Greening the world’s transport
An emerging global leader discusses Oxford, green transport and technology
‘I am Elle Tait. I applied to the UNIQ Summer School during my sixth form because I wanted to be sure that a law degree was for me.

At Oxford, I was fortunate enough to be supported with a bursary during my undergraduate degree.

Most of my time as a law student was spent reading and going to tutorials but there’s so much more to get involved with, which the bursary allowed me to do.

My main passion was journalism and I became deputy editor of the student newspaper.’

If you have made a provision for any part of the University in your will, please let us know so that we have an opportunity to thank you and invite you to events of interest.

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Oxford’s next college
The University is in the process of founding a new graduate college to pursue specific cross-disciplinary subject areas.

Meet Tara Shirvani
The millennial advocate talks about engineering, climate change, what makes a development bank tick and her memory of being a water polo Blue.

How to save the oceans
The concept of marine sanctuaries worked up into a formidable and realistic blueprint for a blue planet.

New era for Physics
Physicists at Oxford have a stunning new building, the Beecroft Building, and it is now officially open.

Postgraduate access
Oxford has launched a new access scheme, UNIQ+, for postgraduates.

Back to 1984
Master provocateur George Orwell is enjoying a renaissance, not least in the United States.

Quantum computing
It’s virtually impossible to explain but we think we’ve cracked it! Here’s our guide to one of the most tantalising technologies of this century.

Alumni at large
Bill Franklin, Irra Ariella Khi and Jasmine Richards respectively on the subjects of longevity, cyber business and bookwormery with a purpose.

Graduate power
A growing number of graduate scholarships are powering students to places they might only have dreamed of, and here are a couple of striking examples.

Double the money
Joe Double was helped by an alumni group bursary, a powerful new concept.

Angels in America
A group of Oxford alumni have got together and created an angel fund to seed-invest San Francisco start-ups – eleven to date.

Books
Afua Hirsch on racism in the UK; Felipe Fernández-Armesto on world history; Danny Dorling and Sally Tomlinson on Brexit; Susannah Lipscomb on the sexual politics of France.

Hail and farewell
New College Choir has issued a beautiful new recording of Charles Hubert Hastings Parry’s Songs of Farewell, linked to fresh research and a German connection.

Big hitters
Varsity baseball, not something you’re familiar to hearing about in Oxford? Think again. Oxford won too.
From the editor

Welcome to the 2019 issue of QUAD. Have you heard of VUCA? It stands for ‘volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.’ It’s the world in 2019 and it also frames our cover star Dr Tara Shirvani. Her story is fantastic because she offers inspiration to other alumni who may be grappling with leadership roles in a VUCA world. Development bank may not rhyme with silicon valley but the entwinement of environmental imperatives with technology is quite possibly the defining subject of our century. Tara says that Oxford helped her prepare by imparting a strong sense of academic rigour, with an ability to weigh evidence amid competing claims and, increasingly, outright falsehood and disinformation.

Tara was a graduate student of Oxford rather than an undergraduate, pointing to another theme of this issue. October 2018 was the first time in the history of the University that Oxford’s incoming graduates exceeded its undergraduates. You can read here about a new graduate summer school programme, UNIQ+, while we talk elsewhere to two graduate students who, but for generous scholarships, would never have come here. QUAD is full of engaging alumni voices, ranging from our oldest living alumnus – Bill Frankland, age 107 – to pioneering change-makers like Afua Hirsch, Irra Ariella Khi and Jasmine Richards.

If we end with the inspiring obituary of Diana Athill, it seems fitting to kick off here with another alumnus who has recently passed, Bill Heine (Balliol, 1967). An American, Bill came over to Oxford from Georgetown to pursue a second BA in jurisprudence. While he never formally pursued a legal career, what he learned at Oxford stood him in extremely good stead for his own little world of VUCA – created partly by a decision to install a massive shark model in the roof of his terrace house in Headington. The great fury of planners was unleashed and for years he had to fight battles, all detailed in his 2011 book The Hunting of the Shark. Of Oxford, he said, ‘The place was buzzing… It was so full of energy and life that I felt like I’d walked into a film set – except that people were living there.’

We hope this issue of QUAD demonstrates that Oxford remains as energetic and lively as Bill first found it.

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Oxford's new college takes shape

A proposed new graduate college, not yet named but informally referred to as 'Parks College' owing to its proximity to the south-west corner of the University Parks, is beginning to take shape. The aim is for the college to admit its first cohort of 50 students in October 2020. The college will be housed in a redeveloped Radcliffe Science Library and other buildings in the vicinity. The intellectual focus of the college is strongly interdisciplinary and builds on existing and potential Oxford strengths in Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, Environmental Change, and Cellular Life; all three broadly defined. In the future these three areas will be supplemented by others for a total of 6–8 research clusters. The creation of the new college is being overseen by Professor Lionel Tarassenko, a world-leading expert in the application of signal processing to healthcare. The college is essential if the University is to meet its goal of increasing the intake of graduate students across all four divisions by up to 850 a year by 2023. Like St Cross and Kellogg colleges, the new college will be a University society.

Blueprint for a Blue planet

Oxford has contributed to a landmark marine protection plan. The report, 30x30: A Blueprint For Ocean Protection, is the result of a year-long collaboration between leading academics at the University of Oxford, University of York and Greenpeace. In one of the largest-ever studies of its kind, researchers broke down the global oceans – which cover almost half the planet – into 25,000 squares of 100x100 km. Mapping the distribution of 458 different conservation attributes, including wildlife, habitats and key oceanographic features, they generated hundreds of scenarios for what a planet-wide network of ocean sanctuaries could look like. Alex Rogers, Visiting Professor at the Department of Zoology, said: ‘Creating marine reserves is critical to protecting and conserving the diversity of marine life.’ The report was published to coincide with a UN meeting to negotiate a global ocean treaty.

Chair of Celtic restored

Oxford’s Jesus Chair of Celtic has been endowed, securing this area of study at Oxford in perpetuity. Often described as ‘the Classics of the British Isles’, Celtic Studies is intensely interdisciplinary.

Cleaning up plastic

A group of Oxford students will work with the Seychelles Islands Foundation to clean up the badly littered Aldabra Atoll in the Indian Ocean, home to the Aldabra giant tortoise and a UNESCO site.

Elmer Cotton reborn

Oxford is not escaping the pain of a web-savaged high street. Elmer Cotton Sports on the Turl has closed, but employees have reopened it as Blue Blood Sports, in the Covered Market.
The Beecroft Building has opened, firing the starting pistol on a new era of physics research. Worldwide web pioneer Sir Tim Berners-Lee and donor Adrian Beecroft joined the Chancellor, Lord Patten of Barnes, and the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Louise Richardson, to open the new facility adjacent to the south-west corner of University Parks, opposite Keble College.

The Beecroft Building sits above the deepest basement in Oxford, a sixteen-metre-deep collection of laboratories intended to house extremely environmentally sensitive atomic-level experiments that are already allowing the University to spearhead research in quantum technology. The laboratories can maintain temperature to within a tenth of a degree, and reduce the amount of vibration down to the width of a few atoms. The Beecroft Building provides space for about 200 theoretical and experimental physicists.

The Department of Physics also has a new head, Professor Ian Shipsey, who previously headed the sub-department of Particle Physics. When he commenced his new role last year he paid tribute to his predecessor, Professor John Wheater, under whose leadership Oxford physics attained international pre-eminence.
New programme to give prospective Oxford graduate students a taster

Oxford University has announced its first graduate summer school programme: UNIQ+. The residential experience will run over six weeks, and will give 25 potential applicants the chance to experience what it is like to be a postgraduate research student at Oxford, with a focus on the medical, biological, mathematical and physical sciences.

UNIQ+ builds on the success of the recently expanded UNIQ residential for A-level students in their final year of study. It is aimed at talented individuals who would find progressing into postgraduate study a challenge for reasons other than their academic ability, such as socio-economic circumstances.

The programme will run for six weeks, from 1 July to 9 August 2019, and will give candidates the chance to take part in a range of research projects, including time spent in laboratory environments, all under the guidance and mentorship of Oxford academics and current postdoctoral research students.

All candidates will receive a £2,500 stipend to offset any loss of potential earnings during this time.

