conjuring the extraordinary corsetry of Michaela Stark.

“*Slow fashion trends have long been embedded in folk and May Day traditions*”

Stark's garments redefine beauty ideals through reshaping the body in an unconventional way, maintaining a respect for the individual wearer's physique by emphasising curves in a technique combining custom-made lingerie and references to the Shibari rope-tying method. The theme essentially conveys a deeply embodied artistic and sensual relationship with the body, at a time when getting back in touch with our own humanity is no bad thing.

Of course, such themes often get lost in the Met Gala's media whirlwind. Craftsmanship falls secondary to the celebrity, completing the paradox that the stars provide an unmissable platform for a brand's garments, often footing the bill for celebrity attendance. Yet costume art (when taken more literally) also implies the painstaking haute couture process used to create the gowns: a slow, personally tailored technique antithetical to fast fashion's constant churn. Unfortunately, not the paradigm of sustainability either, the slower ethos of high fashion is nonetheless applicable to student wardrobes. Elevating her second-hand shopping to Gucci for the

2022 Met Gala, Billie Eilish's pale green and peach gown used deadstock fabric to create an ensemble from entirely pre-existing elements. This evokes recent online trends for garment embellishment, using simple and quick sewing techniques to upgrade an item that owners had fallen out of love with. It proves a cheaper way of updating personal style, as well as a welcome revision break. Following a viral recreation of a cardigan worn by Harry Styles in lockdown, JW Anderson released the original crochet pattern with a tutorial. Sustainability in fashion is collaborative, as healthy for our wellbeing as for our wardrobes.

The prime example of sustainable, collaborative costume art in Oxford comes from an unexpected tradition. Oxford's month of May is heralded by an altogether different celebration than the Met Gala, marking the start of summer through pagan and Celtic origins. For many students, the early morning at Magdalen Tower is addled with hangovers and sleep deprivation, but it is still often possible to spot the Green Man in the crowds and various Morris dancing troupes. With feathers, flowers, and leaves in hair, the materials used to indicate summer's return are naturally tied to the season. Furthermore, the costumes worn by such celebratory groups are often collaboratively handmade or embellished, passed down and adjusted through generations.

Social media slow fashion trends reflect what has long been embedded in folk and May Day traditions. This is most evident with the 'Jack in the Green' figure, a more modern spectacle in Oxford tradition that involves someone donning a huge wicker frame, which is covered in greenery and ribbons. Of course, this is linked to a more spiritual vision of costume art, posing a locally-grounded perspective on clothing sustainability. The Met's own take on the theme will inevitably come outfitted with billionaires and celebrities vying for coverage at an event that feels notably detached from the current economically divided world. Yet, as Oxford students, we can take a theme already embedded in city traditions and use it as a sustainable fashion impetus for reworking.

Image credit: Patrick Crump, with permission.



Toni Servillo shines in assisted dying drama: 'La Grazia' in review

Finlo Cowley reviews Paolo Sorrentino's euthanasia drama, shown at the UPP

Does Big Tobacco sponsor Paolo Sorrentino's films? Almost certainly not, but their money could not be spent more wisely elsewhere. One of the lasting images from Sorrentino's latest feature, *La Grazia*, is of Toni Servillo smoking on the parapets of the Quirinal Palace overlooking Rome. Servillo's expression is enigmatic, the view exquisite. As viewers of Sorrentino's 2013 Oscar-winning triumph *The Great Beauty* will know, there are few things eminently more watchable than Toni Servillo slowly dragging on a cigarette.

La Grazia sees Sorrentino reunited with his long-time muse – and what a welcome reunion it is. Servillo plays the ageing, lame duck president Mariano De Santis, a legal expert who is a “jurist”, not a politician (sound familiar?). He would normally be facing his last six months in office with the same detachment and letter-of-the-law rigidity that have earned him the nickname “Reinforced Concrete”. However, a bill passed through parliament on assisted dying must be signed by him to become law, and thus, the president is faced with a dilemma. If he signs, he is an “assassin”; if he rejects the bill, he is a “torturer”. Two petitions for presidential pardons for convicted murderers complicate the picture: De Santis has the power to offer the titular “grace” to those on all types of life sentences, medical and criminal.

A tired and grieving De Santis (he lost his wife some years before) proves an excellent vehicle for the film's meditations on life, loss, and legacy. Who better to weigh up the suitability of euthanasia than a man who has seemingly lost all flair for life himself, who falls asleep when he prays and is still obsessed with an extramarital affair his late wife may have had 40 years ago? “Who owns our days?” is the question that De Santis keeps coming back to with the help of his daughter and legal advisor, Dorotea (an effectively exasperated Anna Ferzetti). But the film also asks: “Why should we care who owns our days?” Though De Santis is a genuine Catholic, the existentialism at the heart of the film is reminiscent of the tortured questioning of a lapsed Catholic at confession.

Boy, does Servillo have range. This is not

his first time playing an Italian president, yet the contrast with his muted, shuffling Gulio Andreotti in *Il Divo*, and his exuberant Silvio Berlusconi in *Loro* is remarkable. He is able to convey a world of emotion in the most subtle of movements. It is no wonder the Venice Film Festival awarded him the Best Actor award.

As in those films, all the hallmarks of a Sorrentino film are here, if rather downplayed. The trademark big set-piece scenes do not disappoint. The Portuguese president's welcome to the palace in biblical rain is reason alone to head to the cinema. A dinner for veterans of the Alpini, Italy's mountain regiment, at which De Santis is the guest of honour, is profoundly moving. As ever with Sorrentino, the soundtrack is full of thumping electronic music, although this time with the humorous (you'll see why) addition of some Italian rap. You will leave the cinema with a host of unexpected, striking images – and a surprising affection for a horse called Elvis.

This is the most melancholic of Sorrentino's films that I have seen, but it was nonetheless much funnier than I expected from a film about assisted dying. From the reactions of those around me, the Ultimate Picture Palace audience certainly agreed. Much of the comic

relief comes in the form of the acerbic Coco Valori (Milvia Marigliano), De Santis' old friend, whom I could happily watch an entire film about.

If the film fails to fully capture the deep sadness of the assisted dying debate, it is in part because of the at-times clunky dialogue, also, unfortunately, something that can be expected of Sorrentino's films. The ending might strike some as too saccharine, but if you allow yourself to be swept up by the admittedly contrived plot, you will leave the cinema feeling pleasantly revived. Sorrentino's more muted direction here might also surprise those who came expecting the bright colours and relentless opulence of *The Great Beauty*. Sorrentino's famous maximalism may be gone, but the dry humour is certainly still there, just not wrapped in a bouquet of colour but instead a dull, wintry palette.

Will this be the definitive film about euthanasia? Probably not. But it certainly makes you ponder the similarities between death and justice, and to question the suitability of those who wield such decisions. If nothing else, it is worth going for Toni Servillo's performance alone.

Image credit: La Grazia via IMDB.



FILM AND TV

What's Oxford watching?



The O.C

Vanisha at Wadham recommends *The O.C* (2004-2007):
 “The O.C is the epitome of 2000's teen drama television. Heartfelt, high stakes, dramatic, and silly at times, it captures exactly what made this genre so enduring and re-watchable. It's sunny California setting also makes it the perfect fun watch for this Trinity!”



Rope

Emma at Merton recommends *Rope* (1948):
 “One of Hitchcock's most experimental films, playing with the idea of a single take. A murder with no mystery, the film asks the audience how far abstract philosophical ideas can be applied to real life, and whether we should really be gay and do crime.”

Image credits: 'The O.C.' and 'Rope' via imdb.com

In sickness, health, and wrongdoing: 'The Drama' reviewed

SIENA TRACEY

CW: Gun violence.

The driving question of Kristoffer Borgli's *The Drama* is: “What's the worst thing you've ever done?” The film centres around a couple whose otherwise perfect relationship is abruptly destabilised by the revelation of a shocking piece of information, mere days before their wedding. Simultaneously thought-provoking, highly tense, and remarkably funny, it deals with issues of judgment and redemption, and has consequently fostered substantial debate and discussion.

It makes sense, then, that when I first heard about *The Drama* a few months ago, it was because my social media feed was suddenly flooded with discussion of the film's ‘twist’, with people calling it shocking, controversial, and even problematic, although nowhere could I find exactly what this twist was. This mystery, aided by an innovative marketing campaign – most notably a wedding announcement in a real-life Boston newspaper – and the appeal of its A-list leads, had me curious and

more than a little excited when I sat down to watch this film in my local cinema.

