BALLIOL COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

FLOREAT DOMUS

NEWS AND FEATURES FROM THE BALLIOL COMMUNITY | JUNE 2024



Rory Stewart's long walk from Balliol 38
AI: a special feature 16
Decarbonisation using sound and bubbles 26
Outreach teaching 10
A porter's view 36
The importance of play 40
Getting high: a seven-summitteer's passion 34

CONTENTS

FLOREAT DOMUS















FROM THE MASTER 1

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

Awards 2

New staff 4

Building a better information environment 6

Supporting students seeking sanctuary 8

COLLEGE STORIES

Balliol at Berlinale 9
Nick Trojanskis

Outreach impact 10
Ed Grayson
Andrew Ahern

How best to teach transatlantic slavery? 13
Ian Farrell

BALLIOL AND AI

AI in journalism 16
Felix M. Simon

AI in the military 18
Linda Eggert

Back to the future of AI with Aristotle 20
John Tasioulas

Alumni working on AI 23
Ed Grefenstette
Devaki Raj
Mick Yang

GREEN THEMES

Using sound and bubbles for decarbonisation 26
James Kwan

Engineering a sustainable future 28
Cherie Wong

A regenerative lawyer 30
Nadja Skaljic

IN THE MOUNTAINS

Giving the mountain a chance 32

From Balliol to the top of world 34
James Ogilvie

MORE FEATURES

A porter's view 36
Alexandru Popescu

A long walk from Balliol 38
Marina Ristuccia

The importance of play 40
Farrah Jarral

BOOKS

A many-sided 'Balliol-Scot' 43
John Sloan

Bookshelf 44

Balliol College, Oxford OX1 3BJ
www.balliol.ox.ac.uk

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Editor: Anne Askwith (Publications and Web Officer)
Editorial Adviser: Nicola Trott (Senior Tutor)
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Front cover: The William Westerman Pathfinders 2024: see details at www.alumniweb.ox.ac.uk/balliol/westerman-pathfinders

Back cover: Student performers at a Balliol Musical Society Members' Concert.

Photos by Stuart Bebb.

From the Master

Dame Helen Ghosh DCB

'Half the world will be voting this year.' The media has made much of this since the start of 2024, with general or presidential elections taking place in countries across the globe including the US, Iran, Russia, India, and of course the United Kingdom. Not to be outdone, and as all Oxford alumni should be aware by now, we will be having our own election here too in the University of Oxford, to appoint a successor to Lord Patten of Barnes (1962 and Honorary Fellow) as our Chancellor.

The role of Chancellor is not of course a leadership role in any executive sense; the CEO for the University is the Vice-Chancellor, though even she can only lead with the support and advice of a plethora of University decision-making bodies. But if leadership is in large part – as I believe it is – about setting the vision and the tone for an institution, I know of no one I have seen do it so well as Chris Patten. He has eloquently championed the cause of an open society, liberal democracy, the rule of law and academic freedom of expression not only here in Oxford but also on our behalves in the wider world, even where these views are unpopular. When asked recently which quality he regarded as essential for a successful life, he replied 'kindness'.

Chris has been the fourth Balliol Chancellor since the start of the 20th century, and is only outdone in tenure at 21 years in post by Harold Macmillan (1912) at 27 (a record shared with Lord Halifax, a Christ Church man). As I write, I have no idea whether there will be any Balliol candidates in the running for the Chancellorship this time round. Some of you may have fond memories from previous elections of turning up in the Sheldonian, complete with gown, to vote – then the only way to do so. From now onwards the voting will be entirely online. With an electorate made up of every graduate of the University, collectively known as Convocation, the new process will undoubtedly make the election more inclusive and perhaps more unpredictable.



The Master (left) with Maryna Oproshchenko (2022), who came to Balliol as a refugee from Ukraine, on her graduation day.

The election of a Master of Balliol has generally been much lower profile over the centuries, though we do have some form in terms of dubious election practices. In his history of the College, John Jones describes the election of Theophilus Leigh in 1726 as arguably 'scandalous, corrupt and nepotistic'. Certainly, the 12 Fellows of the College were variously bribed and threatened by representatives of both candidates and Leigh won only by the 17th-century equivalent of a hanging chad.

There are many similarities between the role of Master and that of the Chancellor, particularly in having little or no executive power. From the origins of the role in the medieval academic community, the most that any Head of any Oxford college can claim to be is the '*primus inter pares*' (the 'first among equals'). Ambitious Heads of House across Oxford have learned to their cost over the years that they can't tell their Governing Body what to do! The influence of a Master – as with the Chancellor – can only come in the shape of 'setting a tone' and supporting and communicating the collective development of a vision. Jowett expressed this in a private memorandum written in about 1875, in which he included among the requirements for a Head of House the ability to 'put forward his undergraduates, suggest thoughts and plans to the Fellows, create a common spirit'. Many of our Masters have of course done this in (appropriately) masterful fashion, shaping the College over the centuries.

In his resignation letter to the Vice Chancellor, Lord Patten movingly expressed his debt to Oxford and to Balliol for the part they had played in making him the man he became. All that he achieved in his post-Parliamentary career in Europe, in Hong Kong and in Northern Ireland reflected his profound belief in the rule of law and freedom of expression. Today these are challenged by the rise of nationalism and authoritarianism across the globe, and the resulting conflicts have forced all too many people to leave their homes, temporarily or permanently, to seek security and livelihoods elsewhere. The Sanctuary Fund for students fleeing conflict and repression, about which you can read more on page 8, is one way in which we can put into action, with the generous support of alumni, some of the principles that the Chancellor and the College believes in. And I very much hope that the students seeking sanctuary who join us will also feel that they have been welcomed by the whole of our community with 'kindness'.

Floreat Domus!

Awards

New Year Honours 2024



Carl Woodall (Fellow and Domestic Bursar 2000–2009, pictured right top): Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE), for services to Parliament. He was Director of Facilities at the House of Lords for 14 years until his retirement in 2023.



Colin Liddell WS (1973, pictured right bottom): Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), for services to theatre and the arts in Scotland. He writes: 'This award recognises my long involvement with Pitlochry Festival Theatre, culminating as Chair for over nine years and now its Honorary President, as well as my long-term trusteeship of Dunard Fund. In addition, it may allude to my more recent involvements in two arts projects in Edinburgh, the creation of the Dunard Centre, a 1,000-seater concert hall, and the redevelopment of the iconic neo-classical Royal High School buildings, which is to house the new National Centre for Music.'

Professor Richard Templer FRSC (1981): Order of the British Empire (OBE), for services to climate innovation. Lately Director of Innovation, Grantham Institute, Imperial College London, he is the founder of Undaunted, the Institute's centre for climate change innovation, whose activities support the education and training of cleantech innovators and entrepreneurs. As part of London's Sustainable Development Commission, he advises the Mayor on the development of London's Green Economy.



Calypso Nash (2012): Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), for services to British foreign policy.

Resignation Honours December 2023



Jon Moynihan (1967 and Foundation Fellow): Peerage of the United Kingdom for Life. He was formerly CEO and Executive Chairman of PA Consulting Group, a global firm specialising in management and IT consulting, technology and innovation; chairman of Ipex Capital, the venture capital arm of PA, and chairman of various Ipex venture companies; and Chairman of Vote Leave.

Senior Members

Lord Reed (1978 and Visitor) was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws (LLD) by Edinburgh University.

Dame Helen Ghosh DCB (Master) was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws (LLD) by Nottingham University.



Professor James Belich (Beit Professor of Global and Imperial History, and Professorial Fellow) was shortlisted for the Wolfson History Prize with his book *The World the Plague Made: The Black Death and the Rise of Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2022).



Professor Neta Crawford (Montague Burton Professor of International Relations and Professorial Fellow of Balliol) won the 2024 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order for the ideas in her book *The Pentagon, Climate Change and War: Charting the Rise and Fall of Military Emissions* (MIT Press, 2022), in which she argues that the US military must reduce its dependence on fossil fuels so that the world can effectively address climate change.

Linda Eggert (Early Career Fellow in Philosophy) was awarded the 2023 Frank Chapman Sharp Memorial Prize – for the best unpublished essay or monograph on the philosophy of war and peace submitted – by the American Philosophical Association, for her work 'Duties to Rescue and Permissions to Harm'.

The Cambridge Companion to Sappho, edited by **Adrian Kelly** (Fellow and Tutor in Ancient Greek Language and Literature) and P.J. Finglass, was listed in Choice magazine's Outstanding Academic Titles 2022: LGBTQ+ Pride.

Professor John Tasioulas (Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Institute for Ethics in AI) was appointed to the Greek government's High Level Advisory Committee for Artificial Intelligence.



Professor Nick Trefethen (Emeritus Fellow) was appointed Professor of Applied Mathematics in Residence at the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS). He was previously Professor of Numerical Analysis at the University of Oxford and head of Oxford's Numerical Analysis Group.

Professor Chris Minkowski (Emeritus Fellow) was appointed Visiting Professor in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Yale University. He has recently retired as Boden Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.

Professor Hagan Bayley FRS (1970 and Honorary Fellow) was awarded the Royal Society's Buchanan Medal for helping pioneer the founding Oxford Nanopore Technology, the highly successful biotech company.

Maria Czepiel (Lecturer in Spanish) won the 2023 SNLS Ann Moss Early Career Essay Prize for her essay 'Jewish Scholarship in the Lyric Poetry of Benito Arias Montaño (ca. 1525–1598)'.

Junior Members



Jeffrey Tse (2021, DPhil Modern Statistics and Statistical Machine Learning – CDT) won a prize in the UCL Statistical Science poster competition.

Aimee Clesi (2022, MPhil Criminology and Criminal Justice, pictured right) was selected as a John Robert Lewis Fellow by the Faith and Politics Institute (FPI), to participate in a civil rights programme.

Old Members

Diana Berruezo-Sánchez (Career Development Fellow in Spanish 2018–2021) was appointed Audrey Lumsen Kouvel and Mellon Foundation Fellow at the Newberry Library in Chicago for the academic year 2023–2024.



Alice Cicirello (Career Development Fellow in Engineering Science 2017–2020): elected a Lecturer and Fellow in Engineering at Churchill College, University of Cambridge, re-joining the university as a University Assistant Professor in Applied Mechanics in the Engineering Department.

Professor Alison Young (Fellow and Tutor in Law, Balliol 1997–1999) was appointed as the Law Commissioner for Public Law and the Law in Wales.

Martin Edwards (1974) won the Best Mystery Critical/Biographical Macavity Award for his book *The Life of Crime: Detecting the History of Mysteries and Their Creators* (Collins Crime Club, 2022).

Norman Daniels (1964) received the Hastings Center's 2023 Bioethics Founders' Award for his 'pioneering work that has addressed justice in health care'.

Ned Bigham (1985) was nominated for one of the Ivors Classical Awards 2023 in the 'Best Community and Participation Composition' category for *Together and Apart* for youth orchestra and choir, which was inspired by the experiences of West Sussex's children and young people living through the pandemic.



Halik Kochanski (1985, pictured right) won the Wolfson History Prize 2023 with her book *Resistance: The Underground War in Europe, 1939–1945* (Allen Lane, 2022).

Andrei Constantinescu (2017) won Best Paper Award at the Web and Internet Economics 19th International Conference, WINE 2023, in Shanghai.

Yusuf Ben-Tarifite (Balliol 2018) received a 2023 Diana Award, and a Legacy Award, for founding The Aspiring Medics to help students from diverse backgrounds pursue careers in medicine.

Matilda Glynn-Henley (2019) was chosen as one of ten scholarship holders to join the EXIST-Women programme at the Technical University of Berlin.

See more awards for Old Members in News and Notes, a supplement to this magazine.