UNIQ+ includes a programme of activities intended to give participants a taste of life as an Oxford research student. Participants will also receive guidance on writing an application for postgraduate study and scholarship funding, and on improving their CV to enhance potential career prospects. Accommodation will also be provided for free in one of the University’s colleges for the duration of the summer school.

Havel’s Place restored

Havel’s Place, in University Parks, has been restored. The installation is one of several around the world that are dedicated to the memory of Václav Havel, the author, human rights activist and former president of Czechoslovakia. It includes two chairs and a small table built around a young lime (linden) tree – a modest place for rest.

Gone but not lost forever

An iconic presence on the High Street, the almond tree in front of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, had to be felled after it was damaged by the very hot summer of 2018 and weakened by toxic air quality from diesel vehicles. Since replanting, its cuttings have also been propagated by local resident Daniel Emlyn-Jones.

Oxford on Mars

The University logo can be seen on a seismometer that Oxford helped to develop, which has captured the first sounds ever recorded directly from Mars. The NASA InSight lander, which is supported by the UK Space Agency, has recorded a haunting, low rumble caused by vibrations from the Martian wind.
Advancing academic and public discourse on Pakistan

The Oxford School of Global and Area Studies (OSGAS) will soon welcome its first cohort of academics and professionals from Pakistan, as part of a new visiting fellowship programme established through philanthropy. Supported by the Rangoonwala Foundation, the programme will enable three individuals per year to undertake a short working visit to the University. Fellows will conduct research across a broad range of themes, including human development, economic growth, environmental change and democracy, with the aim of advancing both academic and public understanding of contemporary issues facing Pakistan. Creating greater capacity for broad and deep research and teaching on Pakistan is a key priority for OSGAS, and the foundation’s generous support will enable the school to work towards this goal. Professor Kate Sullivan de Estrada, Director of the Contemporary South Asian Studies Programme, described it as a ‘very welcome boost’ to the school’s existing activity in this area.

Widening access to Oxford’s botanical treasure troves

Oxford University Herbaria unite more than a million pressed, dried plant specimens from every corner of the globe, and represent almost 400 years of plant sciences research. But despite providing a rich resource for contemporary scientific investigation, only a small fraction of the Herbaria’s collections has ever been catalogued in digital form. Making the remaining specimens available online is now a key priority for the University. It’s an ambitious goal, but one that has been brought closer thanks to a generous commitment from Clive Gillmore. His gift will enable the digitisation of three parts of the Herbaria’s botanical collections, including the original 1660 herbarium put together by Jacob Bobart the Elder, first keeper of the Oxford Botanic Garden.

‘Digitisation is about securing the past and protecting the future of invaluable research and teaching resources,’ explains Professor Stephen Harris, Druce Curator of the Oxford University Herbaria. ‘Moreover, digitisation will be a catalyst for new ideas and investigations. We are very grateful to Mr Gillmore for this gift.’
‘Scientist surgeon’ will lead the way in treatment of colorectal disease

The Pharsalia Charitable Trust is generously supporting the creation of the Richard Blackwell Pharsalia Professorship in Colorectal Surgery, building on the University of Oxford’s existing excellence in surgical science and bioengineering.

Colorectal cancer is common. Early-stage tumours can be cured and this field of surgery has witnessed great strides in minimally invasive techniques. The development of targeted therapies for related inflammatory bowel diseases, such as ulcerative colitis and Crohn’s disease, is yielding important breakthroughs. Additionally, the value of this work in informing other areas of medical research is considerable.

Professor Freddie C Hamdy, Head of the Nuffield Department of Surgical Science, says: ‘Traditionally, surgery and research have been separate endeavours; however, the holder of the chair will be a leader, developing a research group, a scientist surgeon.’ For Nigel Blackwell, Senior Trustee of the Pharsalia Charitable Trust, the endowment of this chair has great personal resonance: ‘The founding of this chair means that the name and achievements of my father, Richard Blackwell, will always be remembered.’
Baillie Gifford support for humanities graduate students

Investment management firm Baillie Gifford has donated £600,000 to support graduate students in the arts and humanities at Oxford.

Between 2019 and 2023, a new scholarship programme will provide full funding for 12 DPhil students. The scholarships also benefit from matched funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of the Open-Oxford-Cambridge AHRC Doctoral Training Partnership. This unique initiative is designed to increase the diversity of the combined doctoral student body at the Open University, Oxford University and Cambridge University.

The donation will also support a new writing partnership programme at Oxford, to connect DPhil and masters’ students and facilitate new opportunities for peer mentoring.

Professor Karen O’Brien, Head of the Humanities Division at Oxford, says: ‘We are immensely grateful to Baillie Gifford for the generous and imaginative way in which they have chosen to support future humanities students.’

The University of Oxford has set ambitious targets to fund 300 new graduate scholarships over five years as part of its strategic plan.

Chancellor’s Court of Benefactors

The following were admitted to the Chancellor’s Court of Benefactors at a special ceremony in Convocation House in 2018. The Court, which has more than 250 members and includes 26 fellows, celebrates and recognises those friends and supporters who have been outstandingly generous towards the University and the colleges.

**New Fellows**

HRH Sultan
Dr Nazrin Shah
The British Foundation for the Study of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus, represented by Professor Nargiz Pashayeva
Heritage Lottery Fund, represented by Sir Peter Luff
Sir Martin Smith and Lady Smith, OBE

**New Members**

Mr Mohamed Amersi
Dame Pamela Banks
Mr Duncan Greenland, CBE and Mrs Barbara Greenland
Mr Bruns H Grayson
Mr James Mellon
Mr David Norwood
The Rotary Foundation, represented by Mr Michael Webb
Mr Bjorn Saven
Mr Julian Schild

Clarendon Arch

Coinciding with the Chancellor’s Court of Benefactors annual ceremony, an unveiling celebration was held for the donors whose names have recently been engraved onto the slate tablets under the Clarendon Arch, near to the Bodleian Library. The Clarendon Arch records the names of some of the University’s most prominent benefactors, dating all the way back to Henry VIII and Sir Thomas Bodley. In 2018, the University added an unprecedented 22 names.
Joining the man who explains equations

An alumni group bursary helped Joe Double explore the further reaches of mathematics during the long vacation.

Thanks to a bursary from the East Kent alumni group, Oxford undergraduate Joe Double (St Hugh’s, 2015) was able to spend the summer of 2018 working with his Oxford tutor, Dr Tom Crawford (tomrocksmaths.com), to produce pieces explaining complex mathematical topics to a general audience.

OUS East Kent (OUSEK) is just one of a number of alumni groups to offer student bursaries. Every year they award several grants, of up to £750 each, to Oxford undergraduates from the East Kent region to assist with the cost of degree-related long vacation projects such as these.

‘Without the help of the OUS East Kent group, I couldn’t have taken up this opportunity,’ says Joe. ‘With their grant’s help, I was able to afford to live in Oxford through a large part of the summer, allowing me to work in close contact with my tutor and use his studio for creating the videos and audio pieces I worked on.’

Joe certainly made the most of his opportunity, producing a variety of pieces that prove maths isn’t boring. In Take me to your Chalkboard, Joe speaks to philosopher Professor Adrian Moore to find out if alien maths is different from ours. He produced an audio piece about his tutor’s latest mathematical tattoo; and in his main video project, Joe asks Would Alien (Non-Euclidean) Geometry Break Our Brains?

Perhaps not a typical summer vacation project – but as Joe explains, ‘the OUSEK grant can be put to use far more flexibly than those from bigger schemes, so I recommend applying if you have an idea for a project for your time at Oxford which is on the unusual side!’

In 2018 OUS East Kent also awarded bursaries to support placements at the Louvre in Paris and the Rene Magritte Museum in Brussels. They enabled an ordinand to experience the ecclesiastical landscape of Romania and funded a trip to Lamledra House in Cornwall.
In March this year at the New York Athletic Club in New York City, athletes, alumni and current students gathered for a University of Oxford and Vincent’s Club Celebration of Sport.

The Chancellor, Lord Patten of Barnes, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Louise Richardson, and President of Vincent’s Club, Sophie Taylor (St Catz, 2013), gave speeches on the importance of sport in students’ lives. There was a clear sense of camaraderie that stretched across both generations and oceans, creating a jovial atmosphere in the room.

The Master of Ceremonies was the Chairman of the Board of Americans for Oxford, Neil Simpkins (LMH, 1984), a Squash Blue and Vincent’s Club member, who announced that $1.3 million was raised in support of Sport and Vincent’s.