With the film labelled a romantic comedy, the opening scene certainly lives up to that. An awkward yet endearing meet-cute at a coffee shop sees Charlie (Robert Pattinson) approach Emma (Zendaya), pretending to have read the book she is engrossed in. He becomes increasingly more embarrassed as she appears to resolutely ignore him, but as it happens, she simply can't hear him, being deaf in one ear and listening to music in the other. Once he succeeds in getting her attention, sparks begin to fly, and we're presented with a short montage detailing the next stages of their love story. In these first few scenes, the film does an excellent job of getting you to connect with these characters in such a short space of time. You know you want to root for Charlie and Emma; yet at only the 15-minute mark, you do wonder where the story is taking them next. Where does the titular ‘drama’ come into this picture of expected marital happiness?

This is where the promised ‘twist’ comes in. Charlie and Emma are taste-testing wines while deciding on a wedding menu with their best man and maid of honour, when the four of them take

it in turns to confess the worst thing they've ever done. The first three answers are a little disquieting, but none prompt any real moral outrage from the other characters. Finally, Emma confesses that, as a teenager, she planned and intended to carry out a school shooting. What's more, her partial deafness stems not from birth, as she had previously claimed, but from holding a rifle too close to her ear when practising with it. The bulk of the film deals with the fallout, and indeed the drama, of this confession, finally exploding in a chaotic and messy wedding that perfectly demonstrates the aptness of the title.

For a film that grapples with morally complex ideas and centres around a particularly contentious topic, it may seem odd to point to comedy as one of its strengths. Nonetheless, what stood out most to me about *The Drama* was precisely its funny moments. The humour is most successful at its bleakest, one highlight being the repeated anticlimax of a younger Emma trying to film a video manifesto with complete seriousness – not to mention decked out in all-black clothing and posing with her rifle – being persistently interrupted by mundane computer alerts makes for particularly comical, if also distinctly uncomfortable, viewing.

This is not to say that *The Drama* makes light of gun violence. Instead, it deals with relevant questions about morality in an intriguing and insightful way. It is a strikingly nuanced take on a familiar question: can people who have done bad things change? The decision to use a planned school shooting to interrogate this idea is interesting, since it is one of those acts that is often viewed in black-and-white terms. It is difficult to conceive of someone who has gone as far as to plan one out as a ‘good person’, no matter how much personal growth they have undergone since.

The film acknowledges the complexity of this issue, with Emma's confession receiving much worse reactions than the others, despite the fact that she is the only one who has not actually carried out her ‘worst action’. Emma's planned act is viewed as inherently more appalling because of the greater significance school shootings have assumed, particularly in recent decades, within our moral landscape. Borgli further complicates

the moral question by having Emma back out from her plan, not because of any virtuous change of heart, but simply because another shooting occurs before she can carry out her own. Her road-to-Damascus moment soon follows, yet we are given the impression that, if not for circumstances outside of her control, she would have done it, and we are forced to consider whether this is as bad as actually going through with it.

Above all, with Norwegian Borgli as director, *The Drama* offers a European perspective on what has come to be seen as a distinctly American problem. It is fundamental to the narrative that Charlie is English – having grown up in a country with strict gun laws, he struggles to understand Emma's reasoning, attempting to rationalise her actions by blaming American society's attitudes to guns, a perspective that I found myself readily able to sympathise with. Borgli is able to touch on a wider truth about American society – gun violence does occur nearly every day, to the point that it can be mentioned in such a casual manner. There is no overt pro-gun control argument in the film, and yet it makes a point of illustrating how gun violence is a problem that is not just individual but societal.

The Drama is a film defined by second chances. It opens with Emma giving Charlie the chance to re-introduce himself after a clumsy first attempt, and ends with both of them giving each other a second chance in a poignant scene reminiscent of the opening: they re-introduce themselves, signalling a fresh start, leaving both of their mistakes and wrongdoings firmly in the past. The questions raised about whether redemption is possible are answered staunchly in the affirmative by such an ending.

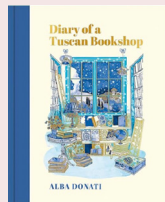
By no means a perfect film, *The Drama* is nonetheless a captivating watch that more than delivers on the promised drama, chaos, and mayhem throughout. It doesn't always get the balance right – there are moments where the school shooting seems more a plot device than anything else – and yet its happy resolution makes a thought-provoking contribution to discussions around personal growth and morality.

Image credit: The Drama via IMDB.



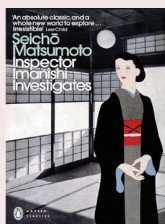
BOOKS

What's Oxford reading?



Amy at St John's recommends *Diary of a Tuscan Bookshop* (2022) by Alba Donati:

"If Trinity weather is making you think of Aperol spritz and train journeys abroad, this is the book for you. Donati's enchanting recollection of her journey in setting up a bookshop in the Tuscan hills is funny, heart-warming, and everything in between."



Alfie at St Hugh's recommends *Inspector Imanishi Investigates* (1961) by Seichō Mashumoto:

"Full of red herrings and clues, it's a complex and confusing mystery, but that makes it all the more rewarding when you eventually piece it together."

Image credits: 'Diary of a Tuscan Bookshop' and 'Inspector Imanishi Investigates' via Amazon.

Oxford and the ongoing appeal of the literary canon

JESSIE JUKES

I remember my tutor asking us if we thought our literature options were broad enough at the end of an Italian tutorial last term. This question really stuck with me: not because I have a clear answer (I still don't – could a reading list ever actually be broad enough?), but because, whether I thought so or not, Oxford would continue to teach the same novels that it has been teaching for hundreds of years.

As a Modern Languages student at Oxford – a primarily literature-focused course – I am no stranger to reading lists built around canonical authors. In theory, we are given freedom within a reading list; we choose, to some extent, the works that we want to study (though of course these include Dante and Petrarch). It would be, as I answered my tutor's question, easy to describe our literature options as broad. After all, I have managed to study female authors without having to choose a specific 'female writers' topic. And yet these choices are already framed by the same set of already-established works. The range of choices may appear to be wide, but its boundaries are clear.

In reality, while they seem to be fairly inclusive, our reading lists are composed entirely of works that form part of the literary canon – works deemed 'essential' and of the highest quality, historically chosen by a narrow and influential elite. These are the books that our tutors studied, as did the scholars teaching them, with their authority only accumulating over time. This status seems to justify their quality: they are good because they are famous, and famous because they are good. With this assumption, though, comes the question of whether we have inherited the habit of valuing these canonical works, rather than that of analysing and questioning them ourselves.

There is a certain pressure to enjoy the classics at Oxford, especially given our university's emphasis on tradition, and yet I have found myself writing essays on novels that I didn't actually like. Enjoying the texts feels like a mark

of intellect, seriousness, and taste, while failure to do so is accompanied by a sense of guilt and a suspicion that I'm just not clever enough to "get it". I wonder whether our admiration of these books and the appeal of the canon itself is genuine or just learned. Appreciation of the canon can become performative, something that is expressed rather than felt. I myself have avoided expressing opinions on novels I've studied here (in all honesty, I am not a fan of Sand's *Indiana*, nor of Ginzburg's *Lessico familiare*): there is a certain awkwardness that arises in a tutorial when someone says that they didn't like a set text, one which I would much rather avoid.

“*Their status seems to justify their quality: they are good because they are famous, and they are famous because they are good*”

Oxford's relationship with tradition only exacerbates the idea that the canon has endured because of its status: studying here comes with a continual awareness that we are not only reading a selection of texts, but the same novels that have been studied here for decades. There's a sense of continuity, a link to the past – we are partaking in an intellectual conversation that began years ago. The canon, through our reading lists, is continually pushed onto us, and it can be difficult to form our own opinions on these novels apart from the appreciation that is expected from us. When we read a classic, we are aware of its status even before we begin to develop our own opinions; they come with an

implicit weight and an expectation of depth, of importance. Our response is shaped before we start to read, which we then do according to this expectation.

So does the canon only endure because we've learned not to question it, or is it actually because of the merit of the texts themselves? The canon isn't simply imposed and followed – its works are (or at least most of the time) there for a reason, and I won't pretend that I don't love studying the majority of the works that comprise my degree. The same novels have often remained so influential and so widely read not only because of tradition, but because they continue to offer something to their readers. As a Languages student, reading texts in the original and finally understanding one of Petrarch's sonnets or a canto of the *Divina Commedia* provides an intellectual satisfaction that is hard to replicate elsewhere. Though it can sometimes be difficult to separate authority from quality, in most cases, canonical and classic works are genuinely well-written. We have standards for everything else, so why wouldn't we for books? And I think that's why the canon is so hard to reject: it's not just elitism and snobbiness, but its works have genuine appeal.