New Staff



Jennifer Smith

Domestic Bursar

Jennifer Smith's career route to Balliol began with two arts-related degrees – the first in the US and a Master's in the UK – and a spell in the private sector, after which she worked at the Plunkett Foundation, a charity supporting rural communities where, eventually as Head of Operations, she ran a £10m national programme for food at a local level. After ten years at Plunkett, she then became Executive Director of Longborough Festival Opera, overseeing a core team of 10 people which grew to 300+ during the opera season, including orchestra, singers, technical and stage management teams, and front of house. 'We were focused on creating memorable opera on our stage,' she says, 'and growing our educational outreach, supporting singing and the performing arts in local rural schools.'

At Longborough Jennifer 'appreciated and witnessed the interconnectedness of all departments in making a successful arts organisation', and this aspect is one of the similarities she sees with her Domestic Bursar role: she is responsible for domestic and related services to those living or working in College, as well as to conference guests and other visitors. 'Our goal is to enable a smooth running, day-to-day experience paired with a friendly atmosphere to underpin academic life here at Balliol.' While at Longborough, she 'had a deeply held respect for the cooperative nature of opera'; indeed, the way she describes it might be a metaphor for an Oxford college: 'The audience see the conductor and the principal cast on stage, but there are a vast array of other people behind the scenes who are vital to the art – the rigger who has safely fixed the lights, the stage manager who is calling the cues, the person who is operating the surtitles. It takes a great array of specialisms, people dedicated to their craft, who come together to create a beautiful evening at the opera.'

Arriving at Balliol in the middle of Michaelmas Term, Jennifer had to learn quickly. There were things that needed to be done urgently and she experienced 'information overload'. Now, she feels she is getting up to speed on the operational side, although she is learning every day. 'It is a challenging role, certainly,' she says, 'but people have been so kind, really giving with their time in terms of helping me and allowing me to ask a whole range of questions.' She describes the Deputy Domestic Bursar and all the heads of department as 'fantastic', noting, 'I'm very impressed by the high level of commitment: everybody has their different expertise and perspectives but everybody really cares about Balliol.'

Another thing she appreciates about Balliol is 'the level of community, people having meals together and the importance given to conversing and connecting.' And she feels fortunate and proud to be working at such a prestigious and historic academic institution, where by 'ensuring the College is a lovely place to work and live,' her purpose is to 'create an excellent atmosphere for learning'.



Faye McLeod

Archivist and Records Manager

Although Faye McLeod comes to Balliol from the Bodleian, where she was Keeper of the University Archives, the role of college archivist is familiar to her, as previously she was Archivist and Records Manager at Keble. But there are differences between the colleges as well as similarities: in the names for roles, for instance – she finds herself 'trying to remember that it's Master and not Warden, and getting used to slight nuances'. And of course Balliol is about 600 years older. 'The Balliol collections are fantastic because it's one of the oldest and largest colleges with a very long history. So we've got the institutional records' – going a long way back, these include 'property records pertaining to the domus endowment and early benefactions' – 'but we also have a splendid collection of personal papers, which not all college archives do, such as the correspondence of Benjamin Jowett [Master 1870–1893] including with Florence Nightingale, and material pertaining to T.S. Eliot, to

Graham Greene [1922], and of course to past Masters of the College.'

With such a large archive, where does one begin? One of Faye's first tasks has been to update the existing location inventory, making sure it is absolutely up to date and accurate. This has been 'a really helpful exercise' that has enabled her to 'get to know what's on the shelves, what we have and where'. Discovering it all has been 'amazing' – for example, she says, 'I found on my travels the matrix for the first common seal of the College the other day, which is just awesome.' She has made a start on records management work, having preliminary meetings across the College, and she is continuing the 'huge task' her predecessor began of transferring Balliol's catalogues to Epexio, a cataloguing database that will eventually be made available as an online resource. What with answering enquiries as well, it all sounds quite a challenge. But Faye says: 'I absolutely love the Library team. They're incredibly supportive. Everything really is a team effort – if you need help you only have to ask.'

Welfare Lead

Hannah Jones brings a wealth of experience to Balliol, having worked with students in a number of educational institutions in her career, in different roles in academic administration and student services. Most recently she was working at a specialist designated institution for adults and 16-18 year olds in London, where she was the Safeguarding and Wellbeing Manager. After three years of doing the three-and-a-half-hour commute there from Oxford, Hannah decided it was time to work closer to home. She spent a few months freelancing when the Balliol job came up with 'perfect timing'. Now she gets to work in 12 minutes.

How does she find her first job at Oxford University? The terminology took a bit of getting used to – 'Today I said to a student "Now that we're in Week 3" and back in August I could never have imagined myself terming weeks by numbers.' The main difference from previous colleges, though, is that 'There are so many different subjects that the students can study here, and they're all taught in a different way, so when you talk to students about workload and time management it's quite different for everybody.'

In her role Hannah provides welfare support to all undergraduate and graduate students, and coordinates Balliol's student wellbeing and welfare provision, leading a team that includes the College Nurse, the Student Counsellor, the Student Support Administrator, the Junior Deans, and others. She finds Balliol 'very supporting' and that 'everyone's keen to try new initiatives, which is great'. Events she has introduced include a festive wreath workshop at the end of Michaelmas Term and a spring bouquet workshop in Hilary, both a great success with the students.



In Hilary Term students enjoyed a spring flower bouquet workshop with the Welfare Lead.

'What I want to do is to offer the students lots of low-level interventions that are not focused on "This is to improve your mental health" but more like "Come along, be together, learn new skills, enjoy doing things that improve our wellbeing, which in turn help our mental health." Instead of saying "Come to a seminar about mental health", it'll be "Let's do some outdoor singing or go on a wellbeing walk and we can chat about stuff. Let's give you things that you can think about doing or that you look forward to each week, which are put on by the College and may help you with your resilience and your wellbeing."' Likewise she has held sessions with the Library and with Gwyneth Lewis (Artist in Residence for Hilary Term 2024), and these have helped raise the profile of her work. 'Allowing people to see me about and get used to seeing me means that they'll know that I'm approachable and they can come and see me. It's like normalising wellbeing.'



Building a better information environment

Algorithmic manipulation, bias, hate speech, misinformation, and deep fakes have created a global information environment crisis and an existential threat to humanity. The cost so far has been billions of dollars, millions of lives, and an erosion of trust in science, our institutions, and each other. The proposals for addressing these problems, from antitrust action and civic education to fake news observatories, are not comprehensive enough to match the global, multi-faceted, and technical nature of the threat we are facing today.

In response to this crisis of misinformation and disinformation, a dialogue began in 2021 between Balliol's Professor Phil Howard and Dr Sheldon Himelfarb, CEO of the US non-profit PeaceTech Lab. As Director of the University of Oxford's Programme on Democracy and Technology, Professor Howard had seen how information operations degrade public trust and collective decision-making. To meet the challenge at hand, it was clear that a new, global organisation was needed to generate more evidence-based solutions to emerging problems. In 2021, at the Nobel Prize Summit, the idea for the new International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) was born.

The IPIE learns from the organisation of other science-based, consensus-building groups, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). IPIE's goal is to provide the most actionable scientific knowledge about threats to the world's information environment and assist policymakers in taking meaningful action. As Professor Howard said in a 2023 interview, 'Information technology can make it difficult to do any peacebuilding or to set any good policy. The IPIE will be delivering policy-relevant, applied research that helps regulators make good decisions and perhaps, even more importantly, helps the technology platforms themselves design in good ways for public conversation.'

From the earliest days of the IPIE, Balliol has been instrumental in seeding the organisation and ensuring



'IPIE's goal is to provide the most actionable scientific knowledge about threats to the world's information environment and assist policymakers in taking meaningful action.'

Professor Howard addresses experts at the chartering meeting of the International Panel on the Information Environment at Balliol in 2022.

its continued success. In 2022, Balliol hosted the chartering meeting of the IPIE, which was attended by 40 of the world's leading experts in algorithmic bias, manipulation, deep fakes, illicit bots, and other mechanisms of misinformation. At this initial meeting, the group crafted the IPIE's mission statement and drafted guidelines and policies for future research.

Notably, Vidar Helgesen, Executive Director of the Nobel Foundation, spoke to the group about the information crisis and challenged the IPIE to address the crisis and offer reasons to have hope at the 2023 Nobel Prize Summit. With this bedrock foundation at Balliol, the IPIE inaugurated its intellectual and strategic development by hosting and supporting the early scientific panels, recruiting scientists from around the world, and welcoming to Balliol a range of leaders, including the presidents of the Nobel Foundation, Omidyar Foundation, and the Director-General of the BBC.

The IPIE publicly launched in May 2023 at the Nobel Prize Summit and was met with significant media coverage, including from the *New York Times* and *Forbes*. In only its second year, IPIE leadership and experts have already travelled the world including East Asia, Latin America, the USA, Canada, and West Africa to share the IPIE's findings and recruit new members and support. Today, the IPIE has a growing membership of over 250 affiliate scientists, representing a diversity of disciplines and backgrounds. The Canton of Zurich has recently approved the charitable status and legal domicile for the IPIE, which will be headquartered in Switzerland.

Perhaps most importantly, the IPIE has already published several groundbreaking reports on the state of the global information environment today, along with accompanying summaries designed for policymakers. The reports provide a systematic review of scientific literature on countermeasures for mitigating digital misinformation; and they examine the effectiveness of countermeasures against misinformation on social media platforms, focusing specifically on content labelling and corrective information interventions.

Professor Howard is now President of the IPIE, as well as CEO, overseeing the direction of the organisation. The IPIE will be launching several new topical panels throughout the year and will continue to publish exciting research to inform scientists, policymakers, and the public at large. Balliol will remain the home base for Professor Howard and several IPIE staff members managing the logistics of creating the organisation, and will no doubt continue to serve as an instrumental partner in the IPIE's success.

You can watch Professor Howard's Balliol Online Lecture 'AI and the Information Environment' on Balliol's YouTube channel. For more information about IPIE: https://www.ipie.info/.

Supporting students seeking sanctuary

Continuing its tradition of offering sanctuary, at the end of 2023 Balliol launched the Balliol Sanctuary Fund, to provide a secure home for students fleeing conflict and repression. The ambition is to fully fund one undergraduate and postgraduate at Balliol on an ongoing basis.

Balliol is proud to have a long history of welcoming scholars seeking sanctuary since at least 1639, when Nathaniel Canopius fled from persecution in Constantinople to study at Balliol. The College took in Belgian refugees in 1914 during the First World War and it welcomed Jewish scholars fleeing Germany and Austria following Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s. After the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Balliol enabled Hungarian students to pursue their studies at Oxford. In the 1970s and 80s it supported refugee scholars from around the world through the Balliol JCR's Refugee Scholarships. More recently, it co-funded a Rhodes Scholarship for Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine in 2016; in 2018 it awarded the Balliol Students' Scholarship for a refugee student; and with the generous support of Old Members and friends, Balliol gave sanctuary to two Ukrainian scholars displaced by war in 2022.

Today, ongoing conflicts and human rights abuses worldwide mean that increasing numbers of bright students are forced to flee their countries and stop their education, often experiencing violence and significant trauma. Speaking of Balliol's tradition of welcome, and of promising students who have had education stolen from them by circumstances beyond their control, the Master, Dame Helen Ghosh, said, 'Now more than ever, I believe we must secure that tradition for future generations. We have an opportunity to welcome them to Balliol, and support them through our wonderful community to make the most of everything on offer here at Oxford.'

'My time at Balliol gave me absolute security, stability, confidence. Coming to a new country on your own and having no community is incredibly difficult, but Balliol surpassed my expectations. Now I have graduated, I'm applying the knowledge I've learned at Balliol to help my country.'

Someone who has already received such a life-defining opportunity is Maryna Oproshchenko (2022), who came to Balliol as a refugee from Ukraine to read an MSc Financial Economics. 'My time at Balliol gave me absolute security, stability, confidence,' she says. 'Coming to a new country on your own and having no community is incredibly difficult, but Balliol surpassed my expectations. Now I have graduated, I'm applying the knowledge I've learned at Balliol to help my country.'