It is hoped this celebration will serve as a springboard to help secure the future of the Iffley Road Complex and legacy of Vincent’s Club serving athletes and scholars for years to come.

Meet some great alumni start-ups

Charlie Maynard (Christ Church, 1990) is the co-founder and CEO of Going Merry, a US platform that matches students with scholarships offered by colleges and independent providers. Going Merry is used by more than 7,000 high schools across the US, having launched in 2018 from a graduate research project at Stanford University. Its mission is to give every student equal access to life-changing education.

BabyNoggin is an app platform allowing parents to track children’s developmental delays at home using evidence-based screening tools, and to connect to clinicians, teachers, and local resources for further follow-up.

Founded by Dr Jin Lee (Pembroke College, 2008), the BabyNoggin mission is to achieve universal screening and intervention as well as better outcomes for all children.

OpenSponsorship connects brands to athletes and teams, through data-driven insights, using artificial intelligence. Having completed more than 3,000 deals, it is the largest marketplace in sports globally. Founder and CEO Ishveen Anand (Keble, 2003) started the sports tech start-up to solve the inefficiencies she experienced within the sponsorship industry during her time as a sports agent.
In late 2014, 50 Oxford alumni based in the San Francisco Bay Area began meeting monthly to present business plans to others in the Oxford alumni community. The Oxford Entrepreneurs of the Bay Area, spearheaded by Gauthier Philipart (Green Templeton, 2005), now has more than 300 participants who come together to hear company pitches, discuss new ventures, and provide feedback and support to each other.

By 2016, the group of founders, investors and mentors decided that they wanted to be able to offer more and ‘pay forward’ in return for the opportunities they have enjoyed as a result of their time at Oxford. Out of this came the idea for the Oxford Angel Fund – a small focused fund providing seed funding from Bay Area Oxford investors to early-stage companies with Oxford founders and Bay Area operations. The fund is managed by four Oxford alumni, Neil Wolff (Green Templeton, 1979), Cameron Turner (Christ Church, 2004), Rich Gill (St Catherine’s, 1997) and Paula Skokowski (St Edmund Hall, 1983).

‘Many of the company pitches were so good, we looked for opportunities to invest and provide more support,’ explains fund manager Paula Skokowski (St Edmund Hall, 1983). ‘The goal was to test whether we would find sufficient, quality deal flow.’

There was no need for concern: 40 start-ups were invited to pitch and so far the Fund has invested in 11 of them. The varied portfolio covers companies in financial technology, sports sponsorship, healthcare, textiles and networking. ‘Most importantly, 80% of the companies are doing well – extraordinary survival rates for angel investments.’

So what’s next on the horizon for the entrepreneurs? Following approaches by investors and founders from across the US, the group is now exploring opportunities for similar groups in cities including Boston, Washington DC and New York. Plans are also under way for a second round of the Oxford Angel Fund with a similarly wide geographical reach and a larger investment.

‘With Fund II, we are expanding the scope beyond the San Francisco Bay Area to include Oxford-educated founders and investors from anywhere in the US.’ And whereas Fund I, at just over $525,000 in size, was limited to one $25,000 investment per company, with Fund II the investors are aiming for $10 million to allow larger investments in promising companies.

But it’s not all about the money. ‘We concluded in operating Fund I that the expertise and connections which Oxford alumni can provide to each other are equal to, if not greater in value than the funds we invest.’ says Paula. ‘Fund II will continue to cooperate actively with the group to help build a strong Oxford entrepreneurial network.’

Oxford alumni interested in entrepreneurship are invited to join the group’s monthly meetings. Details are posted in their LinkedIn group. You can find out more about the group at oeofthebay.com
Square the circle with Oxford’s alumni magazine

For the latest Oxford news and alumni stories visit: alumni.ox.ac.uk/quad
Striking gold in China

Oxford historian’s book is named among most influential translated into Chinese, writes Stuart Gillespie.

In the summer of 2015, Peter Frankopan published The Silk Roads: A New History of the World, described by Bloomsbury as ‘a major reassessment of world history in light of the economic and political renaissance in the re-emerging east’.

Just three-and-a-half years later, the book has been named one of the 25 most important works translated into Chinese over the past 40 years.

Professor Frankopan, Professor of Global History at Oxford and Senior Research Fellow at Worcester College, said he was ‘flabbergasted’ to be chosen for the list compiled by Amazon China.

‘I thought it was a wind-up. Many of the books on the list are ones I admire hugely, and to be mentioned in the same breath as The Great Gatsby, One Hundred Years of Solitude or A Brief History of Time is genuinely astonishing. Tastes come and go, so who knows if it will still be mentioned in 25 years’ time. But it is a great testimony to the importance of the humanities in general, of history, and of the impact that historical writing can have far beyond the Senior Common Rooms of Oxford.’

The Silk Roads challenged Eurocentric views of world history, shifting the focus east of the Mediterranean. A bestseller in a host of countries and categories, it was met with widespread acclaim. Last year’s The New Silk Roads explores more recent events.

In Professor Frankopan’s own words, by writing The Silk Roads he was ‘trying to explain how the past looks from the perspective of the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, Central Asia and beyond’.

He adds: ‘I’ve been a Senior Research Fellow at Worcester for nearly 20 years, and Director of the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research since it was founded nearly a decade ago. I simply wanted to explain why the regions, peoples and cultures that I work on are not just interesting, but also important. I spent many, many late nights at my computer trying to work out if it was possible. I never thought for a moment about whether lots of people would read it. But I did think it was worth trying to write!’
Orwell is going through something of a renaissance in the US. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is once again a bestseller there. Young Americans are excited by left-wing ideas and anxious about new forms of tyranny.

*Liberty, Equality and Humbug: Orwell’s Political Ideals* could hardly be better timed. Yet Dwan queries the thought. ‘Everyone tends to invoke Orwell,’ he tells me. ‘“What would Orwell have said?” has become a ubiquitous question.’ It is, he says, ‘an empty form of self-benediction’.

The English Faculty Associate Professor, a fellow of Hertford College, says he began the book long before Donald Trump was elected US President. His introduction opens by pointing out that in Westminster it’s been 1984 for a very long time. His purpose is not to debate current affairs.

Nor does he rehearse Orwell’s life – which spanned Eton, attempts at rough living, volunteering in the Spanish Civil War, and isolation on the Isle of Jura. Dwan’s aim is to place Orwell in a broader intellectual context – political and philosophical.

Orwell wrote fantastically, had loads of rich ideas and still has plenty of admirers, but arguably he left behind no ‘school’ of followers. Dwan says, ‘It’s hard to say he left behind a school because it’s hard to know whether he left behind a systematic doctrine or a particular method.’

Orwell’s friend Cyril Connolly noted in 1955 how he ‘reduced everything to politics... He could not blow his nose without moralising on the conditions in the handkerchief industry.’ Yet the closest Orwell came to a systematic position was his anti-systematism, says Dwan, citing Bertrand Russell’s dictum that ‘a
scepticism about philosophy when pursued systematically enough begins to look a bit like a philosophy’.

Dwan writes, ‘The fraternity of porcupines seemed to suit Orwell best: distance between individuals was necessary, otherwise freedom would suffer.’ He is excellent at isolating Orwell’s contradictions, which define the book. He laughed at pistachio-shirted socialists. He embraced the warmth of poor people, but from a patrician distance. He was consistently anti-intellectual – a trait of British politics and public life. ‘Any intellectual can make you out a splendid “case” for smashing the German Trade Unions and smashing the Jews,’ he argued. ‘But the common man simply knows that these practices are wrong.’

Orwell places a huge bounty on the moral strength of intuition, denouncing the amoral ends-justify-means instrumentalism of Trotsky and other revolutionaries of the left. He frequently begins a sentence with a rhetorical appeal that ‘anyone except a monster or an idiot knows’ such-and-such to be the case. Despite these problems, and not discounting the worry that Orwell at base is a pile of platitudes, there remains his art.

To most of us, it is in Nineteen Eighty-Four and Animal Farm that Orwell hit his stride and most clearly embraced the warmth of poor people, discounting the worry that Orwell except a monster or an idiot knows’ a splendid “case” for smashing the porcupines seemed to suit Orwell best: distance between individuals was necessary, otherwise freedom would suffer.’ He is excellent at isolating Orwell’s contradictions, which define the book. He laughed at pistachio-shirted socialists. He embraced the warmth of poor people, but from a patrician distance. He was consistently anti-intellectual – a trait of British politics and public life. ‘Any intellectual can make you out a splendid “case” for smashing the German Trade Unions and smashing the Jews,’ he argued. ‘But the common man simply knows that these practices are wrong.’