It's easy to think that the canon endures only because of tradition, and because we are taught that it should, but perhaps it continues to hold so much weight because it continues to persuade us. Even as we are encouraged to question it – as I myself was in my recent tutorial – we find ourselves not only guided to but drawn to it. Maybe it has continued for so long just on status alone, but to say this takes away from the genuine appeal that a lot of its works have. Since I have been considering this tension, I've become less interested in whether the canon deserves its status and more in how I respond to its texts. We can approach the canon with both scepticism and appreciation, and doubt about the canon's prestige can coexist with a genuine enjoyment of its books.

G for Georgian? LGBTQ+ representation in historical fiction

ELIZABETH GAMMAIDONI

It is undeniable that LGBTQ+ representation in the media has become more positive in recent years. One may assume this trend extends across genres, forms, and time, allowing previously unacknowledged LGBTQ+ historical figures to receive recognition. The popular series *Bridgerton*, for example, deviates from the books to feature two LGBTQ+ main characters. However, the majority of media with LGBTQ+ main characters is contemporary and does not explore the existence of LGBTQ+ identities in previous centuries. It seems historical literature has indeed fallen behind in LGBTQ+ representation. If this is true, then why, and how can this issue be solved?

There are a few reasons to think that this could be the case. For instance, a recent talk at the Oxford Literary Festival, entitled 'Gender-Fluid Georgians', saw Carolyn Kirby and Anthony Delaney in discussion on their work about LGBTQ+ Georgians. They discussed the many issues surrounding the writing of texts, both fiction and non-fiction, about historical LGBTQ+ figures. There remains a legacy of concealment that many appear hesitant to deviate from, noticeable archival scarcity (meaning criminal records are the widest body of evidence remaining), and moral discomfort surrounding revealing identities that were so carefully kept hidden.

Even if there are limitations and worries surrounding the representation of historical LGBTQ+ figures, it is possible to make up for these oversights. If they have been long under-represented, Kirby and Delaney try to undo this in their work. Kirby discussed this in her novel, *Ravenglass*, which centres on the life of the protagonist, Kit, whose disruption of gender norms forces him to live a life of concealment. Kit must suppress an interest in feminine fashion, and later hides in a more literal sense by living as Stella, in a fascinating exploration of gender identity.

Delaney's non-fiction book, *Queer Georgians*, explores silenced LGBTQ+ voices in the Georgian period. He details the lives of a variety of Georgian people, discussing figures mostly unknown, as

well as revealing information from the archives about the undiscovered LGBTQ+ lives of better-known figures. He especially discussed archival gaps and how deep one must look to discover historical figures' true lives, which is one possible explanation for the scarcity of LGBTQ+ historical texts. However, the existence of Kirby and Delaney's books is evidence of the increasing recognition being given to LGBTQ+ figures of the past.

One admirable figure that Delaney discusses is Margaret Clap. Nicknamed Mother Clap, she provided a place of refuge for LGBTQ+ people. She ran a Molly House in Holborn, a "pub for homosexual men" and gender-nonconforming people, where they could socialise safely away from the rest of society without fearing the consequences of expressing themselves. Elsewhere, this fear was strong given that sexual activity between men was outlawed by the Buggery Act of 1533, which said that the "detestable and abominable Vice of Buggery committed with mankind or beast" was punishable by death.

Margaret Clap is a fascinating part of the history of Molly Houses because of her rebellion against law enforcement and being "actively involved in legal battles relating to sodomy charges". Her aid was selfless; she put herself in danger to protect others and was eventually prosecuted. She was fined, made to stand in the pillory, and given two years' imprisonment; it is unknown whether she survived her prison sentence. The records of Clap's actions emblemise the issue of having criminal records as the main source for LGBTQ+ history. Not only does it limit understanding, but it is also reductive of the humanity of these people whose lives now must go unacknowledged outside of the record of their then-criminal activity.

Clap's form of allyship to the LGBTQ+ community is one that clearly had a great positive effect. However, it is somewhat foreign to forms of allyship today in that it required her to hide those she aligned herself with, rather than championing them openly. In modern society, the latter form of activism is often more prominent because of the increasingly accepting attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people, at least in certain parts of the world. Perhaps it is this tradition, and the lack of source material that comes from this need to

hide, which leads to fewer stories being told about LGBTQ+ people of the past, even whilst they are gradually gaining greater acknowledgement in contemporary pieces. We have inherited a legacy of both internal and external suppression, which has such power that it feels more natural to continue this than to break bounds. Despite the excellent work of these authors, as well as others, there remain difficulties in countering the issue of LGBTQ+ under-representation. Perhaps it does not feel truly possible to celebrate these people, given the need for any author to place themselves in the same position as the law enforcement who cruelly exposed their identities.

Even with the best intentions and in a much more accepting climate, it may feel uncomfortable to profit from revelations about identities that were kept so carefully hidden, and for such good reason. It is difficult to celebrate their humanity when LGBTQ+ figures of the past were not perceived (and therefore not documented in the archives) as such, and their stories rarely end happily. However, whilst this may be the case, the

books written by Kirby and Delaney, as well as their invitations to speak at the Oxford Literary Festival, are proof of at least some forward movement.

Therefore, it is possible to overcome the struggles of writing about historical LGBTQ+ figures and responsibly represent them. It may be necessary to spend extra time searching the archives, but this is not an impossible activity. Delaney discussed the limitations of writing a non-fiction text about figures who are often seen only through a criminal lens in the archives. If a piece of information has not been reported, if no humanity has been given to these figures in the records, then no humanity can be recorded in a history book about them. Such limitations do not, however, apply to a novel. A careful amalgamation of historical accuracy with the gift of humanity in a work of fiction could be the answer to this issue of responsible representation of lives once gone despised, who now have the retrospective opportunity to be celebrated.

Image credit: Elizabeth Bourn for Cherwell.



WHAT'S ON

STAGE

Legally Blonde
New Theatre
26th - 30th May

The Birthday Party
Oxford Playhouse
5th - 9th May

MUSIC

Maisie Peters
O2 Academy
12th May, 5pm

FILM

Orwell: 2+2=5
Ultimate Picture Palace
Until 5th May

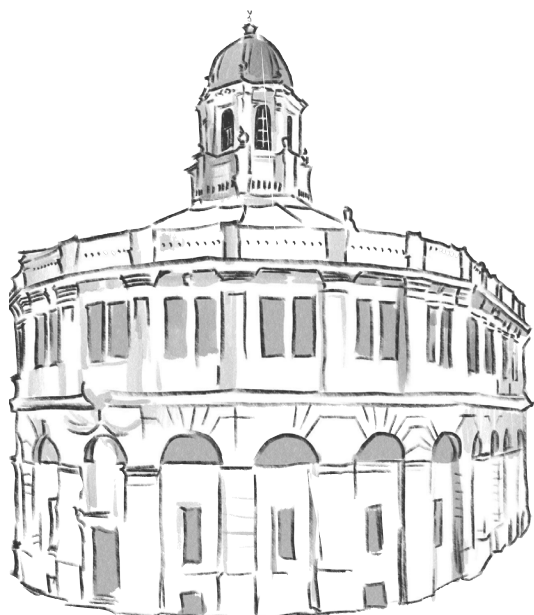
LITERATURE

Geoff Andrews: RADICALS with Tom Buchanan
Blackwell's
5th May, 5-6pm

ART

Foraging Connections
Modern Art Oxford
Ends 14th June

Wonder of the Birds
Weston Library
2nd May - 3rd January



The Source

May Morning

Smudged mascara and the curling of coffee steam. Small yawns and the shuffling of boots. Tangled hair plaited by the same girl from first-year, a crumbly pastry shared with her, too. Heads resting on shoulders, tired eyes looking skyward for the song that is coming. Fresh, crisp air and butter-yellow sunlight you could reach out and taste. There is excited chatter of stories from the night before, looks shared. A hush falls. May morning. See what the world can do before sunrise.