Thanks to the generosity of donors to the sanctuary fund, we can continue to give students fleeing conflict and repression the welcome and support they need to succeed at Balliol.



BALLIOL SANCTUARY FUND

Gifts of all levels will help to fund scholarships for students seeking sanctuary, covering their full tuition and living costs. The initial aim of the fund is to provide on an ongoing basis at least one undergraduate and one postgraduate sanctuary scholarship. Every donation made towards this goal will be doubled, thanks to partnerships between the Balliol Sanctuary Fund and a range of College and University funds.

If you would like to help support students fleeing conflict and repression to come to Balliol, please visit www.balliol.ox.ac.uk/sanctuary.



Left to right: Mark Eid, Nikita Trojanskis and Aaron Leu in Berlin.

Balliol at Berlinale

Nick Trojanskis (2022, DPhil Biology) reports

In mid-February of this year, ten members of Balliol embarked on a remarkable cinematic journey to Berlinale, the 74th Berlin International Film Festival. With the College's support with our application, Balliol Fine Pictures, a graduate-run film society, successfully obtained a special accreditation – typically reserved for film schools – to attend the festival.

On the opening night, the group experienced the premiere of *Small Things Like These*, featuring Cillian Murphy in his first role since his acclaimed performance as Robert Oppenheimer. Set in 1985, this drama follows Bill Furlong, a devoted father and coal merchant, as he discovers unsettling secrets within a local convent in his Irish town, challenging the silence complicit in his community.

The festival days felt surreal, akin to a fever dream. Despite often retiring at 6.00am, a testament to Berlin's nightlife, our team set alarms for 7.00am to compete in the daily scramble for free cinema tickets against thousands of other film enthusiasts, all navigating the Berlinale website's cumbersome interface.

Most Balliol attendees managed to watch up to six films daily, interspersed with quick Vietnamese meals—resulting in six visits to Vietnamese restaurants that week. Although watching multiple films in a day might seem daunting, the festival atmosphere uniquely energises attendees, making it surprisingly easy to stay focused.

Highlights recommended by the Balliol delegation include:

La Cocina, a culinary drama set in Times Square that captures the essence of contemporary America and the survival struggle within late-stage capitalism. It focuses on the life of restaurant kitchen workers, their dreams, struggles, and the intricate relationships among them.

A Different Man, a psychological thriller that examines the interplay between self-perception and societal views through Edward, a man with neurofibromatosis who undergoes facial reconstructive surgery and becomes obsessed with an actor portraying him in a play. Very Kafkaesque, very Balliol.

Another End, a science fiction romance that explores grief and recovery through Sal, who mourns the loss of his partner, Zoe. The film aligns with the dark, introspective tone of *Black Mirror*.

The Fable, set on a wealthy family's orchid farm mysteriously set ablaze, weaving a narrative that delves into India's class structures, traditions, and mysticism. It's a film Gabriel García Márquez would have directed had he been a contemporary Indian filmmaker.

Unfortunately, as on our visit to the Cannes Film Festival 2023, our intuition led us astray and we missed *Dahomey*, which won the Golden Bear, the highest award for best film at Berlinale. *Dahomey* offers a dramatised account of the return of 26 royal treasures from France to Benin, exploring the Beninese people's reactions.

Nevertheless, the experience of attending Berlinale was invaluable. Europe in 2024 continues to be a treasure trove for cinephiles of any nationality, with many festivals offering accreditations for young attendees. Thanks to Balliol's support, members of Balliol Fine Pictures have had the privilege of attending the world's three largest cinema festivals – Cannes, Venice, and Berlin – within the same academic year, for which we are profoundly grateful.

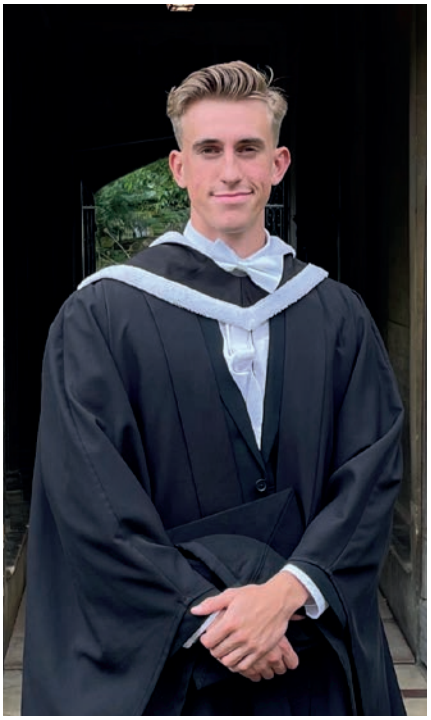


Outreach impact

Two graduate students who teach on Balliol's access programmes share their experiences

Floreat full circle

Ed Grayson (2023, MSt Intellectual History)



Ed Grayson on his graduation day for his BA.

Halfway through my first year of A-levels I found myself in a classroom at Queen's School, Bushey, a 30-minute drive from my school in Hemel Hempstead. I was sitting amongst the most articulate and intelligent students I had ever met, drawn from state schools across Hertfordshire, in Balliol's flagship humanities outreach programme, Floreat, having signed up in preparation for the Oxford application I hoped to make the next year.

Every fortnight we gathered to discuss a topic drawn from a rotating discipline of the humanities, such as philosophy, history, or English, for which we had been assigned preparatory reading. It was my first exposure to high-level academic discussion, led by Balliol postgraduate students and ignited by my fellow sixth-formers, who were as curious and passionate as I was. I entered the first seminar unsure of how to articulate my views (if I had any at all, I worried), a skill that would be essential come admissions interviews.

But in learning from my peers and the compassionate graduate tutors, I gradually became more and more comfortable with 'thinking out loud', tackling complex problems, and being academically creative – skills that had not always been nurtured at GCSE level, when teaching was much more focused on learning and executing a 'road map' in closed-book exam scenarios.

The course concluded with a summer residential in the college where I partook in a tutorial on a chosen topic – populism in the 21st century. Having developed my discussion skills throughout the year, the session felt comfortable, relaxed, and enjoyable, and the task of an interview suddenly seemed much less daunting than when I had set out six months before. I also received 1:1 support on my personal statement from the Outreach Officer, Pravahi Osman, which further instilled faith in my application.

Now I write as a graduate of

Left: Students on the residential part of the Floreat access programme 2023, attending a workshop on history research skills.

Balliol College, Oxford, with a BA in History, and as a current postgraduate candidate for Oxford's MSt in Intellectual History, to pursue which I have (of course) remained at Balliol. Floreat played a central role in my successful application to Oxford. More importantly, it is why I also write as a tutor on the same course, having been invited to deliver two seminars on the historiography of the Cold War for Floreat (which now takes place online).

Naturally, this is a beautiful full-circle moment for me. As a teenager, my Oxford dreams were about others as much as myself, not only to show what can be done with opportunity but also to be the provider of such opportunity myself.

As I commented in the College's recent undergraduate admissions video, my experience is that Balliol sets its students up for life. A holistic mix of academic, social, and sporting opportunities introduced me to fascinating people, exposed me to world-class academic rigour, and gave me moments with friends I will cherish forever. In my time at Balliol, I have been lucky enough to receive a Full Blue for playing on the University's basketball team and to captain the College cricket team, which achieved Cuppers glory in 2023. My time on the student telethon introduced me to Balliol's fascinating alumni community, which led me to an internship I undertook in strategy consulting, an industry I am pursuing after graduation. And the buzzing academic climate has led to encounters with world-famous academics, most recently Quentin Skinner, to whom I had the privilege of talking at a Christ Church book launch last November.

'I gradually became more comfortable with tackling complex problems, and being academically creative.'

I was the beneficiary of a generous Balliol outreach programme that works to unlock the potential of all students, regardless of background. Having been a telethon fundraiser, I know how vital donations from Old Members and friends are to Floreat. I thank those who have already generously donated and encourage those who haven't to join an extremely worthwhile cause. I hope that as a tutor on Floreat I can return the favour to the College and give others such opportunities.

Monday Maths

Andrew Ahern (DPhil student in Mathematics and Foley-Béjar Scholar)



In the early months of 2023, Balliol Outreach introduced a new sustained contact programme, Monday Maths. This programme invited ambitious A-level students wanting to study maths-based degree courses at Oxbridge to attend weekly online mathematics workshops given by Oxford graduate students. Its mission is to give 40 Year 12 students from schools across the UK an opportunity to glimpse university-level mathematics, to stimulate their interest in the subject, and to provide guidance on the undergraduate mathematics admission process at Oxford.

'Since the launch of Monday Maths, seven students have received offers to study at Oxford, one of them from Balliol.'

The 2023 workshops spanned a wide variety of topics, from group theory and combinatorics to computation and quantum mechanics, to name but a few. Every week between January and April, participants attended a two-hour workshop, preceded by up to two hours' preparation guided by reading materials assigned by that week's graduate tutor. The programme culminated in an in-person visit to Balliol, featuring mathematics lectures as well as a guidance session on the Oxford application process and an opportunity to meet some of Balliol's maths undergraduates.

As an eager contributor to the programme, I had the privilege of speaking to students about graph theory, that is, the mathematical study

'I really enjoyed Monday Maths and I definitely think it helped me get as far as I did, especially with my confidence in the interviews.'

Offer holder

'I thoroughly enjoyed the Monday Maths and I am grateful for the opportunity to visit Balliol College and to have received help on my personal statement and other aspects of the application process.'

Offer holder

of networks, a field of some importance to my DPhil research. Our tour began in Königsberg, the birthplace of graph theory, with the famous question of whether one can forge a path through that city by traversing each of its seven bridges precisely once (answered in the negative by Euler in 1736). We continued with an interactive discussion of some mathematical puzzles, such as how many possible social networks can there be that link up 100 individuals? We closed by watching a model simulation of toxic proteins spreading through a network model of the human brain, created by researchers at the Mathematical Institute for the study of Alzheimer's disease progression patterns.

When speaking to school students about mathematics, I aspire to achieve two objectives: to present advanced mathematical material in an accessible and engaging manner and to convey the inherent beauty of mathematics beyond its utilitarian aspects. On the latter point, I encourage students to discuss the very nature of mathematics: what it is, its relationship to our world, its relationship to us. I try to convince them of the beauty that is to be found in establishing through human thought permanent truths that transcend our material world and even empirical evidence. Beauty is truth, as Keats tells us, and mathematics is indeed the search for those truths that pervade our universe and yet are independent of it. Admittedly, some students have little interest in such amateur philosophising but for some, it can kindle their curiosity and enrich their view of the subject. Since the launch of Monday Maths, seven students have received offers to study at Oxford, one of them from Balliol.

Mathematical outreach initiatives are growing in number in Oxford. The Mathematical Institute naturally plays a large role, hosting public lectures, school workshops, open days, and an online maths club for school students, to name a few examples. Even the Natural History Museum has hosted its own Museum Maths programme for GCSE students, emphasising the importance of maths research to biology and ecology. Balliol's Monday Maths (now renamed Fibonacci, in honour of the great Pisan mathematician) is proving to be an impactful new addition to the mix, helping to demystify higher mathematics for young minds as they consider their academic journey beyond school.


Stuart Bebb

When they attend the residential part of an access programme, participants get a taste of what it's like to be a Balliol student.

Thanks to the support of generous alumni donors, the Fibonacci (mathematics) access programme for Year 12 students now includes a residential summer school, following the model of Balliol's Floreat (humanities) and Frontier (science) Year 12 access programmes. During the summer schools, students take part in a tutorial and receive support with the university application process. If would like to support Balliol's outreach work, please visit www.alumniweb.ox.ac.uk/balliol/support/outreach.