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To most of us, it is in Nineteen Eighty-Four and Animal Farm that Orwell hit his stride and most clearly understood his era of totalitarianism and world war. But to Dwan, the novels – including less famous titles such as Keep the Aspidistra Flying – accommodated Orwell’s confusion as a philosopher. They are fictional reflections of human moral and political ambiguity.

In his wider work, Dwan writes on the relationship between literature and intellectual history, particularly moral and political philosophy, from the late eighteenth- to the early twentieth century. His study of Orwell’s inconsistencies allows the writer to be re-accommodated without hero-worship. Different readers will interpret different Orwells, while proper scrutiny of his work can also ‘acquaint us with the complexity of our own moral heritage’.

With copious notes and a beautifully wrought introduction, Dwan sets out to systematise Orwell in a way that Orwell couldn’t himself. Dwan says of the exercise, ‘It makes us think hard about the merits of systematisation, or emphasises the limits of systematisation.’ His study shows Orwell ‘a fairly inconsistent defender’ of liberty, equality, solidarity, truth and happiness, with ‘conflicted views on all of these things’. But unpacking the contradictions allows Dwan to identify the mainstays of his position, such as it was. It also leads to an important question from Dwan: ‘How much coherence can we legitimately expect in moral or political life?’

He identifies in Orwell a certain republican cussedness, where truth is told to power, often rudely. Other practitioners include British-American critic Christopher Hitchens and American neoconservative pundit Norman Podhoretz – who has also liked to present himself as a second-wave Orwell.

‘In the Orwell-waving articles you get a certain tone, a mode of address that is sometimes quite aggressive. Some of this might be related back to a republican tradition stretching all the way back to Machiavelli – in which the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. Citizenship requires a virtuous paranoia, since power will always be abused.’

In the face of Trump what would Orwell say? ‘Panicked about the decline of truth in his own day, it’s hard to say that he would feel particularly upbeat about its further decline in ours. Yet he was also an enthusiastic defender of freedom of speech.’

He ridiculed fruit-juice drinkers, nudists, Quakers and homosexuals. Yet he went out of his way to defend respect and tolerance, giving a fair hearing to ideological adversaries like P G Wodehouse or Rudyard Kipling, and even advertising his own inability to hate Hitler.

On Brexit, Dwan has a clear sense of Orwell’s ambiguities. It is tempting to think of him as a left-wing Brexiteer. ‘He prided himself on a certain honest-to-goodness Englishness, sceptical of continental abstractions and wedded to ancient traditions of native liberty.’ On the other hand, he was a huge critic of English isolationism in the 1950s, and took a bullet in the neck fighting for republican Spain.

In fact Orwell defended a United States of Europe in the late 1940s as the only bulwark to Soviet and American power. Unlike many people these days, Orwell felt you could be both – a good Englishman and a good European.


David Dwan is Associate Professor in English at Hertford College, Oxford. He writes on the relationship between literature and intellectual history, particularly moral and political philosophy, from the late eighteenth- to the early twentieth century.
Dr Tara Shirvani leads the ‘greening’ and ‘smarting’ of €1 billion a year in transport funds, a huge role at the age of 31. An emerging global leader talks to Richard Lofthouse about Oxford, green transport and technology.

Aren’t big development banks too often famous for funding insensitive dams, motorways or coal-powered power stations. What does green actually mean here, I ask?

Shirvani says that the bank recently adopted a ‘no coal, no caveats’ financing policy and has slashed lending to oil exploration and production projects. ‘This is a big step in the right direction and certainly brings into sharper relief the activities of Chinese and other development banks that finance huge numbers of coal and oil projects around the world.’

In her previous, not dissimilar role at the World Bank, Tara helped to deploy a rapid-transit bus pilot in Dakar, Senegal, the first of its kind in francophone West Africa. At the EBRD she’s fully supporting a green cities initiative, which is also very attentive to the potential for new technology.

‘The EBRD is in pole position to exploit the 4th industrial technology for its members. I view everything through a green lens but also through a smart innovation lens.’

One example of a tech–green tie-up is a smart-refuse project in Amman, Jordan, where cheap sensors inside civic waste bins will lead to refuse collection based on actual need, reducing driven miles and air pollution. In Tbilisi, Georgia, an EBRD loan and grant has replaced 143 obsolete diesel buses with modern, low floor Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) buses, reducing climate emissions and more especially local emissions injurious to public health.

In the bigger picture, Tara talks about greening the ‘Silk Road’, adding that she’s advising the government of Azerbaijan on a digitisation strategy for the Middle Corridor, the key freight line of the New Silk Road project stretching from China all the way to the Black Sea and beyond. Alongside, she hopes for a major Green Ports project to integrate renewable energy into port operations in Baku... to achieve sustainable trade and transport between...
the Caspian sea ports of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and the wider region, including Europe.’

The daughter of Iranian parents, Tara lived in Vienna, Austria, until the age of 19, her father having moved there to pursue a PhD in forestry. This explains why Tara speaks not only Farsi and English but also German and French. Cross that international background with a BSc in International Management including corporate finance, a Cambridge MPhil in Engineering and an Oxford DPhil in Inorganic Chemistry and Fuel Technology, and the resulting skill set is impressive. Tara also professes an abiding enthusiasm for politics, even though its harsh realities so often frustrate idealism and what she refers to as ‘the holistic view of things’.

In this, her Oxford mentor and supervisor, former chief science advisor to the British government Sir David King, and inaugural Director of Oxford’s Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, was a perfect match and Tara describes him in 2019 as a dear friend and ‘incredible force of nature, still advising the government of Rwanda on COP climate strategy’.

The subject of her research at Oxford was whether algae could be grown in massive quantities to create biofuels to replace fossil fuels. The blunt answer is yes, but not (yet) at a price to compete head on with oil, she says.

The context of her deep dive into algae was controversy around biofuels ten years ago. ‘They had a very negative image in the media. If you take corn and maize to produce vehicle fuel, you get food price inflation. I remember protests in Mexico. We were looking at alternatives. Algae looked very promising because you don’t need as much land. We quantified it. Planting a land-space the size of Texas with algae ponds would replace the entire global transport demand for fossil fuels, vehicular, aviation, marine – everything.’

‘But,’ she continues, ‘it’s one thing to have a holistic view of things – say, climate change. But the leap to policy implementation is something else. You have to understand the hard practicalities – engineering, cost, application. That is critical, but also really valuable in the era of fake news and often blunt disregard for evidence.’

In the case of algae, it hasn’t taken off because the transition from laboratory to commercial production hasn’t been straightforward or cost-effective, apart from the abrupt change in US energy politics with the Trump presidency.

Tara continues, ‘There’s no commercial production yet [of algae for fuel]. Only as part of a blend…What I learned from my Oxford DPhil is that the devil is always in the detail.’

Having published several articles about Iranian gas production and the diplomacy of sanctions, she knows that energy is above all a political matter, not just an environmental one.

Noting that she still has lots of family in Iran, and returns there frequently, one of her former inquiries (during the Obama presidency) concerned whether Iranian gas supplies might have balanced Europe’s dependency on Russia. She’s also done policy work on how to reduce fuel subsidies within Iran – an urgent domestic matter given that Tehran, trapped between mountains, has some of the worst air quality in the world.

Sitting here in the great empty boardroom while Joby sets up his lights for photos, I can sense Tara’s wide interest in policy, which is ultimately where any initiative for change has to find acceptance and execution. Is politics a possible future career path?

‘Well yes! A lot of my friends keep asking me about that. But the political climate in Austria is not compatible right now. The very right-wing government in place doesn’t fall within my values. It’s very difficult.’

What is her advice for women contemplating careers in the broad area of engineering and science?

She says that she was raised to believe in gender equality and found it both at Oxford and internally at the World Bank. ‘However, when you then start working in different countries with different cultural backgrounds, suddenly you realise that the concepts of ’mansplaining’ and ’maninterrupting’ are real…It is not easy, not comfortable – you have to learn to stand up for yourself. But to me this is the only path worth walking on.’
Tara, what do you remember from your first day at Oxford?
I met Sir David [King] at The Smith School. It was a bustling, bubbling world of academia but also a start-up atmosphere. I was shuffled in as a junior, to do research. He was very approachable and it was very natural, not a set event. We just had a coffee in the department. One of the best memories, on reflection, because it all began here!