ELIZABETH BOURN



OXFORD AND
CAMBRIDGE
— CLUB —

WELCOME to your Club

For nearly 200 years alumni have chosen to take up membership of a spacious and elegant private club in the heart of London. The Oxford and Cambridge Club in Pall Mall is the perfect place to meet for a drink, entertain friends and colleagues in magnificent surroundings, play squash, take a break, host a party or just find a quiet corner to prepare for a meeting. A thriving social scene, sports facilities, a lively calendar of events including talks, tastings, dinners and balls, an exceptionally well-stocked library, extensive wine cellars and more than 40 bedrooms mean our members use their club for recreation, relaxation and business - and now you can too.

For details on membership or a tour of the Club house on Pall Mall, please visit www.oxfordandcambridgeclub.co.uk or call 020 7321 5110

Oxford and Cambridge Club
 @oandclub



Going to prison in the vac: Secret lives of Oxford students

ANONYMOUS

The question of “So, how was your vac?” often comes up in hall after a vacation, always from those you didn’t have time to message over the break. “I spent it in prison” is perhaps not the expected response amidst stories of ski chalets and exam lock-ins. But we Oxford students take pleasure in overburdening ourselves, and those of us who worked during the vacation have much better stories to tell than those who spent it cruising down a black run.

Over 150 hours of my Easter vac were spent inside the sturdy walls of one of His Majesty’s most secure men’s prisons – though fortunately I was able to go home at the end of the day. My job is a varied one: I help to facilitate daily family visit sessions by serving refreshments, supporting family work, and organising activities for children. Many of these children are told that their dad lives on an oil rig or that they’re visiting him at work, and my job is to make the whole establishment – with its search dogs, handcuffs, locked doors, cameras, and austere-looking guards – seem a less daunting place to visit. Wrapped up in a university that provides a college family in addition to my own real one, it is easy to forget that there are those who might only see their dad for two hours a month.

My favourite thing about work is our monthly Family Days, day-long visits where the men get to be dads again: they can get up and play with their children (rather than stay stuck in lines of dull grey chairs), they can eat lunch with their family, and they can finally spend some time relaxing. Seeing a little one yell “Daddy”, running across the visitor’s hall to be scooped up in her father’s arms brings a tear to my eye every time. I

will always remember last Christmas, when Santa Claus (played by one of the officers) asked one of the older children what presents he wanted. He said: “I just want Dad to be at home again.”

“*It is both helpful and humbling to have a reminder of the lives lived outside of Oxford*”

Those are the highs, though, and I see the lows in equal measure: I see men who are on drugs, unable to speak a coherent sentence. I see children coming to the play area because their parents are ignoring them. I see children who have had no male role model in their lives, children who have suffered. Just this past vacation, I was spat on, punched, kicked, and grabbed by children who know no better, whose parents sit, watch, and silently approve. Seeing this world – one so different from my own childhood – is just as unbearable to watch.

Being but a cog in the machine, I can’t help but wonder whether they will grow up to imitate their dads. For the inmates’ loved ones, the worst part is the “second sentence”, the sentence that families have to bear through loss of income and community judgment. And the suffering that families have to bear makes it all the more likely that the cycle of addiction, violence, and neglect will continue.

Most days at work involve living a double life: to the officers, I am the diligent colleague who spends his breaks reading *Beowulf* (collections

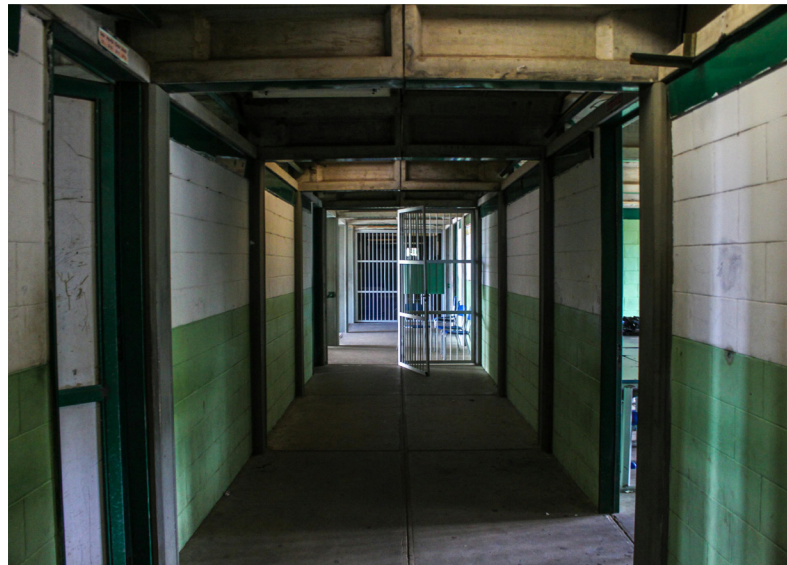
revision), but to the residents, I am just another part of the establishment. Not allowed to reveal any personal details (not even my surname), I am simply the “Sir” (or “Miss”, if they’re feeling cheeky) who serves the refreshments. For those who have been there long enough to remember me from the Christmas vacation, I do have to admit that I’ve been at university: “Yeah, I do maths at Bristol mate” is my normal response, dreading the day someone asks me my opinions on Fermat’s Last Theorem or expects me to solve a Sudoku.

But working with the men is the most interesting part. Speaking face-to-face with the people whose headshots have appeared on the news is an intimidating experience – dare I say worse than a one-on-one tutorial – but it does pop the Oxford bubble. From arguing with those who are adamant that university is a waste of money or “just for toffs” to having a serious conversation about a

book they picked out from the prison library, I am (or at least I hope) able to have just a little impact on their road to rehabilitation. And though many are happy to have a roof over their head, three hot meals, and all the friends they could need, an equal number are desperate to get out and see their children grow up.

When I’m deep in an essay crisis during term or stressing about an upcoming exam, it is both helpful and humbling to have a reminder of the lives lived outside of Oxford. And, in the world which we inhabit, so full of hate and loneliness, I find some inspiration in my experiences in a prison: somewhere that should perhaps epitomise these emotions. One that sticks with me most is a card written by one of the eight-year-olds: “Dear Daddy, I know you’ve been a little bit naughty this year, but that will never stop me from loving you.”

Image Credit: Maia Fotografia, PDM via Pexels.



HOROSCOPES



Aries

Make at least one enemy this week



Taurus

Yes! Keep bashing your head against that wall! Surely it will break



Gemini

Overcommitted, underperforming, right in your element



Cancer

Make a new friend in a strange location



Leo

Stop explaining your modules to friends as if they’re in primary school



Virgo

Karaoke at the Mad Hatter DOES qualify you for Magdalen choir

‘If he wanted to he would’ and other fairy tales

Jessie Jukes outlines the problem with the dating advice handed out on TikTok

“If he wanted to, he would.” Look under the comments of any TikTok video about dating, and you’ll see it repeated over and over again: it’s a promise of clarity, an explanation, a definitive answer to any and all problems that could arise in a relationship. But relationships aren’t that simple. With the rise of TikTok and the generic, algorithm-driven dating advice that comes with it, we are continually encouraged to seek a one-size-fits-all answer to our problems. As more of us turn to an app rather than our partners or friends for advice, we risk reducing complex dynamics into 30-second videos that assume the worst and ask for the impossible. TikTok has no shortage of “dating experts”, and their advice offers a bleak and overwhelmingly negative outlook on our relationships.

Today, I opened TikTok to see a video entitled “At the end of the day, dump him”, in which the creator listed a number of ‘flaws’ deemed worthy of a breakup. Among them, the simple act of questioning if your boyfriend has cheated on you: “At the end of the day, it doesn’t matter whether or not he was actually cheating on you, the fact is you’re questioning it.” Now, in some cases, this might be a valid point – yes, of course, your boyfriend shouldn’t be making you feel like he has cheated on you. But I can’t help but wonder about the effects that this sort of content has on relationships where this isn’t the

case. Or relationships where one party is naturally prone to doubts, and is convinced by someone they’ve never met to dump a boyfriend who is “trying his best”, because – as this TikTok put it – “his best ain’t it”. Every relationship is different, and when we simplify all problems down to one issue with the exact same solution, we strip away the nuance that real-life situations often require.

“*Instead of having a conversation with our partners, we’re encouraged to analyse and dissect*”

These TikToks, along with offering an overwhelmingly negative outlook, encourage unrealistic standards for our dating lives. Entering this side of TikTok, you are met with a barrage of content centred around communication. We’re not meant to be reachable 24/7, but by telling us to expect this, these “dating experts” are only setting us up for failure. Creators often make assertions about how long it should take to receive a reply to a text message (their answers all differ), but also about how often you should see one another (on which

they also can’t agree). Their advice is the same for developing relationships; I have seen countless TikToks claiming that if someone is interested in you, they will make the effort to seek you out. But the reality is that this kind of constant open communication isn’t natural. If your partner is working, busy, or even just in need of an hour to themselves, not texting back does not mean that they don’t care about you, and TikTok should not tell us that it does.