In 2024, 90 students who attended Balliol access events or programmes received offers from Oxford University, 15 of them from Balliol. These record numbers show the growing impact of Balliol's outreach work. Read more at www.balliol.ox.ac.uk/outreach-impact.



Ian Farrell (centre) with other course participants in Balliol Library.

How best to teach transatlantic slavery?

History teacher Ian Farrell (1984) describes an inspirational training course at Balliol

What perks do you get as a teacher? Well, apart from as many red pens as you want, the most obvious answer is the holidays – especially those delightfully long six weeks in the summer. So some of my teaching friends thought I was a little mad when I told them that I was spending one week of last summer on a training course looking at how to teach transatlantic slavery.

Now had this course been as uninspiring as some I've been on, they'd have had reason to doubt my sanity (one in particular started with the presenter reading his name and the word 'Hello' off the first PowerPoint slide, and it did not get any better). However, the five-day Teaching about Transatlantic Slavery Teachers' Institute at Balliol in 2023, bringing together teachers, academics, librarians and museum curators from the UK and USA, proved to be the most thought provoking and practically useful training I've done in over 30 years' teaching.

'The five-day Institute proved to be the most thought provoking and practically useful training I've done in over 30 years' teaching.'

The email about the course came at a timely moment. The TeachFirst teacher in my department and I had been reviewing our current scheme on slavery and we were dissatisfied with several elements of it: notably its lack of any context of pre-colonial Africa and its failure to adequately consider the resistance of enslaved peoples, without which those who were enslaved just come across as passive victims with no real agency. In addition, as head of the history network across all the schools in my Trust, I knew that teaching Black history was an area several schools were looking for guidance on. The course seemed to fit perfectly, so I applied and, after a couple of online introductory sessions, I arrived at Balliol Lodge on Sunday 13 August ready to begin.

And the course more than delivered. In this short article, it would be hard to do justice to the variety of the



Ian Farrell examines an African artefact in the Pitt Rivers Museum.



Course participants by the empty plinth in Bristol where, until recently, the statue of slave trader Edward Colston stood.

programme and the range of experts who inputted to it, so I shall pick out a few highlights. A fascinating session run by Abdul Mohamud and Robin Whitburn (authors of *Doing Justice to History: Transforming Black History in Secondary Schools*, 2016) focused on the 14 principles they recommend to improve the teaching of transatlantic slavery in schools: as well as confirming my original impetus to join the course (as they stressed the need to consider resistance as well as placing slavery within the wider context of pre-colonial Africa), these principles highlighted other areas for development (such as considering race as a social construct and the legacy for Africa today), whilst also confirming some principles already underpinning our scheme (how to handle the violence and terror of slavery sensitively and ensuring the use of sources from Black voices). These principles have formed the backbone of my department's strategy as we rework our scheme.

On pre-colonial Africa, an absorbing, interactive session at the Pitt Rivers Museum allowed us to handle artefacts from several African kingdoms, including exquisitely carved ivory ceremonial bowls, ornate axes and a wooden representation of a sasa boa, all of which testify to a thriving culture in those kingdoms before the intrusion of the slave traders. The session confirmed in my mind that a stand-alone, one-off lesson on pre-colonial Africa prior to teaching transatlantic slavery would be insufficient, and it would just look tagged on. Instead, we are now planning a whole unit on this, which will be in Year 7, and I am hoping, through working with Mel Rowntree at the Pitt Rivers (and using ideas from a session at the History of Science Museum run by Helen Pooley on using artefacts in the classroom to inspire and engage students), to base this unit around artefacts, so as to develop students' inference skills.

On a walking tour of Bristol, we discussed how the transatlantic slave trade should be remembered (appropriately in front of the empty

plinth where, until recently, the statue of slave trader Edward Colston stood) and visited the house of a former trader in enslaved people, John Pinney. Back in Oxford another tour, 'Uncomfortable Oxford', took us round sites with connections to slavery and examined how different institutions within the University are facing up to these connections (or not).

The course was equally inspiring on Black resistance to slavery. Materials in the exhibition at Balliol's Historic Collections Centre provided sources on the slave uprising known as the Baptist War; sources from Christine Whyte of the Beniba Centre for Slavery Studies at Glasgow University showed how runaways created networks to help others to escape; and Peggy Brunache, also from the Beniba Centre, showed how food was a form of passive resistance, as it enabled enslaved people to maintain their cultural heritage despite attempts to eradicate it.

On the subject of food, the formal dinner in Balliol (fillet of seabass with coco beans cassoulet and coconut bavarois with caramelised pineapple and piña colada sorbet) was a great deal better than your average training course hotel fare. The jerk chicken at the St Paul's Community Centre in Bristol blew me away, and the Middle Eastern breakfasts and lunches provided at Balliol by Damascus Rose Kitchen (a social enterprise run by Arabic-speaking refugee women) were sublime – and therefore fully worthy of the shameless plug for them here: if you're in Oxford, check them out at the Old Fire Station on George Street.

So what now? One of the frustrations of some courses I've attended is that their impact can be short lived, particularly once the initial ideas have been implemented and the general mêlée of teaching takes over. This course, however, as well as providing a wealth of practical resources and pedagogical insights which are currently helping to revitalise my department's schemes, has continued to provide inspiration and support. A WhatsApp group has allowed us all to stay in touch and to share ideas, articles and lesson plans, and some of the British contingent met up in December to visit the slavery exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, 'Black Atlantic: Power, People and Resistance'. Later this year two of the group will be presenting a session at a Historical Association meeting and others have already presented on 'Decolonizing the Curriculum' at TeachMeets.

The Institute was the third stage of a programme that started with an online course in autumn 2021, leading to a visit by some English teachers (mainly from Hertfordshire) to Philadelphia in August 2022 before it was expanded in Oxford to include teachers from across the UK, and we hope that it might be possible to extend it to include schools and academics in Africa, in order to gain their expertise and perspective. This, however, would rely on further funding, and, given the impact this course has had, I for one hope that this can be found. The Institute was certainly a training course like no other I have been on.

And one final thought: what other training course would have given me the opportunity to reacquaint myself with the Half Moon at one o'clock in the morning?



Group photo of the course participants on the Hall steps at Balliol.



AI in journalism

Felix M. Simon (2016, DPhil Information, Communication & Social Sciences) shares some insights from his studies

If it were up to ChatGPT, the introduction to this piece would read: 'Many people seem to believe that artificial intelligence, specifically large language models like ChatGPT, will completely revolutionise the field of journalism. In reality, the impact of AI on journalism will be much more gradual and nuanced. It will vary depending on the specific application and the context in which it is used.' Arguably, this is not as punchy as it could be, but it's good enough. All it took was a prompt with some specifications in the form of bullet points, and *voilà*, at the click of a button an introduction was born. In the future, the little exercise I have performed here will be something journalists will probably do as routinely as making themselves a cup of coffee. They will generate summaries of articles already written, polish their writing style or create illustrations that can be used on the fly. In many cases, they already do.

As a former journalist, I have been researching the implications of AI in journalism and the news industry at the Oxford Internet Institute and Balliol College since 2019, generously supported by the Leverhulme Trust, the Tow Center, the Minderoo Foundation, and the Dieter Schwarz Foundation. More specifically, my research seeks to understand how AI does and does not reshape the production and distribution of news – and by extension our information environment. In this context, I have also branched out into the developing political economy of AI and the news, looking at the role of the technology sector in developing and deploying AI that ultimately affects how we receive and consume information.

One of my core findings is that the view that AI will completely revolutionise journalism and 'disrupt the news' is misguided. Through researching the adoption of AI in international news organisations– including the BBC, the *Financial Times*, the *Washington Post* and Germany's public service broadcasters – it has become increasingly clear that news organisations will still pursue the same goals and have the same needs as they did before; what will change through AI is the way these are pursued. The task stays the same, but the arsenal of tools changes.

Against this backdrop it has been amusing, annoying, and concerning to see recent discussions around generative AI unfold. Amusing, because we have been here before and many of these debates follow the typical patterns that can often be observed around new technologies. Annoying, because AI is not completely new territory for the news. Concerning, because we have seemingly learned little from the past. Technological change does not work like a *deus ex machina* and, more crucially, it is never universal. While in some cases AI has already replaced journalistic work routines wholesale (e.g. hardly anyone still transcribes interviews by hand), there are many other areas where it ends up being just a tool among many others. In some cases, it isn't used at all (and likely won't be for the foreseeable future): you cannot send an AI to a war zone or use it to help you get a source's trust. Such examples are where humans are not replaceable. Likewise, the much-touted efficiency gains of AI are not true in every journalistic context. Often, such gains are easiest to achieve where 100 per cent accuracy is not the most important goal– e.g. in targeting readers with more content or categorising archive material. But in areas such as news writing and reporting, it's a different



story: neither is a straightforward process that can be easily automated with AI. Unfortunately, it also seems that not every news organisation benefits from AI in the same way. Building customised AI is easier for large, well-resourced publishers who have the money and expertise to experiment with the technology and make it work for them. Many local newsrooms or smaller publishers are not in such an enviable position.

And the challenges of bringing AI into news work abound. Accuracy and contextual understanding are the core of good journalism. Getting either from an AI system is still difficult. Add to this concerns about training AI, climate impact, plagiarism, liability issues, a greater dependency of news organisations on platform companies, and how AI might affect audiences’ trust, and you have a good overview of the many challenges (and open research questions, as far as AI’s effects are concerned) in bringing AI into the news. Luckily for the public, a number of news organisations are thinking hard about how AI can serve journalists and audiences without causing harm – e.g. by unintentionally discriminating by replicating biases in datasets. One such organisation is the BBC, whose Machine Learning Engine Principles are a source of inspiration for both public service and commercial news organisations internationally. As one of my research projects shows, human oversight over AI is a key component of these guidelines, as is the regular review of any applications.

While all this might strike one as largely theoretical debate, it is vital that we better understand the effects of AI on journalism and the news, and the larger regulatory and technological environment that shapes the same. Studying such questions will not only improve our understanding of how news organisations and journalists think about, adapt to and deal with a technology that, at first glance, seems to be all about de-emphasising their role in the news; it will also inform our theories of what a future of the news and information environment could look like.

For news organisations are still important gatekeepers to the public sphere. At their best, they provide us – the public – with accurate, accessible, diverse, relevant, and timely independently produced information about public affairs, as the journalism scholar Rasmus Kleis Nielsen argues; information which helps us to make important decisions in our lives, from how to vote to when we should complain to the council about roadworks. At their worst, however, they do the opposite. AI will play an important part here. Used the right way, it can help journalists and news organisations do more of what they do well. But if used without care, or with bad intentions, it can just as easily aid discrimination, amplify one-side views, or produce cheap infotainment that is not just annoying but outright misleading.

The history of technologies and their adoption teaches us that it is easier to shape them and the way they are used at the beginning. Once they gain their own momentum, shaping becomes increasingly difficult. This is just as true for AI. For now, there is still time. It is up to news organisations to make the right choices in how they use this technology and prevent a race to the bottom – and up to us as a society that we demand that the right choices are made.

If you work in a news organisation and would like to contribute to research on the topic, please feel free to reach out to Felix at felix.simon@oii.ox.ac.uk.

AI in the military

Linda Eggert (Early Career Fellow in Philosophy) describes her work on some of the moral questions raised by AI

AI brings with it exciting new ways to learn about the world. It also gives new urgency to many of the questions we ask in philosophy. The capacity in which some of my research has come to reflect a preoccupation with AI is the same in which many of us in the University try to be responsive to major challenges confronting humanity. Like anyone not indifferent to the big issues of our time, I've found it difficult to escape questions about the moral and political implications of AI's impact on our lives. Working in philosophy, what's especially intriguing is that the real-life importance of many questions AI raises is proportionate to their philosophical interest. They even bring into sharp relief questions like what ethics is about, and how philosophers can – I hope – be useful.