What else?
I still find it amusing, this Oxford-Cambridge rivalry. You’re brainwashed to think the other university is the inferior one, and there’s lots of bashing! I came to Oxford from Cambridge. When you convert to the other side you see the similarities and the spirit, and also some differences. Oxford is much bigger, and Cambridge felt like a Hogwarts bubble. Oxford felt like a proper city, with its own charm. Univ is on the High, so close to the pulse, the student life. While the Oxford Tube was right there on my doorstep to whisk me away, I never wanted to escape much, unlike at Cambridge. I was very happy to be in Oxford.

My time at Oxford was really my time to explore everything that could possibly cross my mind. The world was my oyster – women’s boxing, water polo, college life... I never felt claustrophobic. Everything was possible. It was brilliant.

What was your typical day as a graduate student studying for a DPhil in Inorganic Chemistry?
7 until 8am was swim training, followed by porridge at Pret. Then I ran to the Department or the Smith School (I split my time between them). Lunch was typically back at Univ. Around 5pm, a talk or a lecture. There was always something to do, someone to meet. The Smith School had an amazing speaker forum. Bill Clinton came. All the places were taken and it was over-subscribed, so I took a side staircase to stand in the gallery. Who was walking down it but Clinton himself! I caught him and we chatted for five minutes. That was one of the best coincidences I could ever imagine.

What is the lasting value of a DPhil degree from Oxford, as you see it seven years later?
There was a direct application of knowledge to policy because of how the Smith School operated, so there was no question of being trapped in an ivory tower. But now that I’m on the other side of that equation in my career, the real value of the degree was the academic rigour. I was able to co-author publications, cultivate a rigorous mindset and adopt research as a life habit rather than something you just do at college.

Something to change at Oxford?
I remain puzzled about the ‘Don’t walk on the grass!’ business! There were occasions when this rule was broken! I also think that Oxford came late to the table for cultivating links with commerce and industry. I understand that has changed, but perhaps it could still do more.

Are you still in touch with Oxford?
Yes, but I don’t go back there as much as I’d like to.

How did you become a Blue in water polo?
Sport was very important to me at Oxford. Water polo is a contact sport and the typical injury is a broken nose from someone’s elbow. You’re in a pool and there is a net and a ball. You have to be a very good swimmer. It can get pretty physical. You get bathing-suit pulling and nipple-twisting to make someone let go the ball – not stuff that a casual watcher would observe on the surface!

As for the Varsity match, I played defence and we played at home in the then-new Rosenblatt Swimming Pool on the Iffley Road. We completely lost! They had a crack squad of competitive players. Yet I was massively proud of my blue jacket. I wore it for a year and then lost it in the US – a cleaning lady at the World Bank threw it out. I could have replaced it but decided not to. I’ve seen alumni trying to squeeze into their blues jackets 40 years later. It doesn’t always work!
A quiverful of qubits
Can quantum computing unveil nature’s secrets, asks James Bakewell? Oxford scientists, at the forefront of NQIT, the UK’s Quantum Computing Technology Hub, aim to harness the power of this extraordinary new technology to solve otherwise intractable problems with real-world benefits.

Perhaps more than any other nascent technology, the ongoing development of quantum computers could have profound implications on many aspects of our lives. Researchers at the University of Oxford are leading the charge to turn this potential into reality.

Humans are ceaselessly inventive, yet the methods we use to develop many new technologies essentially boil down to expensive and time-consuming trial and error. Every year, for instance, several dozen new drugs will be licensed for use by patients, but for each of these successes some 5,000–10,000 candidate drugs will have fallen by the wayside. According to the Pharmaceutical Journal, it can take around 12 years for a company to research and develop a new drug to the point where it can be sold, all at a cost of around £1.15 billion.

What if there was a way to make this process more efficient? What if there was a way to identify, simulate and build a drug molecule or compound so that it was right first time? Supercomputers are currently used to assist in this process, but once a problem reaches a certain scale of complexity, they hit a brick wall. Quantum computers, on the other hand, could be able to crunch this data with relative ease.

Globally, this promise, which could also have profound implications for numerous fields of inquiry, has driven billions of dollars of public and private investment. In the UK, the University of Oxford – where 38 separate research teams with a total of around 200 researchers are beavering away on the technology – is leading the race to construct the world’s first fully functioning quantum computer.

For the moment the potential of quantum computing is exactly that – potential. However, according to Simon Benjamin, Professor of Quantum Technologies at the University’s Department of Materials, ‘We do have some tantalising examples of problems that we do know are definitely hard for conventional computers.’

One example of such a problem is prime factorising – determining the prime numbers that can be multiplied to make a given number. What makes prime factorising so difficult for conventional computers – and the reason it underlies the security of many of the cryptographic algorithms used for online financial transactions – is that the number of possible outcomes scales exponentially as a digit is added to the given number.

Central to the ability of a quantum computer to cope with these kinds of problems is the quantum bit, or qubit. Conventional computers use bits – single pieces of information that can exist in one of two states, ‘1’ or ‘0’ – to describe things.

Everything from text to music to images can be represented by a stream of these bits, which can be manipulated and stored in a variety of different ways.

By contrast, qubits can represent numerous combinations of 1 and 0 simultaneously when in put into a state known as superposition. Further, pairs of qubits can exist in a single quantum state – a poorly understood phenomenon (even Einstein described it as ‘spooky’) known as entanglement. The state of one qubit cannot be changed without affecting the state of its entangled partner.

All of this means that while doubling the number of bits in a conventional computer doubles its processing power, adding extra qubits to a quantum computer produces an exponential increase in its ability to handle data. Indeed, a machine with just 50 qubits could be able to outperform the most advanced supercomputers currently in existence in tasks such as prime factorising.

The final results of a quantum calculation reveal themselves when the qubits are measured, which causes their state of superposition to collapse to either a 1 or a 0.

However, qubits in superposition are extremely sensitive to external stimuli, meaning that the slightest disturbance can cause them to collapse before their job has been done – introducing errors into the calculations being carried out. Great pains must therefore be taken to isolate them from the environment. Owing in part to this requirement, adding extra qubits to a system is a significant engineering challenge, as is getting them to talk to one another. As a result, numerous approaches are being taken to build quantum computers that strike a balance between economics, practicality of manufacture, and reducing errors.
A research group overseen by Peter Leek, Research Fellow at Oxford’s Clarendon Laboratory, is developing ways of producing qubits using circuits made from superconductors (materials with zero resistance to the flow of electricity at temperatures close to absolute zero or -273°C) and components known as Josephson junctions.

Quite how this works is a bit of a puzzle unless you’re an undergraduate physicist. Leek says: ‘Do I tell the truth, or do I give an explanation that people can get their heads around? It’s hard to do both at the same time.’

It could be said that such superconducting loops create a superposition of states by allowing electrical current to flow clockwise and anticlockwise simultaneously, but that wouldn’t be strictly correct. According to Leek, the important thing to note is that ‘when you take electric circuit elements down to very low temperatures, so there’s very little energy in them, quantum mechanics take hold’.

Despite being very difficult to explain properly without a whiteboard and a solid grasp of physics, superconducting circuits have a key advantage.

Because they are based on technology that is reasonably similar to that used to produce conventional computers, it could be simpler (compared with other methods for making quantum computers) to produce machines with large numbers of qubits. Leek says: ‘Big companies such as IBM, Intel and Google have latched on to it as a technology they could scale well.’

Despite these advances, the qubits produced using superconducting circuits are more error-prone than their cousins – those formed with ion traps. At Oxford, the latter are being developed by a group led by Professors David Lucas and Andrew Steane.

Ion traps may be leading-edge technology, but there’s something almost Victorian in their appearance – lots of polished metal and nuts and bolts. As the name suggests, they employ ions (atoms that have had an electron removed so that they are positively charged) as qubits. These ions are held in place by an electric field and can be manipulated with what Lucas describes as 'exquisite precision' using a laser. They are encased in vacuum chambers that serve to protect them from outside interference.