This kind of advice doesn’t just set unrealistic expectations, but actively discourages real communication. Instead of having a conversation with our partners, we are encouraged to analyse, dissect, interpret, and ultimately to assume the worst. Even where there were no issues in the relationship, this ensures that they can be easily created. TikTok constructs a paranoia, whereby taking time to reply to a message suddenly represents a lack of interest, and spending too much time with friends becomes a sign that they don’t care. We begin to hold our partners to unrealistic standards, quietly “testing” them to see if they will fail, rather than being honest with them about what we need. But relationships aren’t built on mind-reading. A simple conversation would suffice to fix most of the issues that these TikToks claim to resolve. But that wouldn’t generate enough views. And therein lies the problem.

The people making these videos know exactly what will work to gain

more clicks, more likes, more followers. They know that the more dramatic they are, the more likely their viewers are to continue watching, and this in turn ensures that the TikTok algorithm suggests similarly outlandish videos. And so the cycle continues; we see a video telling us that something our partner did is breakup-worthy (like when they took too long to reply to a text the other day), and we watch it until the end. This ensures that we are shown similar content. We then begin to overthink (how long will it take them to reply to this text?), and draw the worst possible conclusions when we don’t get the desired outcome. All the while, the comments section continues to whisper, “if he wanted to, he would”. And so we continue to doubt our relationship, watching more videos for an explanation – and the one provided is ultimately generic and hollow.

At this point, the problem isn’t necessarily the relationship at all. It’s the way that we’re being told to interpret it. These videos, through capitalising on an insecurity, manage to create problems even where there were none, so that their creators can then offer a solution. These TikTok “dating experts” may offer us a quick fix to our problems, but relationships don’t need generic answers or universal solutions – they need communication. So, if we want a relationship, maybe we should look away from our screens and towards the person that we want to build it with.

HOROSCOPES



Libra

Life's about balance: 50% club, 25% sidequests, 25% doom scroll. Oh degree?



Scorpio

You can sleep when you're dead!



Sagittarius

You won't find love in Plush



Capricorn

Streets are saying May Day is any day in May...



Aquarius

Banished to the Glink!



Pisces

People don't secretly hate you. I promise.

A class of their own

MARTHA HODGES

There's no denying that life at Oxford is filled with moments which would not exactly be considered normal to those outside of the Oxford bubble. Matriculation, sub fusc, bops – life here is permeated with language which, to those who are not familiar with the intricacies of this world, is slightly alien at best, and completely undecipherable at worst. I can completely understand how this exclusionary rhetoric feeds into the ideas of 'poshness' held by onlookers, but is this conception merely a myth, or does it still hold some weight?

I distinctly remember arriving at St Catherine's for the first time, anxious with anticipation about whether the people I would spend the next four years with would fulfil what I considered to be the Oxford stereotype: posh, introverted, and far more familiar with the library than the college bar. I also cannot help but remember the words "what school did you go to?" making their way into the very first conversation I had. Coming from a school where getting into Oxford was about as normal or attainable as going to Hogwarts, I was all too aware that my input to this conversation would hold absolutely no relevance to those coming from the network of private education.

Fortunately, I'm now three years down the line, and my time at Oxford has proven to me that my initial conceptions and experiences could not be further from my reality. I consider myself very lucky to be surrounded by people who are all from completely different backgrounds, and I feel as though each one of the people I hold closest to me has added something uniquely valuable to my university experience. Of course, there are the occasional moments of eye-rolling amongst us when an out-of-touch comment is made, and there are invariably topics of discussion that we cannot all relate to, but it is important to remember that this is not a phenomenon which is exclusive to Oxford.

I am also acutely aware, and eternally grateful, that Catz, known for its more laid-back and friendly atmosphere, is perhaps one of the least susceptible colleges to distinctions of 'poshness' which have the potential to create divides between groups of students. Having said this, part of me cannot help but wonder if this has less to do with the atmosphere of inclusivity that the college is proud of having fostered, or whether it rather plays into the desire of Oxford students to sometimes pretend as though there is not a class divide within the University. When such divides are not acknowledged, I feel as though this feigned ignorance has the power to become something more threatening to relationships. The desire (or even pressure) to blend in with peers is not something inherently strange, yet the quiet deceptions which underscore this desire to fit into a set mould have the potential to create much bigger problems than those which could arise from acknowledging our respective privileges and differences. A more diverse student body is something that many of us still chase, so why do we persist in trying to

fulfil conventions of a set Oxford type?

Although the people at Oxford may not inherently be any further from 'normal' than those at any other university (after all, normality is subjective), some of the institutional practices here are markedly more bizarre. After all, what other university precedes dinner with Latin chants? Or not only allows, but celebrates, three-way college relationships which result in having kids just a year later? Trying to explain Oxford's traditions to people who exist outside our bubble does draw attention to the bizarreness of life here, and I, for one, can certainly see how all the University's little quirks can be interpreted as 'posh' to onlookers. Even our sports socials – a decidedly common university affair – comprise games that get some looks when shared with friends from other universities. We can, of course, dismiss these as silly little differences of language or culture, but to those who aren't privy to life at Oxford, these traditions can make the University seem worlds away from real life.

However, it is perhaps in the subtleties of Oxford life that class differences become most apparent. The distinction of 'poshness' is one which, to me, exists not just between Oxford and the rest of the world, but also within the University itself. Existing at Oxford can be expensive, and class divides can manifest themselves in ways which may not be immediately obvious. Onlookers understandably perceive Oxford's balls and events as a 'posh' affair, but it's important to remember that this is a feeling which doesn't cease to ring true on a university level. Differences in class manifest themselves in the very fact that some students are able to attend several balls a year, whilst others never experience one on account of financial constraints. An Oxford Union membership was framed to me in freshers' week as integral to the true Oxford experience, and now I know that this is not the case.

It's no surprise that a world in which the significance of certain costs is overlooked, one with prevalent sentiments of "you'll only be here once" or "it's the experience of a lifetime", can give rise to the impression that its students are by default 'posh' and part of a privileged elite. However, the longer I spend in Oxford, the more I both notice the tendency of this sentiment being used to justify many of Oxford's traditions, and yet understand that it cannot be generalised to the entire University population. It's easy to forget that Oxford is full of people who live a very average life outside of the University when most of what is published online draws attention to the intricacies that differentiate it.

After spending a year away from Oxford on my year abroad, I have grown to miss its quirks – quirks which may translate as 'poshness' to onlookers, but do undoubtedly form part of what makes life at Oxford so special. After all, where else can you wake up at 5am to hear choral singing from Magdalen tower, get your work brutally scrutinised by some of the world's leading academics, punt down a river, and dance the night away in a black-tie ball, all within the same 24 hours?

CHERWELL-FED

A solo diner's paradise: Rincha Café review



PRITY LALOUX

As the sun shone over Oxford and my collections drew ever closer, I decided I needed a change of scenery from the panicked atmosphere of my college hall. So, I headed to Rincha Café to sample some Thai specialities and catch up on reading. I was excited to try this casual, sunlit spot, open continuously from 10:30am-8pm, so I could enjoy delicious food while watching the sun set over Oxford.

I often approach solo dining with a bit of apprehension. I always worry that I will be the only solo diner in the restaurant, or that everyone else is judging my attempt at reading while slurping down noodles. Fortunately, Rincha Café appeased these fears immediately. As I walked in, armed with my Plato and performative wired earbuds, I was greeted by smooth jazz, a wealth of individual seating, and many students with open laptops and noise-cancelling headphones. I had found the perfect place for my solo dinner.

My fears abated, I took my seat across from another reader, and set out to decide on my meal. This was no easy feat, considering the sheer number of options on the menu. In the end, I decided to try the Thai pork meatballs as a starter, the chicken mixed dry noodles as a main, and the mango sticky rice (obviously) as a dessert. I placed my order at the counter, and the food arrived only minutes later, served by friendly and welcoming staff.

The skewers were a lovely balance of sweet, spicy, and savoury, with the tamarind sauce providing a tangy contrast to the pork meatballs. I will say that the flavour of the pork is quite pronounced, so I would skip the dish if strong meat flavours are not to your taste. The portion was generous, with three skewers that had four meatballs each, but not so large that I did not want to eat my main.