Much of Silicon Valley has been gripped by a broadly utilitarian mindset that treats ethics not unlike a technical engineering challenge. But not everything can be quantified and optimised. In my view, ethics is not about identifying some end towards which to optimise. It's not even primarily concerned with bringing certain things about. It's ultimately about how we treat each other. And 'AI ethics' – as an emerging topic in practical ethics and political philosophy – is no exception. With that, here is a quick tour through some of my research, which focuses on AI in the military as well as broader questions – about human rights and democracy – concerning what, if anything, we stand to lose if we eliminate human decision-making in certain contexts.

Lethal autonomous weapon systems (AWS) are typically defined as weapon systems that use AI to identify, select, and engage human targets without human intervention. Besides increased risks to peace and international stability, commonly cited ethical concerns include that the use of AWS might violate the laws of armed conflict, that it may be impossible to hold anyone meaningfully accountable, and that delegating life-and-death decisions to machines poses an indefensible affront to human dignity. Much of my work seeks to help us better understand what concerns are fundamental and will persist, even as circumstances change and technologies advance.

'What unites many worries about AI is the concern that delegating consequential decisions to machines poses an indefensible affront to human dignity.'

Take the worry that AWS may not be able to comply with the laws of armed conflict. Perhaps sufficiently advanced AI, with sufficiently advanced contextual judgement, will one day be able to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate targets, and to make proportionality judgements: correctly assessing, say, that a munitions factory is vital enough to an unjust enemy to make it a legitimate target, even if the attack would also harm some civilians. But perhaps compliance with the law isn't the only thing that matters. The trouble is that law and morality don't always coincide, and armed conflict is a case in point. Even if AWS could be made compliant with international humanitarian law, we might still have good reasons for objecting to their use. For one, the fact that most people hold that human combatants should effectively have the legal right to perform harmful acts that are morally impermissible doesn't mean that the same should apply to AWS. Besides, the use of AWS may not be limited to armed conflict. This means that human rights considerations should be front and centre, and that it could be a dangerous mistake to assume that capacity to comply with the laws of armed conflict is all that matters.

Or consider the worry that eliminating human involvement will create accountability 'gaps' and make it impossible to hold anyone meaningfully accountable for harms caused by AWS. As many clever philosophers have started to show, 'accountability obstacles' may not be as insurmountable as they appear. But suppose that eliminating human decision-makers does indeed jeopardise the possibility of accountability; and also suppose that, as proponents of the technology argue, using AI may help reduce civilian casualties. How should we weigh the promise of AWS to reduce harm to innocent people against the importance of accountability? Would a world in which less harm is caused, but without the possibility of accountability, be better than a world in which more harm is caused, for which people can be held accountable?

One possibility I explore in my work is that there might be distinctly non-instrumental value in preserving human decision-making in certain contexts: reasons that have nothing to do with furthering extrinsic values like compliance with the law or the possibility of accountability, and everything to do with people's intrinsic worth as rights-bearers – which, arguably, demands a kind of moral concern that is foreign to algorithms, whether they are executed by humans or by machines.

How should human rights and democratic values shape what technologies we develop and how we use them? Perhaps surprisingly, this question extends even to the ethics of autonomous vehicles. My work in this area aims to help reorient the debate around self-driving cars from prosaic invocations of trolley cases towards debates about how to fairly distribute risks in democratic societies. For example, one unsettling question is how democracies might, in principle, justify harm-minimising policies that prohibit self-driving cars from performing life-saving actions on behalf of individual human passengers, even though it would be morally permissible for those passengers to perform those actions themselves.

What unites many worries about AI is the concern that delegating consequential decisions to machines poses an indefensible affront to human dignity. Algorithms effectively reduce people to numbers. From courtrooms to battlefields, merely following an algorithm fails to give people the concern they deserve. In many cases, this is a serious worry. What my work highlights is that, no less worryingly, people can do likewise: they can follow algorithms just like machines. A position I explore is that increasingly common calls for a 'right to a human decision' should be rethought. What we should want, in certain situations, is non-algorithmic decision-making, regardless of whether algorithms are executed by machines or by people. More generally, much of my work in this area is dedicated to trying to understand not just what our values and principles are, but also why we hold them – whether they matter to us instrumentally, for other goods they help to promote, or for their own sake.


John Attenborough/Sunday Times

Finally, a broader question on which some of this work aims to shed light is how human rights should evolve as technologies advance. Seismic advances in AI technology have sparked calls for a whole cluster of novel rights, including rights to digital autonomy, to an explanation, and to be 'forgotten'. Human rights theorists, meanwhile, are nervous about the 'inflation' of human rights – after all, positing too many human rights may effectively devalue their currency. One critical question we consequently face is how our human rights framework can remain sensitive to changing social norms and technological advances, while avoiding pitfalls like rights inflation and expansionism. Another question is whether we may need to rethink the traditional division of labour between the human rights obligations of states on the one hand and those of international corporations on the other.

Moral and political philosophy have a critical role to play in helping us clarify and uphold the values that should shape our society and our future. My mixed Taiwanese-German heritage imprinted on me a simmering appreciation for the fierce urgency of protecting human rights and the stirring power – and harrowing fragility – of democratic values. Technological advances don't just happen to us. As democratic citizens, we have agency over the future. When asked if AI can write good songs, Nick Cave put it beautifully: 'Awe', he said, 'is almost exclusively predicated on our limitations as human beings. It is entirely to do with our audacity as humans to reach beyond our potential.' What better place to put into service this essentially human audacity than Balliol, where it's been a thrill, together with wonderful students and marvellous colleagues, to bring some of the most fundamental questions in moral and political philosophy to bear on pressing issues that affect us all.



Back to the Future of AI with Aristotle

Professor John Tasioulas (1989, Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Institute for Ethics in AI) argues for an Aristotelian approach to AI ethics

The challenges of AI, and the closely related topic of democracy, need a rich humanistic picture of ethics at their heart, one that gives expression to distinctively human capacities. I believe that this is something that we can develop in dialogue with Aristotle. Here are four lessons we need to learn from his philosophy.

The inevitability of choice

The first lesson is that ethics is a domain of individual and collective human choices based on reason. We are, as Aristotle says, rational animals. We have the capacity to stand back from our desires, or from socially established patterns of life, and to ask what it is we should do in light of all the reasons for and against any course of action. This kind of deliberation presupposes the reality of human choice. No one, says Aristotle, can deliberate about matters that are immutable or beyond their control.

'We need to understand, following Aristotle, that ethics is a domain in which we deliberate about what to do on the assumption that we have effective choices.'

Too often today, however, influential voices present the development of AI-based technologies and their increasing penetration into all domains of our life as inexorable processes, over which we can exercise little or no control. One recent book uses the metaphor of the rise of AI as akin to a tidal wave that is hurtling towards us, something that we cannot fundamentally affect. The denial that there are choices often serves to mask both the fact that these choices exist and the identity of those making them.

This sort of technological determinism is massively disempowering for individuals and political communities alike. We need to understand, following Aristotle, that ethics is a domain in which we deliberate about what to do on the assumption that we have effective choices. The exercise of capacity for choice is inherent to our dignity as rational animals, which is what Aristotle tells us we most fundamentally are.

The richness of the domain of ethics

A second lesson to learn from Aristotle is the richness of the domain of ethics. His is a view of ethics that goes back to Socrates' question in the Republic: how should one live? In addressing that question, we have to be attentive to two further questions: 1) what makes for a good life (well-being), and 2)

‘If ethics is about what it means to live a good life, then it is fundamental to all forms of AI regulation.’

what do we morally owe others – other humans, other animals, or nature itself (morality)?

In discussions about AI ethics, we often operate with a comparatively thin idea of ethics.

Most notoriously, the tech industry has sought to equate ethics with self-regulation. Ethics for them means the absence of legally enforceable regulations, which is why the tech industry was for so long keen on the discourse of ethics. But the reduction of ethics to self-regulation is a travesty from the Aristotelian point of view.

If ethics is about what it means to live a good life, and what we owe to each other, then it is fundamental to all forms of AI regulation – from my self-regulation in deciding whether to buy a social robot to keep my elderly mother company to legally enforceable rules about using AI for facial recognition or social credit. Ethics is not one form of regulation among others. This is why Aristotle’s *Politics* seamlessly follows on from his *Nicomachean Ethics* – it is impossible to do ethics properly without considering how we flourish as members of political communities and what we owe to our fellow citizens; man is by nature a ‘political animal’, who can only flourish in community with others.

Another way ethics has been diminished in discussions around AI is that it is often conceived negatively, as a series of restrictions on technological progress. In a recent lecture in Oxford, the founder of DeepMind, Demis Hassabis, spoke about all the benefits his AlphaFold system could bring by helping us predict the 3D structure of proteins. These predictions have since been used to do such things as develop malaria vaccines, protect honeybees, mitigate the effects of plastic waste. Towards the end of the lecture, Hassabis said he would at last address ethical issues, such as concerns about privacy. But, of course, the lecture was ethical from the very beginning, because scientific understanding, health and the protection of nature are among the great goods of human life, and hence a central part of the ethical.

We need to reject the fallacy that AI confronts us with a trade-off between ‘ethics’ and ‘technical progress’. From an Aristotelian point of view, the very progress that AI should seek to bring about – such as enhanced health care, scientific understanding, or access to justice – is already itself a matter of ethical values, not something to be contrasted with them.

Once this is grasped, it becomes obvious that we need to articulate what exactly are the benefits that developments in AI are intended to secure. One of the greatest failures in contemporary AI regulation is a narrow view of the potential benefits of AI. When benefits are talked about, they often take the form of economic growth or innovation, as in the UK’s white paper on AI. Yet neither economic growth nor innovation are themselves ultimate values. Many things could exemplify technical innovation or promote economic growth, from development of weapons of mass destruction to the sale of addictive narcotics. Innovation and growth are at best very imperfect proxies for genuine values and at worst slogans invoked to advance the wealth and power of some at the expense of others.

The Aristotelian conception of *eudaimonia*, which identifies human flourishing with the correct exercise of our rational powers, is I think the surest starting-point for the discussion of what should count as a benefit.

‘We need to reject the fallacy that AI confronts us with a trade-off between ‘ethics’ and ‘technical progress’.’

The limits of rules in practical reasoning

Core to Aristotelian ethics is the idea of practical reason, or *phronesis*, that enables us to discover truths about how to live. If ethics was simply about subjective opinions or established cultural practices, it would ultimately reduce to a power struggle when peoples’ ethical views clash. The Aristotelian tradition offers a more hopeful perspective. We can engage our rational powers, especially in active dialogue with others, to discover what makes life worth living and what we owe to others. Ethics is not simply a matter of subjective preferences or entrenched cultural assumptions.

By contrast, many within AI adopt an impoverished conception of intelligence. This focuses on means-end reasoning. On this view, the question of the value of the ends and the moral appropriateness of the means are treated as matters extrinsic to the operations of intelligence. Understandably, this view of ‘intelligence’, even ‘superintelligence’, has fuelled nightmares of Artificial General Intelligence annihilating humanity as a means to trivial goals, such as maximising the number of paper clips.

And a related point is that much of the discourse of AI is about replacing human decision-making with algorithmic systems that will be more efficient and free from human biases. Against this tendency, we need to hang on to Aristotle’s idea that practical wisdom cannot be reduced to the mechanical application of rules, which is what an algorithm involves. Even the best rules we can devise, says Aristotle, will encounter unforeseen circumstances. We therefore need to understand that there will always be a role of judgement in human affairs.