According to Lucas, this approach has a number of benefits. The qubits are well shielded, meaning they can be held in superposition for extended periods of time (for at least 50 seconds). Further, Lucas’ qubits are able to work together effectively. Logic gates (the basic building blocks that enable conventional computers to process data) created by his group from entangled pairs of qubits behave with 99.9% precision – currently a record achieved only by ion trap methods.

A fidelity of 99.9% is a significant advance, but it does mean that, according to the laws of probability, something will go wrong one time in a thousand. By contrast, conventional transistors almost never fail to behave exactly as they’re supposed to. Benjamin

Amy Hughes, Graduate Teaching & Research Scholar, Oriel College, DPhil Student in Atomic & Laser Physics. Amy is working on quantum entangling gates for ion trap-based quantum computers.
saying: ‘It’s an enormous gap and it’s not clear that it can ever be closed by better engineering.’ He and his group are looking at ways to work with so-called ‘noisy’ quantum computers.

But what if you want a quantum computer that does exactly as it’s told? The answer to this, according to Benjamin, might be to take inspiration from how conventional computers work. In a hard drive, for instance, 1s and 0s are each represented by many magnetic particles pointing either to the left or to the right. If one particle goes rogue, it’s not the end of the world because its partners will still be pointing in the right way and data will still be able to be read. Benjamin continues: ‘But in quantum computers, we aren’t doing that. We’re using an individual entity. A device may have a lot of qubits, but each of them is doing a separate job.’

To emulate this robustness through numbers, a quantum error correcting code could be employed, whereby a whole bunch of qubits work together to do the job of one – a so-called logical qubit. Benjamin continues: ‘As long as you check every so often, you can find the qubits that have gone wonky and fix them using the state stored in the qubits that haven’t gone wrong.’ The downside to this approach? It might take 1000 qubits to create one perfectly behaved logical qubit. By contrast, one of the largest quantum computer chips currently under development – by Google – has 72 qubits, and it is currently unclear how well these work together.

The challenge of adding extra qubits to a quantum computer is mostly one of engineering, and it is quite possible that meaningful quantum computers will be unveiled over the coming decade. Only then will we be able to see what they can really do.

If the promise delivers as hoped, incurable medical conditions could become a thing of the past; strong, lightweight materials could be produced cheaply; and artificial intelligence capable of adapting and learning may become commonplace. Quantum everything? Steering the way between overstating the potential benefits of quantum computing and too much caution about the challenges, it is worth noting that quantum technologies in general are advancing rapidly. With the commitment of the UK government to establish a National Quantum Computing Centre, and the ongoing work of our scientists and industry partners, the UK will continue to accelerate progress towards a quantum computer, develop a new quantum computing sector and be at the forefront of this global revolution.
Alumni at large

Oxford's oldest alumnus Bill Franklin is still working on academic papers aged 107, while Irra Ariella Khi reflects on a cyber-tech career and Jasmine Richards on the lack of diversity in children's literature.

Bill Frankland (Queen’s, 1930)

Dr Bill Frankland has recently turned 107 and is still working to a daily routine from a residential care home overlooking Charterhouse Square in London, the author or co-author of four academic papers since turning turning 100.

Born in March 1912, a month before the Titanic steamed to its doom, he was, incredibly, a whole generation older than the late Sir Roger Bannister, and indeed taught him clinical studies at St Mary’s Hospital, London Paddington.

A recent biography by Paul Watkins, From Hell Island to Hay Fever, details not only a distinguished 80-year career in medicine, but also the astonishing tale of Bill’s survival of World War Two in a Japanese internment camp, a subject he only spoke about at 98.

He partly attributes his longevity to the experience of having survived near-death on eight occasions, some war-related and others from illness and medical experiment. An amazing example of a life lived to the full.

Irra Ariella Khi (Hertford, 2006)

After many international family moves, Irra Ariella Khi spoke nine languages but had few friends until she came to Oxford. ‘Oh Lord, I enjoyed myself,’ she recalls.

She learned how to prioritise and turn ‘a gargantuan mountain into manageable challenges’. Before taking a first in History, she co-founded Oxford Entrepreneurs.

At 29 she was an out-of-work single mother sleeping on a friend’s couch. She tuned out the negativity, read Carol S Dweck’s Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, taught herself cyber tech, and raised funds for what is now VChain Technology, where she is CEO. It uses blockchain technology to securely verify travellers’ identities. British Airways owner IAG was a first customer.

Her favourite Oxford spot is the old History Faculty, once part of Hertford College. ‘It was a thinking space. In those quiet moments of reflection, you really find yourself.’
Jasmine had always been what she calls a ‘hardcore bookworm’ since she was a child, so it was no surprise that she chose to study English Literature and Language when she came to Oxford. What was a surprise to her, however, was that she came at all. Growing up in a working-class north London family, none of whom had attended university, Jasmine had never expected to come to Oxford. But come she did.

When she arrived Jasmine was one of only two black students at her college and, without the omnipresent social media to connect to people outside those walls, the ‘first couple of terms at Oxford were tough’. In our extended online interview with Jasmine, she spoke about the various societal perceptions that influenced her: ‘My time at Oxford was shaped by lots of different factors – being a woman, being a black woman, coming from a working-class family, being the first in my family to go to university. Trying to work out how all of these things intersect, and influence my experiences at Oxford and beyond, is quite complicated.’

Beyond Oxford she went on to work in publishing and spent nearly ten years as an editor, with Penguin, Working Partners and Oxford University Press. In 2010 her first novel, *The Book of Wonders*, was published.

In her role as an editor she continued to see the dominance of white characters in children’s books. A 2018 study shows that only 4% of children's titles published the previous year featured BAME characters – black, Asian and minority ethnic. She decided to do something about it, and Storymix was born. The studio was created in December and works with emerging writers and illustrators from under-represented backgrounds to create high concept commercial children’s fiction that features BAME characters.
Harnessing the power of graduate scholarships

Zeynep Kaya and Pashtoon Atif discuss the impact of being awarded scholarships.

Graduate students play a vital role at Oxford, helping to drive research forward whilst inspiring and enriching the experience of others around them. Many go on to make important contributions to the economy and to society, leading the way in their fields and addressing major global challenges.

Providing fully-funded scholarships is key to ensuring that the very best students from around the world are able to pursue further study at Oxford. For this reason, the University has set an ambitious target to create 300 new graduate scholarships over the next five years. Donor support will be essential in achieving this vision.

Zeynep Kaya (Kellogg, 2016)
Dulverton Scholar
Zeynep was born and raised in Mardin, an ancient city located in the south-east of Turkey. 'I remember when I was first learning English, I saved up to buy an Oxford English Dictionary,' she says. 'Going back home and finding that dictionary reminds me that I always wanted to come here, even if it was a dream that I didn’t want to think too much about.'

Although fear of disappointment initially held her back from applying, Zeynep had a change of heart whilst studying for her master’s degree. 'I was doing research on cancer,' she explains, 'and the more I learned, the more I realised how little we actually know about it. That’s why new discoveries in the field excited me; I felt like a road-map was being generated for an unknown destination. I wanted to devote myself to better understanding the condition, and I decided that Oxford would be the best place for me to do that.'

In 2016, Zeynep became a DPhil candidate in the Medical Sciences Division. Her research focuses on prostate cancer – the most common form of cancer in men in the UK – and the mechanism that regulates its spread to other parts of the body, particularly the bone.

‘Cancer is not a static disease, and so finding something that will cure all patients is really difficult,’ she says. ‘It’s a bit like uncovering a mystery. You can’t work out all of the unknowns by yourself, but if everyone puts in something from their own research, that will help to solve the puzzle.’

For Zeynep, studying at Oxford has been a life-changing experience. But without the financial support provided by a scholarship, she would have been forced to turn the opportunity down. ‘I remember finding out that I had been awarded a scholarship from the Dulverton Trust,’ she says. ‘I can still feel the happiness of that moment. It truly was the greatest gift.’
Pashtoon Atif (St Peter’s, 2018)
Weidenfeld-Hoffmann Scholar
A graduate scholarship also opened the door to further study for Pashtoon. ‘Coming from Afghanistan, I would never have made enough money to afford a course like this,’ he says, referring to the Master of Public Policy (MPP) on which he is currently enrolled. ‘Without the Weidenfeld-Hoffmann Trust I would not have been able to come.’