While I had set out to have a semi-productive dinner, this task was made tricky by the delicious chicken noodles I

was served next. This dish commanded my full attention. The moment it was set down at my table (almost as soon as I had finished my starter), the peppery smell of the sauce had me salivating. The bowl was loaded, to say the least. Thin rice noodles coated in a sweet and peppery sauce, a pile of minced chicken, three generous chicken meatballs, a handful of soybean sprouts, and coriander to top it off made me question whether I had over-ordered. My book lay forgotten beside me as I focused on constructing the perfect bite. The different elements provided a satisfying balance of chewy, spicy, savoury, and fresh. I must admit that I was almost defeated by the sheer amount of ground chicken in my bowl, which might not be a problem for protein-lovers.

Menu

- Thai pork meatballs: £7.50
- Chicken mixed dry noodles: £13.50
- Mango sticky rice: £9.50

18 Broad St, OX1 3AS

Next came the star of the show, the love of my life: mango sticky rice. This mini dish came in a small plastic cup, the perfect portion size after my previous two courses. There was definitely more mango than sticky rice, but when the mango is perfectly ripe, that can never be a complaint. The sticky rice itself was warm with a pleasant coconut flavour, yet not overly sweet. The perfect end to the meal.

While the prices certainly do not make it an everyday treat, considering its location and the fact that it is an independent business, I felt they were fair. In a city where everything can feel rushed and overwhelming, the calm setting and friendly service at Rincha Café are a welcome addition to the hustle and bustle of Broad Street.

Image Credit: Prity Laloux for Cherwell.

AGONY AUNT

Dear Agony Aunt,

Why are there no outrageously hot and single men in Oxford?! Every time I want to approach someone, I find they're already with someone else and it's quite frankly devastating. Don't get me started on matchmaking social media either. They're always too shallow or deep in their questioning and rarely ask you for what you're physically attracted to so most of the time you're sat there, not attracted to your date and knowing nothing will likely come of it. Please, pull a Queen and find me somebody to love.

Dear Loveless Second Year,

Dates and tutorials have many similarities: you go in with high expectations, there's plenty of awkward silences in the middle, and you emerge a hopeless mess. Your Goldilocks man might well come, with his perfect amount of questioning and lack of rival suitors, whether he be your stunning poetry tutor or college grandson (as most Oxford love stories go). Unfortunately, my crystal ball does not give me directions to the nearest hottie, as much as I have tried.

But maybe you need a change of perspective? Endless dating will only tire you out. Rather, do you take pleasure (and even find another form of love) in friendships? In being fun and whimsical and living an adventurous life? And I understand, there's nothing worse than trying to let your hair down in Bridge only to be jabbed in the back by a more-than-passionate couple, followed by the mental spiralling as you watch in drunken jealousy. A time will come, but no one can make you happy if you aren't content with yourself first.

Yours Tinderfully,
Agony Aunt

Oxford, Alysa Liu, and the cult of radical self-love

Nora Miles reflects on whether the internet's new sanguine mantra is just what Oxford needs

I love struggling, actually," says Olympic gold medalist figure skater Alysa Liu, "it makes me feel alive".

The 20-year-old has become something of a global phenomenon, not only because of her success in Milan, but also as a result of this attitude of unprecedented self-confidence. The American had previously quit the sport at age 16 to spend more time with family and friends, but made a triumphant return in 2024 on her own terms, saying the sport gave her "something to be strong for". You don't need to understand the mechanics of a triple axel to be able to see the pure, unfiltered joy on Liu's face during her victorious Olympic free skate.

I am fascinated by mindsets like Liu's, ones that differ so starkly from my own. As a chronic depressive, the thought of waking up with such apparent unwavering self-belief is so alien that I'm half-convinced I'd be capable of some kind of acrobatic ice jump if I were able to similarly trust myself through the hard days.

And it strikes me that I'm not the only one in Oxford who could learn a thing or two from Liu.

At an earlier and more cynical time in my life, I saw Oxford as a city divided between us outsiders, crippled by imposter syndrome and self-hatred, and the wannabe leaders of society, brimming with confidence instilled in them since birth for the low price of £20,000 a term. Now, though, I can see that almost no one at Oxford goes about their day without overthinking, or an inner monologue telling them they're not doing enough.

A recent work by Oxford graduate Simon Van Teutem examines a "Bermuda Triangle of talent" wherein an unprecedented number of graduates are choosing careers in corporate law, management consulting, and investment banking. Is it possible that this phenomenon is a symptom of a crisis of self-esteem at Oxford? Two minutes on LinkedIn is enough to convince you that everyone you know has a millionaire-making graduate scheme lined up, and that you'd better quickly follow suit. I'm delighted to announce that you need to hurry up with your life. You're falling behind. Why haven't you been networking? Why didn't you start casing for McKinsey the day you received your UCAS acceptance?

So it is against this backdrop, as rejection emails numbering in the triple-digits burn a hole in my inbox, that I consider Alysa Liu. Bored of harbouring a heavy fatigue from ceaselessly comparing myself to others, I am optimistic, or maybe delusional enough

to hope that self-love really is learnable. What a relief it would be not to rely on a bottle of wine, or 50mg of sertraline to drown out the fear of being judged and found lacking.

In fact, self-belief is a more fundamental component of emotional balance than you might expect. In her 2018 memoir *I want to die but I want to eat Teokbokki*, the late Korean author Baek Sehee locates low self-esteem at the crux of her dissatisfaction with her life and personal relationships. To constantly second-guess what impression you're making on others is to begin to resent those around you for the most likely unfounded suspicions you attribute to them. It almost guarantees that you will never have a moment of peace. And Oxford can't afford to be negligent about moments of peace.

“
To constantly second-guess what impression you're making on others is to begin to resent those around you for the suspicions you attribute to them

Here then, is as good a reason as any to investigate the possibility of reinvention with a self-fashioned self-confidence. I had noticed that certain creators online referred to Liu in relation to the term "radical self-love", so I took this as my starting point. I scrolled through video after video featuring Pinterest pictures of women doing yoga and dancing in the rain, and found an entire genre of girlboss self-help books. But I quickly developed doubts about the internet's current favourite psychological buzzwords. After all, Marcus Aurelius didn't have to navigate this modern rabbit-hole of 'aesthetic' philosophy and profiteering self-help programs when he set out to know himself.

For example, I found out that the term "radical self-love" itself is attributed to the writer and public speaker Gala Darling, whose 2016 work of the same name promises to offer "the ultimate guide to living the life you've only dreamed about", and to help you "manifest a life bursting with magic, miracles, bliss, and adventure" for the price of £10.29. Did you roll



your eyes with me?

Although it feels cynical to side against self-love, I simply worry that this veers a little too close to the commercial exploitation of insecurity. If we purchase Darling's book in order to love ourselves, who's to say we shouldn't purchase a rhinoplasty, or that new designer jumper that everyone seems to have but you? That's not to say that I am against the movement as a whole, but at this point, I'm proceeding with caution.

In a similar vein to the question of commercialised self-love, I turn to another no less pressing issue: is self-love a mindset that you can simply decide to inhabit one day? Can you try on optimism like a new jacket and leave your old insecurities on the fitting room floor with other temporary delusions like belief in the tooth fairy? Thinking that such a radically good feeling will last forever is what I recognise as a manic episode. I'm pessimistic about the possibility of turning your life around simply because you decide it's fashionable to love yourself.

On the other hand, I consider that Albert Camus' freedom has, as its point of entry, an abrupt recognition of the absurd conditions of life. "We must imagine Sisyphus happy" because, having discerned that there was no power to prevent it, Sisyphus is free to conclude that "all is well". In this way, might it not be possible to navigate Oxford with an awareness

of the absurdity of the University and the social exigencies of its student populace?

Radical self-love feels artificially radical to me. I don't want to have to pay £10.29 to find out that I'm not as messed up as I think I am. I don't want to put my faith in a TikTok edit to inspire a shift in my outlook.

But maybe there's something profound at its core. Maybe it is still possible to start loving yourself and your life just by choosing to start swimming up to the surface. To trace the shape of the firm bedrock of insecurity and push up from it simply because you see that it is absurd. To trust that there's no concrete obstacle between us and a self-belief that doesn't flinch at the possibility of failure. The kind that helped Alysa Liu come back better than ever.