A richer understanding of democracy

We live at a time when democracy is in a precarious condition, with many, especially younger people in established Western democracies, saying they

have little faith in democratic systems. And there's an interesting AI angle to this: in a recent poll of people in 11 countries worldwide, 51% of Europeans favoured replacing some of their parliamentarians with AI (the highest European support was in Spain at 66%); outside Europe, 75% of those surveyed in China supported the idea of replacing parliamentarians with AI.

Yet perhaps the most crucial objective of AI policy is to subject AI to democratic control, in order to ensure that the choices it confronts us with are directed to genuine goods and that the benefits are fairly distributed. This is the theme of an important book by Acemoglu and Johnson entitled *Power and Progress* (2023).

Can we really present Aristotle as a proponent of democracy, since like many philosophers of his time he seemed to be a sceptic about democracy?

Well, perhaps the first thing to be said here is the pragmatic point, emphasised by Josiah Ober, that it was democratic ancient Athens that witnessed the greatest flowering of philosophy in human history. Philosophers like Aristotle voted with their feet in choosing to live in a democracy, whatever their theoretical reservations. Another is that the definition of democracy with which Aristotle operated was not one that we would use; it was rule by the poor in their own interests, a kind of counterpart of oligarchy.

More positively, Aristotle's philosophical method was democratic in a broad sense. It assumes that in general humans can trust that the exercise of their rational capacities will give them a reliable picture of the world. So the starting-point of philosophical discussion for Aristotle was always the *endoxa*, the widely held opinions on a given topic.

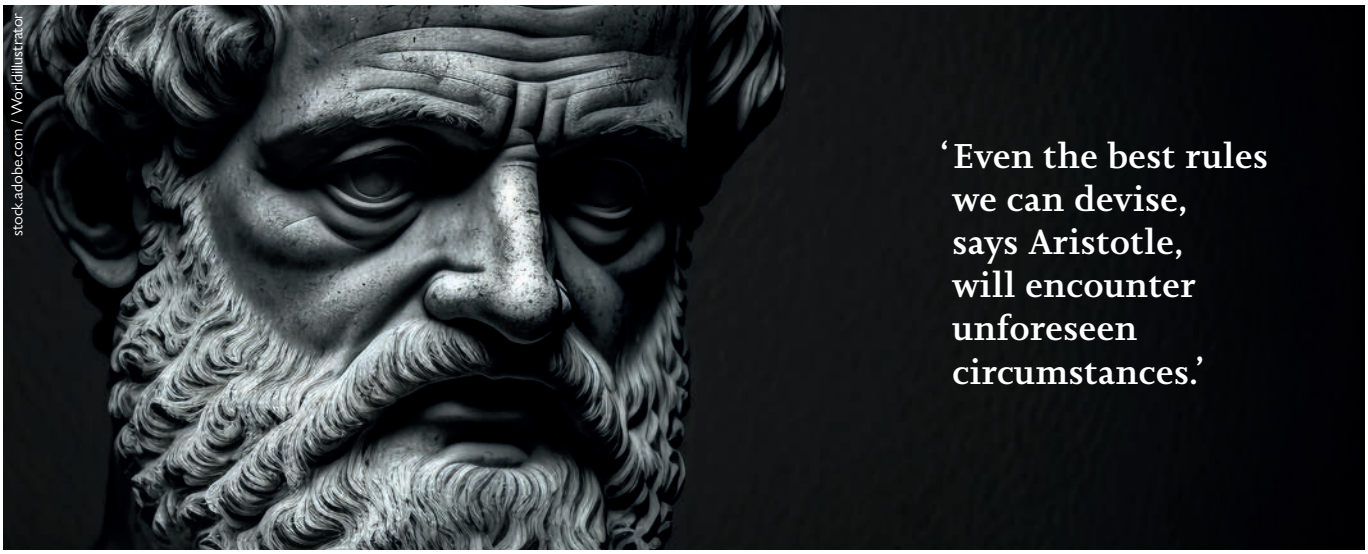
Aristotle has a highly participatory definition of citizenship as 'ruling and being ruled in turn'. This is not just democratic in character but a form of democracy that cannot be restricted to voting for representatives in elections every three or four years. On this definition, most members of contemporary democracies are not truly citizens, because their role is too passive.

One important line of argument for democracy is that it serves the common good better than any alternative because it can draw on the different forms of knowledge possessed by the whole of the citizenry. And the need for cognitive diversity in political decision-making is something that Aristotle powerfully understood when he remarked, in the *Politics*, that sometimes the person who lives in a house knows more about it than the architect who designed it.

Notwithstanding that democracy is one of the topics where we need to think with Aristotle to get beyond his own limitations, to criticise Aristotle in the name of a deeper, truer Aristotelianism (for example, his grossly mistaken view that women were not properly equipped to engage in rational deliberation about the common good), I think Aristotle helps us towards developing a richer understanding of democracy: one that consists not simply in aggregating preferences but in deliberation about the common good by an informed and engaged citizenry. Moreover, we need to recognise that the site of democratic deliberation is not confined to our representatives in parliaments but extends to the culture as a whole, the *agora* not just the *ekklesia*.

One of the great challenges that has confronted the extension of democratic participation to the people as a whole is the immense size of modern democratic states. One of the most conspicuous benefits of AI and digital technology is that it can potentially enable us to tackle this problem of scale, to find ways to enable more meaningful democratic participation.

We have an inspiring example of this in Taiwan's experiments in digital democracy, especially its digital platform aptly named POLIS, which uses AI technology to channel wide-ranging deliberation among citizens into tangible legislative outcomes. The Aylon Lyceum (https://aylonlyceum.gr/) – 'a hub for public dialogue' inspired by Aristotle's Lyceum – is another example of digital technology in the service of participatory democratic citizenship. The philosophical dialogue it facilitates does not simply cater to our consumer preferences in the name of generating a profit. Instead, it enables us to actualise the operation of our rational powers in addressing the ethical problems that confront us as individuals and self-governing communities. Rather than replacing human activity, these are technologies that enable the fuller expression of human capacities. This is ultimately what we should want from all technological developments.



'Even the best rules we can devise, says Aristotle, will encounter unforeseen circumstances.'

Alumni working on AI

Ed Grefenstette (2008)

Director of Research at Google DeepMind

I started working on applying contemporary machine learning (based on neural networks) to the understanding of natural language during my postdoctoral work at Oxford, which was a thematic continuation of my DPhil research. This marked the start of a journey in artificial intelligence research in which research in academia and in industry intertwined with occasional dips into entrepreneurship and working in the leadership of companies of various sizes. At present, I am a Director of Research at Google DeepMind, where I help steward the production of general-purpose artificial agents which can understand and assist us. In tandem, I am an honorary Professor of UCL, part of UCL's Department of Computer Science, and its AI Centre, where I co-lead the UCL DARK (Deciding, Acting, and Reasoning with Knowledge) Lab with Professor Rocktäschel, supervising half a dozen PhD students.

Across my decade-long career since leaving Oxford, I have contributed, with my brilliant students and colleagues, research across a number of domains. In particular, we developed novel architectures for enabling neural networks to reason algorithmically; we devised new methods for artificial agents to understand language in the context of virtual (and one day, real) environments and learn to formulate their own goals and notions of success, which they could use to guide the execution of their plans; we analysed how and whether powerful neural networks could learn to reason about programs, logic, mathematics, and tested how much of conversational pragmatics is grasped by the current state-of-the-art of large language-understanding models; and finally we designed algorithms which seek to replicate the ways in which (some) humans constantly seek to push back the limits of their understanding and capabilities, by not only learning from challenging problems, but also from seeking out novel challenges which exist at the boundary of what we can and can't do (yet). We have been fortunate to have had these works recognised by the scientific community in the form of acceptance at top-tier conferences, frequent citation, and the occasional best paper award.

As we enter a period of near-ubiquity in the application of AI in our lives, it is fascinating to observe how the themes we explored over the last decade either have influenced current strands of research finding their way directly into production or application in the real world, or persist as ambitious open problems. It is also concerning to see how uncertainty about the capabilities of artificial systems frequently translated into seemingly boundless hype or ungrounded fear. This perhaps further highlights the importance of those building these systems having a firm commitment to the Scientific Method, in order to ensure that their deployment is safe and responsible, while boldly pursuing technological progress for the sake of humanity. In this regard, I am thankful for the education I have received at Oxford, and other places before and after, and remain dedicated to supporting the ability of such institutions to train those who will come after, and build what comes next.



A generative AI-enhanced portrait of Ed Grefenstette.

'It is concerning to see how uncertainty about the capabilities of artificial systems frequently translated into seemingly boundless hype or ungrounded fear.'



Mick Yang (2017)

AI Futures Fellow, Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México

I am currently one of 13 AI Futures Fellows chosen by the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM) in Mexico City to work with leading AI researchers – from Harvard, Oxford, OpenAI, and other institutions – to understand advanced AI and its risks. I am researching frontier AI developers' responsible scaling policies and how those and evaluations can inform the regulatory landscape.

The connection between this work and what I originally came to Balliol for, to study law, isn't obvious. But in a way, it all makes sense. I've always felt naturally attuned to injustices and driven to find ways to correct it. Coming to Balliol, known for its progressive spirit, to study law fitted that goal – and that decision precipitated my work with AI. Through Balliol's unique William Westerman Pathfinders Awards programme, in summer 2022 I embarked on a once-in-a-lifetime adventure across the United States, where I had the privilege of meeting some brilliant and generous people working at the frontiers of AI safety. They opened my eyes to the real capabilities and urgent perils of AI, including the risk of structural injustice and inequality globally. This shook me out of my complacent sense that AI was a sci-fi fantasy hinging on future technical contingencies. Auto-replicating models and agents, superhuman intelligence that could thwart loss of control measures, now seemed plausible within the next five years.

Since then, I have worked to understand AI's transformative potential for good and bad. At BCG (Boston Consulting Group), I advised a national government on deploying AI semantic search systems to quicken payouts to citizens, and an EU scale-up whose proprietary AI product cut building energy use at scale. To spread awareness of safety concerns and learn the latest technical innovations, I organised regular events where I invited leading experts to share on topics such as mathematical guarantees of fairness or knowledge distillation. One invitee was one of our own: Michael Webb (2008), a former DeepMind researcher and current founder of an AI safety school.

Through that and a great deal of self-studying, reading Arxiv papers at weekends, I was fortunate to be selected for the AI Futures Fellowship. My current project considers the ways in which scaling policies are helpful. These are internal non-binding risk management policies that companies developing the most capable AI foundation models have. They set out tiers of model sizes and corresponding procedural triggers such as capabilities evaluations and organisation responses. I have also studied other industries like nuclear and aviation to understand how the regulatory ecosystem grew at a time when it was hard to predict these nascent technologies.

I have concluded that hard laws and independent standard-setting will take time to crystallise, and we're now at a critical period to increase our chances of getting those right. We can do so by (1) improving the robustness and accuracy of technical evaluations, and (2) making sure technical specifications translate into precise verbal standards. Over the next few years, I believe policy needs to become more detailed in quantifying risks to enable potential licensing and insurance; we will also need to anchor legal triggers to specific components in products or development stages. Adding to this inherently difficult problem, there's a bottleneck of people who can engage with evaluations and translate them into workable policy recommendations.

This issue will likely be my focus for the next five years. I hope to keep growing my technical chops to tackle this and other questions I've been pondering. What can we show about a model – internal features or observable behaviours – to provide confidence to society about its system? Can we scale that oversight with software? How can the AI data pipeline be ethically improved upstream, with higher data quality ingestion tools and fairer data labelling processes?

I am motivated by the fact that what we design as our defaults now, through law or moral norms, disproportionately shapes the most transformative technology of our lifetimes. I believe we owe it to others, including future generations, to make it go as well as possible. Please feel free to get in touch with me if what I've shared resonates with you (hello@mickyang.me)!



'I have concluded that hard laws and independent standard-setting will take time to crystallise, and we're now at a critical period to increase our chances of getting those right.'