Before applying to Oxford, Pashtoon had spent a number of years engaged in relief and human development activities in Afghanistan and Sudan. His most recent appointment was at GoodWeave International, a non-profit organisation that seeks to end child labour in the carpet industry. But although it was work he loved, Pashtoon felt the time had come to try something new. ‘I thought that the MPP would be a great course to prepare me for a transition into the public sector,’ he explains.

Taught at the Blavatnik School of Government, the MPP is an intensive, one-year taught course for existing and aspiring leaders with a commitment to public service. It equips students with the knowledge and skills they need to address some of this century’s most complex public policy challenges. For Pashtoon, it is the connection between public policy and economics that holds particular interest. ‘Afghanistan is dependent on foreign aid and I believe that’s down to our poor economic policies,’ he says. ‘There are some economic theories that I want to explore more, and consider how I might be able to apply them to my own country.’

As a Weidenfeld-Hoffmann Scholar, Pashtoon benefits from involvement in the trust’s Leadership Programme, which provides scholars with the skills, knowledge and networks they need in order to make valuable contributions to public life. The programme includes practical skills training, as well as mentoring and networking events. ‘I went through five days of moral philosophy seminars when I arrived,’ he recalls. ‘I got to meet the other scholars; we studied and ate together, so we made friends from the very beginning. It was a great introduction to life at Oxford.’

Pashtoon will soon return to Afghanistan, where he will conclude his studies with a work placement at the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. But although his time at Oxford has been relatively brief, it has left an indelible mark. ‘It has surpassed my expectations,’ he says. ‘The city is beautiful, the University is great, the workload is intense, but good. I’m learning a lot and I’m very glad to be here.’
In recent years the UK has vied for its own piece of the political turmoil grasping the world today. The rise of the extreme right, Brexit, ISIS returnee issues, and the wake of the Windrush scandal have all brought identity politics to the forefront, renewing the question of what it means to be British.

Writer, broadcaster and former barrister Afua Hirsch’s Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging, locates this phenomenon in the context of colonial history. Why, she asks, does she get asked constantly, ‘Where are you from?’ – a racially-charged question seldom asked of non-people of colour (POC). The question embeds Britishness with whiteness. This question reigns from the playground to the workplace. To paraphrase, you might simply ask: ‘Why are you brown?’

Hirsch (St Peter’s, 1999) establishes the book with an honest invitation into her own position in black Britain. Residing in a well-to-do suburban environment, she was privately educated, then Oxford, and a social tightrope drawn from a lighter skin complexion inherited from a Jewish father. She is not representative of black Britain. Equally, Afua is uniquely positioned to witness the insidiousness of racism in Britain.

We go on an adventure with Hirsch. Travels and relocations across the Caribbean and the African continent, while laden with familiarities stoking notions of pride and self, are also plagued with ‘othering’. Bewildering experiences all weigh in – from assault and street robberies to difficulties with the Ghanaian Twi language to run-ins with skin-lightening cream. She returns home – that is, to Britain.

This sets up the crux of the book. Identity for black Britons and other ethnic minorities is often seen as a fifty-fifty identity, but it’s actually much more complex, feeling like 100% of both or maybe zero of both, a Bermuda Triangle of identity.

Through personal narratives and research, Hirsch vividly depicts a purgatory of identity. Unless it fits the narrative of a media headline (a sports triumph or even a ‘homegrown terrorist’) one is a native of nowhere.

Hirsch’s work adds to an emerging canon of black British political engagement from Akala’s Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire to Reni Eddo-Loge’s Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race. The black British community has often looked to the USA for best practice on resistance but now, in the social media age, black Britain (and the wider POC community) has found its own generation of orators.
Fear for our planet is nothing new, says Felipe Fernández-Armesto (Magdalen, 1969), editor of the new *Oxford Illustrated History of the World* – the first in its line to put climate and geography centre-stage.

Though current considerations rouse students, he says earlier historians show environmental awareness – ‘Mommsen on the Romans, Toynbee, Teilhard de Chardin, even Romanticism’.

Fernández-Armesto, former senior scholar at St John’s and current fellow at St Antony’s, was the inaugural holder of the first UK chair in Global Environmental History, at Queen Mary College, London.

Spanning 200,000 years, his History sets about puncturing our temporal myopia.

In Part 5, ‘The Great Acceleration’, historian David Christian notes how an English ploughman with two horses in 1800 commanded 1,000 watts of power, while an Airbus 380 today commands 100,000,000. We have already caused mass extinctions over just a few decades.

Fernández-Armesto points to three comparable cases of human intervention in nature – global migration from East Africa, agriculture, and genetic modification. But he offers pessimism as a pragmatic response to the ever-mounting current crisis.

‘The extinction of humankind is a very envisageable prospect at this point. Population growth may modify, but consumption is I think uncontainable.’

***The Oxford Illustrated History of the World***

By Felipe Fernández-Armesto

Oxford University Press, £30.
What does Brexit really mean? It’s the final convulsion of empire, say two Oxford academics.

‘While everyone is now saying they are sick of Brexit, understanding it has hardly begun,’ says Danny Dorling, Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography.

Among the first serious analyses is his *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire*, co-written with Sally Tomlinson, Honorary Research Fellow in Oxford’s Department of Education.

Dorling estimates 300 Brexit books have been published since the 2016 referendum, mostly rapid-fire journalism. People hunger for something more substantial, and the initial 2,500 copies of *Rule Britannia* sold out in a week.

Letting rip from an admitted left-wing standpoint, the book delivers enough analysis and learning to make it a classic opening salvo in the literary Brexit wars.

The authors point out the weird, inverse correlation between leavers and immigrants. Communities with no immigrants voted Leave; those with many voted Remain.

Referendum-night coverage generated an ad hoc narrative that stuck, says Dorling – that it was ‘feckless, poor northerners’ who voted Leave. ‘But it wasn’t. Ground central for Brexit was Winchester.’

The authors are less strong on the defects of the EU and the current Labour Party. But a blistering chapter pegs the cabinets of David Cameron and Theresa May, as well as other leading Brexiteers, as all essentially self-serving – privately educated millionaires insulated from the financial concerns of most voters.

UKIP’s sole referendum MP, Douglas Carswell, was raised in Uganda. Arron Banks, who bankrolled the party and Leave.EU, spent his childhood in South Africa, where his father ran sugar estates.

The authors submit that virtually all key Leavers fantasised Britain restored to Top Dog on a map painted pink.

Boris Johnson is only excluded to the degree that he was the most self-serving of all.

The authors argue: ‘It’s time to bury the imperial ghost. We’re not “Great”. We’d be much greater if we were just “normal”.’
New College Choir participated in the premiere performance of the complete Songs of Farewell in 1919, soon after Charles Hubert Hastings Parry’s death (1848-1918). While he was a force in British music, recent scholarship has demonstrated how his music assimilated continental and German models. In particular, this recording is the first to use Robert Quinney’s new Oxford University Press edition of the Songs of Farewell, edited from Parry’s autograph manuscripts in the Bodleian Library. It features an earlier version of ‘There is an old belief’ never before recorded, and juxtaposes the six motets with Mendelssohn’s Sechs Sprüche. We think there might be a subtle commentary going on in the background, given recent British politics. The cover image is a wonderfully Romantic Caspar David Friedrich painting.

The Voices of Nîmes
By Suzannah Lipscomb
Oxford University Press, £30

Well known as a TV historian, Suzannah Lipscomb (Balliol, 2004) offers a fascinating glimpse into the ‘invisible’ lives of middle- and lower-class women of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who otherwise left no trace of their existence.

Her evidence is the consistories or moral courts of the Huguenot church of Languedoc between 1561 and 1615. Their records offer tantalising evidence for speech, behaviour and attitudes including personal conduct and sexuality – the prevailing view being that women were primarily responsible for sexual sin.

The ironic, unintended result of the courts was in some respects to empower women, in some instances offering examples of women’s agency in an otherwise intensely patriarchal society.
American contemporary artist Jeff Koons had never been to Oxford in his wildly successful 40-year career. Then came a letter from Oli Lloyd-Parry, Oxford medical student and president of the Edgar Wind Society. The Society, named after Oxford’s first Professor of History of Art, aims to encourage engagement with the field beyond academia. In 2016 it established an Honorary Membership for Outstanding Contribution to Visual Culture.

When New York-based Koons was chosen to be the first recipient, Lloyd-Parry invited him to address Society members and guests at the Ashmolean Museum. ‘Jeff Koons is a very generous person and he really responded to the intellectual curiosity and the genuine enthusiasm in my letter,’ says Lloyd-Parry.