"Winning isn't all that and neither is losing," says Liu: "It's just something that happens, it's the outcome. But what matters is the input and the journey." The key word is input; a concerted effort, not a video you like and forget about. For many of us, self-belief doesn't come naturally and isn't going to manifest in us by osmosis. You have to practise. Not a triple Axel, but choosing self-belief. Because despite the girlboss idealism of radical self-love, Oxford needs a little more Alysa Liu.

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

OXFORD TINY LOVE STORIES

And there you were. When I least expected it, but most needed it. Chance guided us onto one path, but trust held us together. I didn't know then what you would mean to me now: a ship sailing through the rough storms, the trials and tribulations of a young life in a modern world.

But your light steers me to the shore. So far, and yet you wait until I join you. My mind is destructive, but you help deconstruct it. And so we sit on the beach, waiting. Nowhere is safer than in your arms, waiting for the storm to pass.

Jessica Gregory, Wadham

CHERPSE.

Oxford's blind dating

An afternoon at Coffeesmith...
Is nowhere sacred for Union hacks?



Mr LinkedIn Warrior

First impressions?

Lovely person – glad that we both showed up on time!

Did it meet your expectations?

Yes – a wonderful opportunity to meet someone who I may not otherwise have met!

What was the highlight?

Good conversations – many mutual friends. Very Oxford!

What was the most embarrassing moment?

A slight moment of awkwardness when someone else walked by, around a few minutes into our conversation, and asked us how we met.

Describe the date in three words:

Interesting; memorable; Oxford-esque.

Is there a second date on the cards?

No.

Miss Sample Voter

First impressions?

Oh, he is in a suit, on a bike, an ill-fitted suit on a bike.

Did it meet your expectations?

I don't know what I was expecting but I now know that blind dates are supposed to be blind for a reason. A lot of the date felt like he was doing market research, asking me why I would vote for X and not Y if I was involved in the Union.

What was the highlight?

The weather was nice and I got to spend an hour outside of the library. I got a new LinkedIn connection out of it.

What was the most embarrassing moment?

He took my phone and followed his podcast account on Instagram.

Describe the date in three words:

What a character.

Is there a second date on the cards?

I hope not.

SPORT

Oxford's Competition Dance dazzles in first place

Niamh Tooher reports on OUCD's comeback to take national win at Loughborough



Going into Loughborough, OUCD's Varsity loss on 21st February still stung sharply. Losing to Cambridge had been a difficult result for the team, particularly after our win the previous year. Despite an unusually warm and welcoming atmosphere from Cambridge (it's always friendly, but often on Varsity day tinged with a subtle frost), the team left feeling deflated.

With a national competition ahead of us, however, there was little time to dwell on our sorrows. Falling between Varsity and Loughborough, our annual showcase allowed us time to refine our pieces and, most importantly, rediscover our love for performance, growing closer than ever as a team.

“*With a national competition ahead of us, however, there was little time to dwell on our sorrows*”

Two weeks can make a world of difference. With the Loughborough University Dance Competition taking place from 7th to 8th March, this short window of time required the team to learn quickly from our loss, coming back stronger than ever.

Loughborough is the closest thing competition dance has to BUCS: with 29 universities, over 1,400 dancers, and a full weekend of competition across multiple styles, coming out with a win is the victory of all victories. Less about a single rivalry, the day determines national standing.

This year, for the second time in three years,

OUCD reigned victorious. A well-earned first place in this national competition almost healed the wounds we had nursed after our Varsity defeat only two weeks before. Adding to our success, OUCD were awarded Overall Best University, alongside two other headline titles: Best Dancer, won by Josh Redfern, and Best Choreography for Advanced Contemporary, choreographed by Christie Sardjono. To come away with all three awards is something the competition has never seen before.

Beyond that, the results were consistently strong across the board. OUCD placed second in the Commercial category (choreographed by Grace Hillier), and third in both Contemporary (choreographed by Christie Sardjono) and Wildcard (choreographed by Alex Somers). A consistently strong performance across a diversity of styles is one of OUCD's key strengths.

This breadth is typical of OUCD. As a team, we train across a range of styles, including ballet, jazz, contemporary, commercial, and hip-hop. Not everyone does everything, but the overlap between dancers means each piece is built from a slightly different combination of strengths.

The choreography award for Advanced Contemporary reflected a painstaking process that began months earlier. Pieces are developed gradually, through rehearsals that involve a lot of reworking, refining, and, if we're lucky, Christie exclaiming: “Holy shit, that looks really good!” Like any piece of artwork, by the time we present them, they've usually changed quite significantly from where they began.

Dance occupies a slightly ambiguous position within Oxford sport. We train at Iffley, deal with injuries, and go through Sports Federation processes like any other club. At the same time, competition is partly

subjective: performance, storytelling, artistry, and movement quality matter just as much as technique. That can make results harder to predict, but also makes outcomes like this particularly significant.

For President Ruby Suss-Francksen and the team, the result was a strong way to round off the competition season. Coming so soon after Varsity, it also offered a different perspective on how the year has gone overall, complementing other recent milestones – most notably securing our first ever Extraordinary Full Blue for Lucy Williams after her ‘Best Dancer’ award at the same competition last year, and increasing our provision of half blue awards.

While Varsity remains an important marker, Loughborough is a broader one. To finish first there, and to do so ahead of Cambridge, among others, was a reminder of what the team is capable of on a national stage.

“*To come away with all three awards is something the competition has never seen before*”

With the competition season now over, OUCD will turn to Trinity Term performances, showcasing our national standard choreography at Brasenose Ball and Magdalen Ball. That said, Loughborough stands out not only as a peak in OUCD's competitive year but in its entire competitive history.

Image credit: Still Sport Photography, with permission.

ATHLETICS CUPPERS

Fast times fly under the sun at Iffley track

Amidst clear skies, Athletics Cuppers delivered a showcase of speed and endurance as college athletes and Oxford University Athletics Club regulars went head-to-head. An array of impressive performances in the short sprint races included Shion Evans, clocking 11.04 in the 100m, and Thomas Wasserman with a 27.23 time in the 200 Hurdles. Middle-distance running was just as compelling, with Christian Cotchobos' 1.53 800m solo run. Ella Davey won the 2,000m Steeplechase in 7.13, whilst Alex Bampton ran 14.54 in the 5,000m.

OUTSIDE OXFORD

Oxford University Cricket Club India Tour

Fighting in ten games of cricket over ten days, Oxford University Cricket Club travelled to India from 15th to 25th March for its bi-annual tour. This was the club's first-ever combined tour, with both the Women's and Men's Blues Squads travelling to Bengaluru and Goa. Totalling 30, the club honed their skills at the Just Cricket Academy and Futures Cricket Ground. Both teams played 40-over, 30-over, as well as T20 fixtures against local opposition, winning and losing five games respectively across both the men's and the women's sides.

TOWN VS GOWN

Oxford City Bumps returns to the river

Oxford City Bumps 2026 returned on 26th April for an annual showdown between the City of Oxford Rowing Club and Oxford's Colleges. Pembroke College took the win in the Open Side Division I, whilst City of Oxford Rowing Club snagged victory over Gown in the Women's Division I race. Brasenose gained bragging rights, taking the Open Side Division II win, whilst St John's placed first in the Women's Division II.

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

OURFC's Joe Dingle shines bright at annual dinner

Hertford's Joe Dingle was named Whippets Player of the Year for a second consecutive season at OURFC's annual dinner. A relentless presence at training and fixtures, Dingle's consistency and leadership proved central to the Men's Thirds this season, narrowly missing out on a varsity win in a highly contested game. The accolade, voted by his peers, reflects the esteem in which he is held across the squad, with all team awards decided by player vote.