Devaki Raj (2007)

Chief Digital and AI Officer, Strategy Office, Saab

After graduating I worked at Google on a variety of projects, including Maps, Energy, and [X], before co-founding CrowdAI, a Silicon Valley-based leader in artificial intelligence and computer vision, in 2016. I served as the CEO of CrowdAI until it was acquired recently by Saab Inc., where I am now the Chief Digital and AI Officer (CDAO) in the Strategy Office.

CrowdAI rose to prominence in the AI community by developing a leading end-to-end, 'no-code', computer vision platform. The software prioritised mass user accessibility, enabling enterprises to take their existing image and video data and to build production-ready computer vision models on their own. Our customers have included Fortune 500 companies as well as flagship AI programs at the Department of Defense's Joint Artificial Intelligence Center (JAIC), the US Air Force, the US Navy, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, and US Southern Command. CrowdAI solutions have supported a variety of missions, including mapping wildfires for first responders in California, assessing post-hurricane damage in South America, as well as improving manufacturing quality, to name a few.

As a result of this work I was awarded VentureBeat's 2022 Women in AI AI Entrepreneur Award, and I was named one of Inc. and Forbes' Magazines' 30 under 30; CrowdAI was named one of America's Most Promising Artificial Intelligence Companies by Forbes' 2021 AI 50 list.

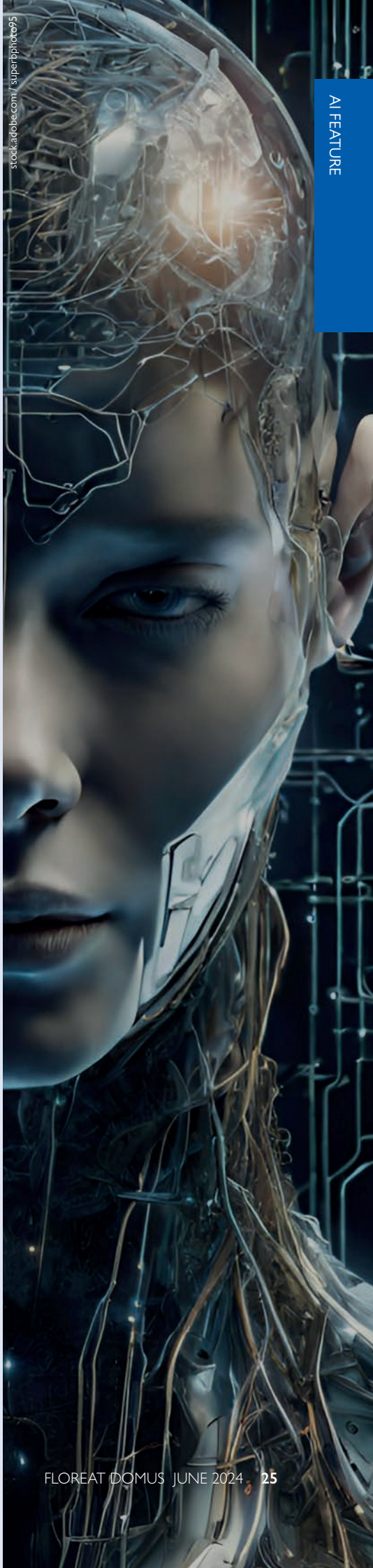
I have consistently advocated that the accessibility of data and AI technology should serve diverse communities. In this respect, I serve on the Advisory Board of the National Geospatial Advisory Committee to the Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland; on 14 September 2023 I testified before the US Senate on AI procurement; and on 5 December 2023, I was invited to US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's AI Executive Forum to discuss US national security implications of AI regulation.

Specifically, I believe that AI procurement across the government should be focused on four things. First, commercial off-the-shelf AI solutions need government-curated data to be mission ready. Second, AI procurement needs to include ongoing AI model training and the infrastructure to support that training. Third, the rapid growth in open-source AI technologies necessitates rigorous testing and evaluation before and after procurement. Finally, it is important to establish paths to programs of record for small businesses through project transition milestones.

My interest in shaping policy is an ongoing commitment to making sure that AI technology benefits the many versus the few – framing policies on broader access to safe AI.

'I have consistently advocated that the accessibility of data and AI technology should serve diverse communities.'





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Using sound and bubbles for decarbonisation

Professor James Kwan (Tutorial Fellow in Engineering Science) explains how sonochemistry may help create a more sustainable future

The problem with carbon

Carbon is in the plastics and pharmaceuticals that keep patients in hospitals alive. It is in the fuel that literally, and figuratively, drives us forward, keeps us warm, and ensures the lights stay on. In some form or another, carbon is integral to every aspect of our lives.

Yet – as is well known – carbon, and more specifically carbon dioxide, is one of the leading drivers for global climate change. Carbon dioxide, and other gases such as methane, in the atmosphere prevents light from the sun from escaping from the Earth. The trapped light becomes heat, which slowly but acceleratingly warms the average global temperature. Eventually, the Earth's temperatures will no longer be able to sustain the current ecosystems into which we as a species have evolved.

Unfortunately, carbon dioxide emissions remain an unmet challenge. Though this is an intricate and complex problem at an international scale, it stems from a simple concept that can be reduced to a single equation:

IN – OUT + GENERATION = ACCUMULATION

This equation is simply an accountancy of stuff (be it energy, people, or carbon dioxide). Effectively, for any given volume of space at some point in time, the amount of stuff in it (ACCUMULATION) is determined by how much enters (IN), leaves (OUT), or spontaneously forms or dissolves (GENERATION).

An example I often give my students is to consider their bank accounts. If they wanted to predict how much money they may have in ten years' time, they would factor in their income, expenditure, and any interest on their savings. Much in the same vein, if we want to know how much carbon dioxide is in the atmosphere, we simply need to take stock of how much we emit, how much is sequestered, and how much is spontaneously created or destroyed.



'How do we use carbon dioxide without producing more carbon dioxide in the process? One possibility may be the use of high frequency sound waves and bubbles in water.'

The carbon cycle

There is a natural cycle of carbon entering and exiting the atmosphere. Trees and other organisms that use photosynthesis to power their cells often pull in carbon dioxide. This sequestration traps carbon in the form of biomass, such as sugars, proteins, etc. However, although organisms absorb and trap carbon dioxide, they also die or are consumed. This releases it back into the atmosphere, effectively creating a carbon cycle for the planet.

This carbon cycle is usually balanced such that the accumulation of carbon dioxide does not change much. According to ice core data, it fluctuates by about 100 parts per million every 50,000 years. That is until about the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when we discovered that a carbon source buried deep in the ground was a viable fuel. Oil, coal, and light natural gases are remnants of biological organisms that millennia ago pulled carbon dioxide from the air, died, and were buried before the carbon dioxide re-entered the atmosphere.

So as we necessarily burn existing and long since deceased biomass our society has opened a new path for carbon dioxide to re-enter the atmosphere. We rely on chemical processes (for food, cement making, pharmaceuticals, water purification, etc.) that innately produce carbon dioxide as well. All of this offsets the balance of the carbon cycle, leading to the devastating accumulation of carbon dioxide.

Why is carbon dioxide so hard to get rid of?

For the burning of fuel to produce energy, we are effectively oxidising (i.e. adding oxygen atoms to) carbon

to its limit. Unfortunately, carbon dioxide itself is not a particularly useful chemical. It does not naturally react with anything. So we cannot do much with it without putting more energy in to remove one of the oxygen atoms. But more energy means more fuel, and thus more carbon dioxide emissions elsewhere.

Of course, plants can convert carbon dioxide. But this requires time and solar energy. The products are not always useful for many chemical processes. Though there is ample research in using these biomass sources as chemical feedstocks, it remains a challenge to ensure the conversion is not offset by the required fuel.

Sound and bubbles

So how do we use carbon dioxide without producing more carbon dioxide in the process? One possibility may be the use of high frequency sound waves and bubbles in water. Sound can be generated from common materials with little electrical energy. It is generally considered a green technology.

High-frequency sound waves in the water are vibrations at frequencies much larger than we can hear. These vibrations are pressure fluctuations that cycle between compression and tension – a push and pull on the water. Pull the water hard enough and a bubble of gas and water vapour spontaneously forms.

Interesting things happen once a bubble forms. There is a power struggle between the stress from the water due to its inertia and the pressures inside and outside the bubble. As these two compete, the volume of the bubble changes. If the vibrations in the water are balanced with the pressures of the bubble, they generally vibrate in resonance. But once the balance shifts to favour the inertia of the water, bubbles substantially grow in volume before ultimately violently collapsing into themselves. It is in these collapsing bubbles that uniquely extreme conditions are created.

The inertial collapse of a bubble stems from the momentum of the water pushing and squeezing the bubble into a near singularity. And in an instant later, the bubble expands back to environmental conditions. During the collapse, the gas and vapour trapped in the bubble begin to heat up. The pressure begins to build. The environment inside the collapsing bubble can reach temperatures like that on the surface of the sun and pressures 100 times greater than the pressure down at the wreck of the *Titanic*.

Under these extreme temperatures and pressures, the bonds that hold atoms in molecules together fall apart. The molecules trapped in the bubble fracture into highly reactive chemical fragments. And once the bubble swings back to room temperature and pressure, these reactive fragments quickly try to find other fragments to bond with. A 'musical chairs' of chemistry allows for chaotic chemical reactions not normally possible. Unfortunately, this means that it is difficult to select specific desirable products. Even more so, this chaotic chemistry usually pushes towards simpler molecules, such as hydrogen, carbon monoxide, and carbon dioxide. Unsurprisingly, early work in this 'sonochemistry' revolved around the removal and destruction of contaminants in water.

'We need greener chemical processes to sustain our modern life and reduce carbon dioxide emissions. This will require a diverse portfolio of strategies, which sonochemistry may find itself within.'

Yet now there is a renaissance in the field, as more and more researchers have developed strategies to produce more complex and desirable chemicals. Much of the work we do is trying to tame this chaos to form specific and selective chemicals and make the technology more energy efficient. We achieve this by taking a holistic approach to sonochemistry. By manipulating the ultrasound field, cavitation, and chemical environment, our research group in collaboration with other academics has started to convert carbon dioxide to valuable products such as methane and ethane. We have also started to convert organic biomass into hydrogen, carbon monoxide, and hydrocarbon. All done in water under normal environmental conditions.

What's next?

Recent work by our lab and colleagues promises that sonochemistry may be a green alternative to several chemical processes. But before sonochemistry finds its place outside our labs, there remain several challenges. We need to develop larger-scale reactors to produce these chemicals in meaningful quantities. And it may be a green chemical process but is it financially sustainable? Ultimately, sonochemistry remains underexplored. There are many more chemistries to be discovered and things to learn about the process so that it may find its place in industrial practice.

In sum, we need greener chemical processes to sustain our modern life and reduce carbon dioxide emissions. This will require a diverse portfolio of strategies, which sonochemistry may find itself within. There remain a number of things still to address before sonochemistry becomes practice. But recent progress is positive and hints towards a more sustainable future.



Engineering a sustainable future

Cherie Wong (2020, DPhil in Engineering Science) reports on a conversation with Jessica Poole (2017) about her career at Rolls-Royce

Jessica's Oxford journey began at the iconic big tree in the Garden Quad at Balliol. Recollecting her time as a chemistry undergraduate, she remembers fondly her first tutorial with Professor William Barford (Fellow and Tutor in Physical Chemistry). Instead of diving straight into equations and chemical interactions, he stared at the big tree outside his office window and asked the nervous Freshers if they understood what was happening there, before starting to talk to them about why the tree changes colour and its mechanisms. It was at this very moment, Jessica says, that she realised she was surrounded by people who were 'interested in stuff' and grateful for being at Oxford. Throughout her four-year Oxford journey, the University constantly encouraged her to learn new things and offered the freedom to problem-solve outside the box.