As part of Koons’ 2016 visit, Lloyd-Parry and the former Andrew W Mellon Teaching Curator at the Ashmolean, Mallica Kumbera Landrus, gave him a Museum tour. Koons has since said, ‘I couldn’t think of a better place to have a dialogue about art today and what it can be.’

Now, three years later, seventeen Koons works are installed there. Tickets are selling faster than for any previous show. The curved surfaces of his towering, shining works reflect the viewer and room in a constantly shifting experience of gaze and reflection.

Standing in front of the deep pink, 2.5m-high Balloon Venus (Magenta), Koons says: ‘I’ve always tried to make work that when somebody views the piece, they realise that the experience is about what happens inside themselves. That’s one of the reasons that I work with the reflective material. It affirms you.’

The size, gaudiness and brightness undoubtedly inspires a sense of awe.

‘I try to make works that are super-charged so that when people are engaged with them they can have feelings and physical reaction taking place within their bodies,’ Koons says. ‘I like to think that that’s what art is – it’s the essence of your own potential.’

Jeff Koons at the Ashmolean runs until 9 June 2019.

Art

Jeff Koons at the Ashmolean

Ruth Abrahams explores the remarkable story behind the controversial artist’s visit to Oxford.
Varsity baseball

Varsity baseball is in its infancy at Oxford. We lost the first match, held last year in Cambridge. The Oxford Rangers were keen to get revenge in this year’s match-up, played on their home turf. Captain Thomas Carroll reports the action.

The Cambridge Cubs got off to a hot start on a cold March day. Captain Roman Rzycki drew a lead-off walk and reached base on all four of his plate appearances. After a few stolen bases, the Cubs brought their skipper home on a sac fly to left from their catcher, Joris Witstok.

The Cubs were threatening further damage when no. 3 hitter Jonathan Feld sent a sinking liner past the diving right fielder. But Rangers captain Tom Carroll corralled the loose ball in the right field corner, and unleashed a one-hop throw over the cut-offs to catch the runner out at third. Energized, Rangers starting pitcher A J Callis struck out the next batter with a biting curveball to keep the score at 1–0.

The Cambridge pitcher was a tough opponent, throwing an incredible 156 pitches. Mixing a quick fastball with a deceptive curve, he cut through the top of the line-up – but the bottom half gave the Rangers some life. Oxford slugger Bobby Klapper had a hot bat all game, and got the Rangers started in the second with a sharp liner to centre. Oxford capitalised on some defensive errors, and fly balls to centre from Luke Hand and Koyo Harada brought in two runners, putting the Rangers at 2–1.

Oxford didn’t look back. Third-baseman Caleb Winchester knocked a clutch 2-RBI single to right-centre. Further tough batting expanded the Rangers’ lead to 6–1. In his seven-strong innings, first-year Ranger Callis allowed only two hits, notched 13 strikeouts and kept a threatening Cubs line-up to just one run. Centre fielder Steven Jacobson caught a towering shot to centre from Witstok over his head on a dead sprint.

Late insurance runs from Kean Murphy and Tanner DeVore expanded the lead to 8–1. The Cubs threatened a comeback at the end, getting on five baserunners in the last couple of innings, but Carroll made strong use of his backdoor curveball, striking out five and allowing no runs during his two innings, to seal the game.

Final score: Oxford 8, Cambridge 1.
Gardening
Green’s green fingers

Botanic Garden curator Patrick Green offers advice for a hot and dry summer.

An individual may each day decant up to 20 cubic metres of water from the River Cherwell for the purposes of irrigation. The beautiful herbaceous borders in the Oxford Botanic Garden were only kept alive in the blistering summer of 2018 because of this generous (and archaic) allowance, notes Patrick Green.

‘Traditional herbaceous borders are beautiful but they guzzle water,’ he says. Visitors will notice that just beyond lie the Merton borders that were originally planted in 2011. ‘This wide area of beds was directly sown into coarse sand with plants known to withstand dry and hot conditions, drawn from three biogeographic regions – the US, South Africa and the Mediterranean. Last summer they looked cracking. Yet we never watered them at all.’

If you are not in a position to change your whole garden, here are Patrick’s tips for a climate-change gardening strategy...

Above: An individual may each day decant up to 20 cubic metres of water from the River Cherwell.

Above right: Compost is a gardener’s best friend. The Botanic Garden’s composting operation is a mechanical matter of timing and rotation.

Right: In summer, you see lush vegetation in the herbaceous border, but behind all the plants are watering devices without which it would die.

Patrick’s top 10 tips for a dry garden

1. My absolutely number one favourite technique is to add 3–4 inches of compost around plants. Not only does it feed and condition the soil, but it provides a natural barrier against moisture loss.

2. Reduce lawn. Ditch the English obsession with clipped lawns. Each square metre of grass sucks up as much as 50 gallons of water a year. Cut tree circles around the base of trees.

3. Let the grass grow longer to trick it into a less vigorous growth and water use.

4. Leave the clippings on the grass. ‘Yes, it’s a trade-off between looks and function. But when you remove the clippings you’re removing moisture.’

5. Water butts, as many as possible. No prizes for that one.

6. Under pressure, any eco-system produces dominant plants at the expense of others. Don’t be shy in managing the dominant ones.

7. Buy a tree-gaiter. It’s a doughnut that holds 100 litres of water than drips out around the base of a tree over the course of a week. Very efficient – and it also suppresses weeds.

8. Don’t freak out if something dies. Learn from it. Accept that your lawn will go brown. It doesn’t mean it’s dead – you don’t need to use a sprinkler.


10. If you are allowed to water, do it first or last thing or at night. Not midday.
**Diana Athill** (LMH, 1936) was a leading literary editor who worked among others with Jean Rhys and V S Naipaul, and in later life found fame as a memoirist.

The literary editor, short story writer, novelist and memoirist Diana Athill died at a hospice in London on 23 January, aged 101. She was a founding director of publisher André Deutsch, where she worked for more than forty years and became legendary. But later she was better known as the author of a series of candid and compelling memoirs of episodes from her own unconventional life.

She was born in Kensington, London, on 21 December 1917 (during a Zeppelin raid, she always believed, though the last Zeppelin raid took place two months earlier), the eldest of three children (two daughters and a son) of Major Lawrence Athill and his wife Alice, née Carr. She was brought up in comfort at Ditchingham Hall in Norfolk, but her father’s work was unstable and she was aware of the unhappiness in her parents’ relationship. She claimed to have become ‘obsessed with sex’ after discovering a copy of Marie Stopes’s *Wise Parenthood* at the back of a bookcase; and first fell in love with the gardener’s boy, ‘after which I was never, so far as I can remember, out of love’.

Athill matriculated at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, in 1936, where she read English, graduating in 1939. She had gone to Oxford mainly because she had fallen in love with an Oxford student, Tony Irvine, but their engagement foundered on his RAF service during the war. Her ‘soul shrank to the size of a pea’ and she embarked on a series of mostly unhappy relationships.

During the Second World War, Athill worked for the BBC as a researcher. In 1943 she met André Deutsch and began a short and desultory affair ‘without much excitement on either side’. But they remained friends, and when he set up his own publishing houses, Allen Wingate in 1945 and André Deutsch in 1952, he asked her to join him. She became perhaps the most acclaimed literary editor in London, working with Norman Mailer, Philip Roth, John Updike, Molly Keane, Mordecai Richler, Brian Moore and Margaret Atwood, among others.


Athill always encouraged her authors to ‘try to write the truth, however indecent’, and the first of her own searingly honest autobiographical volumes, *Instead of a Letter*, detailed her relationship with Irvine. One relationship she didn’t write about extensively was that with the Jamaican playwright Barry Reckord: they were partners for eight years (and she miscarried his baby), but he continued to live with her for another thirty-two, Athill describing it as like a ‘detached’ marriage.

The late flourishing of Athill’s talents as a writer brought both curiosity and acclaim. She appeared on Desert Island Discs in 2004, was appointed OBE in 2009, and in 2010 was the subject of a BBC documentary, *Growing Old Disgracefully*. For most of her life she lived in a top-floor flat in Primrose Hill, but in 2009 she moved into a retirement home in Highgate, and she spent her final months in a hospice in Belsize Park. She retained her wits to the end.

Alex May (St John’s, 1982) is an editor at OUP’s Dictionary of National Biography
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