UPCOMING

Bannister Miles

Monday 4th May
Iffley Road Sports Centre

OUAFC Ball

Wednesday 6th May
Isis Farmhouse

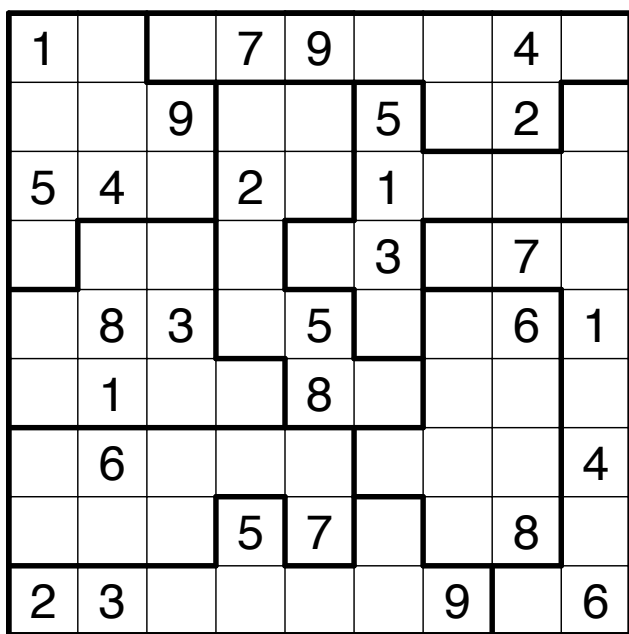
Bidwell 10k

Sunday 10th May
Town Centre

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

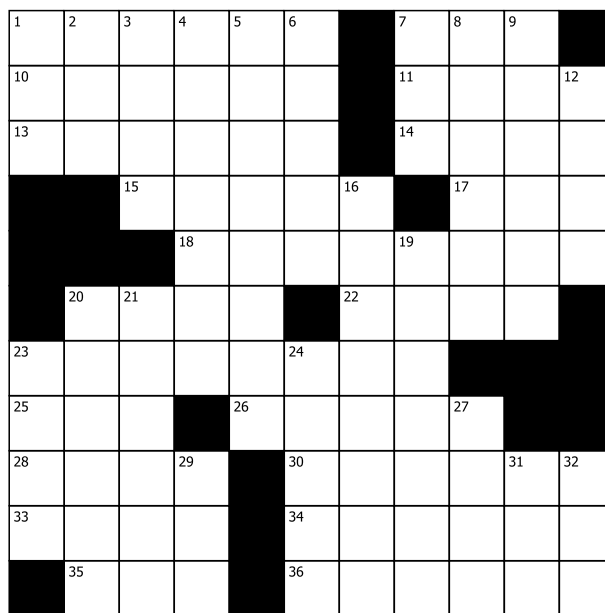
Email sportcherwell@gmail.com to write up a match report

Sudoku...? by ZOË MCGUIRE



Normal Sudoku rules apply. You weren't expecting boring square regions, right?

Crossword by ZOË MCGUIRE



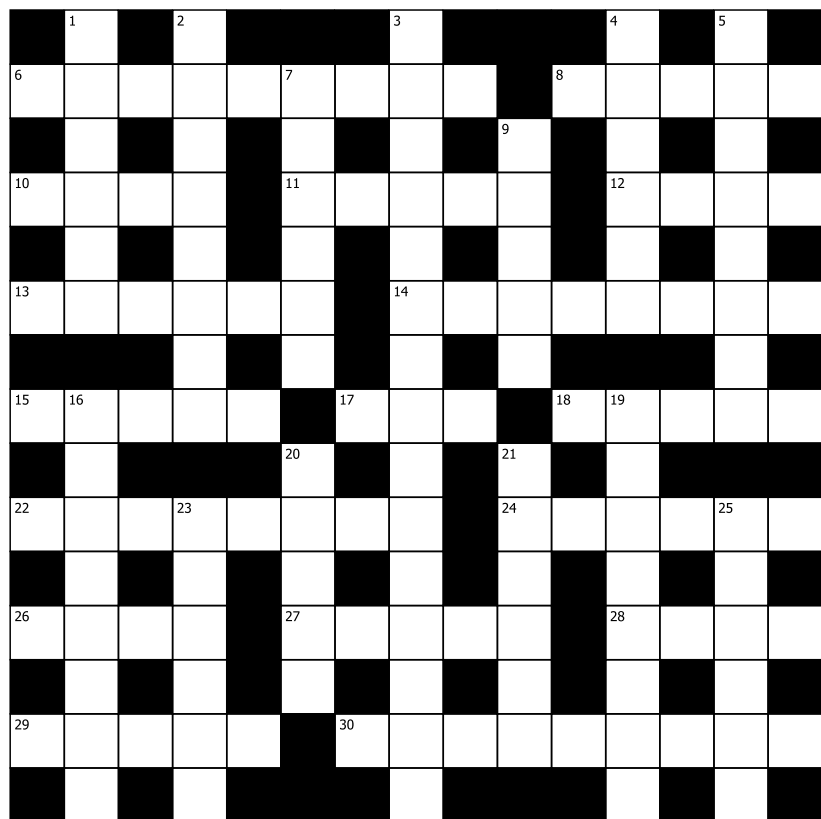
ACROSS

- 1) * See 22A
 7) Panic button, in a sense
 10) Songbird or Baltimore sportsman
 11) Right away
 13) Tapes over, perhaps
 14) There are two blank ones in a Scrabble set
 15) Minor disagreements
 17) ___ Pop
 18) Disobedient
 20) Fruit-flavoured liqueur, familiarly
 22) **What the starred answers are - this term especially**
 23) Where you might find a femur
 25) Command for a dog
 26) Reliable
 28) One of the great lakes
 30) Thrown in the air (or a D&D mechanic where you use a higher level spell s-nevermind)
 33) Tagus, Ebro, y Douro
 34) Words that might be in a Grindr bio?
 35) 'Splodey stuff
 36) Gomez, for one

DOWN

- 1) Friend of a friend?
 2) Pirate's utterance
 3) Familia members
 4) Nursing home
 5) Roosevelt and Rigby, among others
 6) Takes five
 7) Wolf down
 8) Grouch and groan
 9) Ant collective
 12) Word perhaps heard at the bank
 16) "I'm being serious!"
 19) Sound
 20) * See 22A
 21) Sparkling or still, maybe
 23) The U in UX design
 24) One of 17 Frenchmen
 27) Take out
 29) Watch setting for New Yorkers
 31) * See 22A
 32) Floridian airport code

Cryptic Crossword by ALESSANDRA EDWARDS and NAT ELDER Difficulty: 3/5



ACROSS

- 6) Test Labour's administration (9)
 8) Cowardly rascal pinned by the extremes of whimsy (5)
 10) Dock quietly - setter Elder edges (4)
 11) Laugh in DMs about fiction genre, showing allegiance (5)
 12) Nothing after half of buzzer round (4)
 13) Dream to be in many Oxford buildings? (6)
 14) Number endless list with time, or who will tell? (8)
 15) Fictitious son sucked into leaf-blower (5)
 17) Australian's foe represents energy with Greek character (3)
 18) Radical to take meat with different hand (5)
 22) Bit of hair to topple in 2020 situation (8)
 24) An aphrodisiac central to boy's term (6)
 26) First of all, you always want new reaction to boredom (4)
 27) Whisk in the extract, if low on cash (5)
 28) Trick with turnover dessert - add apple last (4)
 29) Setter embraced by lover without ring that's essential to your body? (5)
 30) Man taking long time - or "inventor"? (9)

DOWN

- 1) Bisexual enters toilet near small cottages (6)
 2) Natural listener to young lady that was close (4, 4)
 3) Perhaps a disciple site's random insects? (7, 8)
 4) Square food with artichoke topping (6)
 5) Tottenham admits promise was fabricated (8)
 7) Lonely robot that's foremost often left behind (6)
 9) Cry about right to be put on back of book (5)
 16) Not one to crush without at first nicely scented (8)
 19) Extra crack popularised without fizzy drink (8)
 20) Think about duck and rodent (5)
 21) Can't stand to look at that man (6)
 23) Barbie's guy knelt naked in the doghouse (6)
 25) Implement semi-stripped plan (6)

Week 0 answers:

Crossword: Across: PEWS, GUY, CATHERINE II, AU PAIR, NOOKS, A LA, TBA, LEA, ALL SAINTS' DAY, AKA, TREE, IVES, CAR, PETER GRIFFIN, EDS, TEL, EPI, TEASE, AM DIAL, ANNEXATIONS, ONE, EXIT. **Down:** PAPAL, ETA, WHITAKER, SERBIA, GIN, UNO, YE OLDE, CULL, IKEA, I SAY, AAA, ANT, SAVE, TRAIL MIX, SERF, IT'S A NO, SGT, CREATE, PETA, EDEN, FEINT, IPAS, NIL, SEN, EXE, DO I.

Cryptic: Across: SCRAPE, PLACID, ANTONYM, AVATARS, ASTERISKED, ACHE, SUSHI, TREASURE, DISPATCH, SLOPE, OUSE, TANGENTIAL, BATSMAN, DESIRED, EXPOSE, AGREED. **Down:** SINUS, RIOTERS, PHYSICIST, LIVID, CUTLASS, DARK HORSE, SKETCHING, STIMULATE, EASTER EGG, PRESS-UP, OUTLINE, TRAPS, AMEND.