Driven by her passion to combat climate change, Jessica recognised engineering as a pathway to making a tangible difference in environmental sustainability. Lacking the conventional engineering qualifications required for the Graduate Engineering Trainee position at Rolls-Royce, initially she was met with scepticism from colleagues there, who questioned her capability. However, her background



Jessica Poole

'We must address green technology with a diversified portfolio approach rather than betting on a single 'magic' solution.'

at Oxford equipped her with a solid foundation in areas such as thermodynamics and mathematics, particularly in her final-year project involving scientific computing. Subsequently she became a chartered engineer and after years of experience at Rolls-Royce, Jessica found her niche.

Jessica's most demanding period at Rolls-Royce was when she served as Technical Assistant to the Chief Technology Officer. Anticipating a role involving conference attendance and material preparation, she encountered unexpected adversity when the pandemic struck. As an aerospace company, Rolls-Royce faced formidable challenges and Jessica found herself working closely with leaders tasked with navigating these. Reflecting on this time, she describes it as intensely challenging, reminiscent of the days when she pulled all-nighters at Oxford in order to prepare materials that needed to be perfect. Nonetheless, she learned invaluable lessons from the experience, which fundamentally altered her perspective on leadership and equipped her with essential skills for operating as a leader herself.

Having advanced to a management role at Rolls-Royce, as Technology Business Lead Jessica led a team of engineers and scientists developing Direct Air Capture (DAC) technology in order to combat climate change – her team was tasked with developing a demonstration system for DAC. DAC technology is aimed at directly removing carbon dioxide (CO_2)

'While the scientific principles behind Direct Air Capture are well understood, the real challenges lie in scaling up the technology.'

from the atmosphere, employing a blend of chemical processes and specialised equipment. These systems extract CO_2 molecules from ambient air, concentrating and storing them for potential reuse or sequestration. The technology holds immense significance in the fight against climate change, particularly in mitigating CO_2 emissions from hard-to-abate sectors like aviation and iron and steel production while also addressing the existing surplus of CO_2 that is contributing to global warming. Jessica emphasises that while the scientific principles behind DAC are well understood, the real challenges lie in scaling up the technology, such as engineering the system to minimise costs.

When asked about the essential qualities for success in tackling such complex problems, Jessica stresses the importance of 'learning from other people' and the significance of 'soft skills'. Although she managed the DAC programme, she acknowledges the necessity of relying on the experienced engineers within her team. Constantly learning from and being coached by them allowed her to leverage their wealth of knowledge and use it to inform her decision-making process. Additionally, she underlines the value of interdisciplinary collaboration within a cohesive team. For instance, being the sole chemist in the group Jessica naturally approached the DAC problem from a chemistry perspective, and she is enthusiastic about upskilling her fellow team members in this area – 'It's great fun,' she remarks.

The journey towards achieving net-zero emissions is undeniably challenging. Reflecting on the current state of green technology, Jessica believes we must address the issue with a diversified portfolio approach rather than betting on a single 'magic' solution. For example, while solar and wind energy are great sustainable solutions, we need other solutions to complement their intrinsic intermittent nature. For Jessica, promising as DAC technology is, in order to effect lasting change it must be integrated with other solutions.

Despite significant advancements in green technology, she remains concerned about the pace of innovation. In particular, she is concerned about the International Energy Agency's statement that 'Most of the global reductions in CO_2 emissions through 2030 in our pathway [to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050] come from technologies readily available today. But in 2050, almost half the reductions come from technologies that are currently only at the demonstration or prototype phase.' Frankly, she says, this statement scares her. With only around 25 years to invest, develop, and deploy transformative technologies before the 2050 net-zero target, she stresses the urgency of action needed. In the case of DAC, even though the technology has been around for 15 years, it has only recently started to get real traction; technology development is slow. To achieve the target, Jessica advocates accelerated deployment of existing solutions, coupled with robust regulatory frameworks and global cooperation.

Jessica identifies other challenges in navigating the transition to net-zero emissions. While many companies and governments have pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, there is a notable lack of concrete short-term action plans and intermediate targets with clearly defined milestones: there is an urgent need for tangible, immediate steps to realise this vision, she says, and for alignment between technological advancement, financial investment, and regulatory frameworks. A significant domestic challenge in the UK lies in the planning commission process, where the deployment of various technologies faces lengthy approval timelines. Regulation must evolve to match the pace of technological development.

As a female scientist and engineer, Jessica is committed to changing perceptions of women in science and candidly shares challenges she has faced. She was in the Physical and Theoretical Chemistry department, the 'practical side', which generally she believes is better for gender diversity. But in one almost ridiculous instance, she was once mistaken for a cleaner in Oxford's Physical and Theoretical Chemistry building, as women were so rare in the building at the time: she recalls someone saying to her, 'Thank you for cleaning my mug, but please don't touch my computer.' It was, she says, an 'interesting' start to her Master's project in the department.

Currently, women represent only 20–25% of the workforce in the STEM sector. Jessica emphasises the imperative for increased accountability and inclusivity within STEM environments, particularly in core subjects such as mathematics, physics, and engineering. We should not rely solely on women to lead outreach efforts or participate in women-only mentoring schemes: she stresses the equal importance of male involvement in fostering a more inclusive workplace culture and in coaching other males to contribute to creating a more welcoming environment.

Jessica's message to aspiring scientists is clear: embrace collaboration and your passion. She urges students to follow their passions and seek careers aligned with causes they truly care about, rather than settling for disconnected paths that fail to resonate with their interests. Drawing from her experience, Jessica highlights the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue and cooperation, likening it to the interactions seen in Oxford's dining halls, where classicists engage with physicists, philosophers talk to engineers. As one who is leading the charge in sustainable innovation, she believes that future generations could make significant progress towards a sustainable future by fostering ongoing dialogue and collaboration across diverse fields.

Having heard about Jessica's anything-but-conventional career trajectory from chemistry scholar to chartered engineer, her pioneering work in mitigating climate change, and her views on the net-zero transition, I believe Jessica will remain genuinely 'interested in stuff' and continue to create great impact in the field of sustainability.

A regenerative lawyer

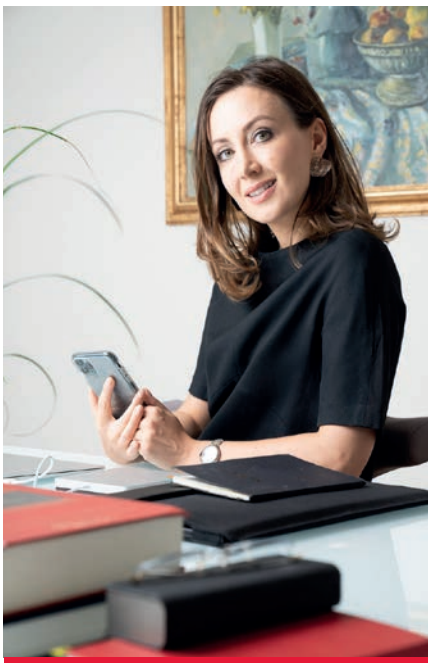
Weidenfeld-Hoffmann scholar and lawyer Nadja Skaljic (2013) speaks to Floreat Domus about her career, Oxford connections and leveraging law for people and nature

Please tell us about your background before you came to Balliol.
I was born in Sarajevo, where in 1914 the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand sparked the First World War, which would change the course of world history. Some eighty years later, when I was five years old, the war in the 1990s that broke up Yugoslavia again brought unspeakable crimes and destruction. With such a background, it is not hard to imagine why I chose to study law and international relations. I also looked up to my grandfather, a Second World War veteran and accomplished lawyer.

My passion for law took me from Sarajevo to pursue my education at Harvard and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in the United States. Early in my career, I worked in The Hague to help prosecute war crimes. That experience taught me the limits of law. It sparked an interest in asking better questions – beyond what is legally permissible and ultimately towards what is right. This drive remains with me today, guiding my practice of law.

Why did you choose Balliol and what did you enjoy about it?
While working as a Senior Fellow for Europe at the Carnegie Council in New York, I met Sir Adam Roberts, long-time president of the British Academy and now a Balliol Emeritus Fellow. He taught me much about international relations and life at Oxford. When I was admitted for graduate studies, he made a case for me to choose Balliol as my academic home at Oxford.

Being part of Balliol meant being immersed in a community of diverse, high-achieving and brilliant minds. The sense of camaraderie and the shared pursuit of knowledge among a mix of scholars from natural and social sciences made for an inspiring atmosphere. Balliol significantly contributed to my personal and intellectual growth.



‘I became aware of the enormous impact my activities at the company had on the environment, and I became concerned that lawyers are not fully playing their part in the green transition.’

The Magister Juris degree was demanding. However, I relished the small tutorial groups, which allowed in-depth discussions and ensured a truly personalised learning experience.

One of my favourite memories is when Adam Roberts and I were having lunch in the Senior Common Room and Professor John Ikenberry, the great American international relations theorist (and George Eastman Visiting Professor that year), came in. I was somewhat starstruck: having just returned to Europe from Harvard, I was fresh from reading many of Ikenberry’s works. Adam asked him to join us and I will forever remember the discussion with these two great minds.

You were a Weidenfeld-Hoffman scholar and now you are a board member of the Weidenfeld Hoffmann Trust. Can you tell us something about that?
The Weidenfeld-Hoffmann Trust (WHT) is an educational charity that provides around 30 graduate scholarships a year for graduates and early career professionals from developing and emerging countries to study at Oxford and participate in a leadership programme. When I became a scholar, I sensed that the WHT was on a mission to create a community of excellence – betting on everybody’s humanity. Co-founded in 2008, it marries the ambitions of George Weidenfeld, who wanted Oxford to educate a significant cohort of young global leaders each year, with André Hoffmann’s vision of a sustainable, inclusive and prosperous world for all.

For me, George Weidenfeld was one of the greatest publishers of the 20th century and the best of politicians, although he never held any public office. He cared about the cause and its impact, not the politics behind it. Always the congenial charmer, networker and fixer, he worked to transcend the ideological divisions that kept people from working together. His passion for leading a meaningful and, yes, fun life was infectious.

Oxford knows George Weidenfeld



Nadja Skaljic speaking at the Weidenfeld-Hoffmann Trust's 15th anniversary celebration at the University of Oxford's Divinity School.

as a generous and loyal friend: beyond establishing the WHT, he persuaded Len Blavatnik to provide the seed funding for the Blavatnik School of Government. His ideas were also instrumental in setting up the Europaeum in 1992, an association of leading European universities funded and led by fantastic Balliol people. The project was enthusiastically taken on by then Oxford chancellor Roy Jenkins (1938 and Honorary Fellow 1969–2003), who was incidentally also the European Commission's first president, and later championed by Lord Patten (1962 and Honorary Fellow), himself a former EU External Relations commissioner.

Now in its 15th year with a 400-strong global alumni network, the WHT has grown into the largest philanthropic scholarship in the history of Oxford. As an alumna and a board member, I am proud of the Trust's achievement and future promise. On this happy anniversary occasion, our trustees and advisory board members announced that the Weidenfeld-Hoffman Trust will continue awarding 30 graduate scholarships to extraordinary individuals from most of the world for as long as the University of Oxford stands – in perpetuity!

How has your career progressed since you were at Balliol?

The other day, a colleague introduced me as 'the regenerative lawyer'. We laughed, but that is precisely how I would describe my work today.

After Balliol, I went to work for the British delegation to the European Union in Brussels, where I worked throughout Brexit. Then I moved to Switzerland to work as Chief Legal Officer in a multinational trading company with operations worldwide. In this role, I saw first-hand the effects of the EU regulations we had co-created in Brussels in the private sector. I also became aware of the enormous impact my activities at the company had on the environment, fair labour practices, and anti-corruption, and I became concerned that lawyers are not fully playing their part in the green transition.

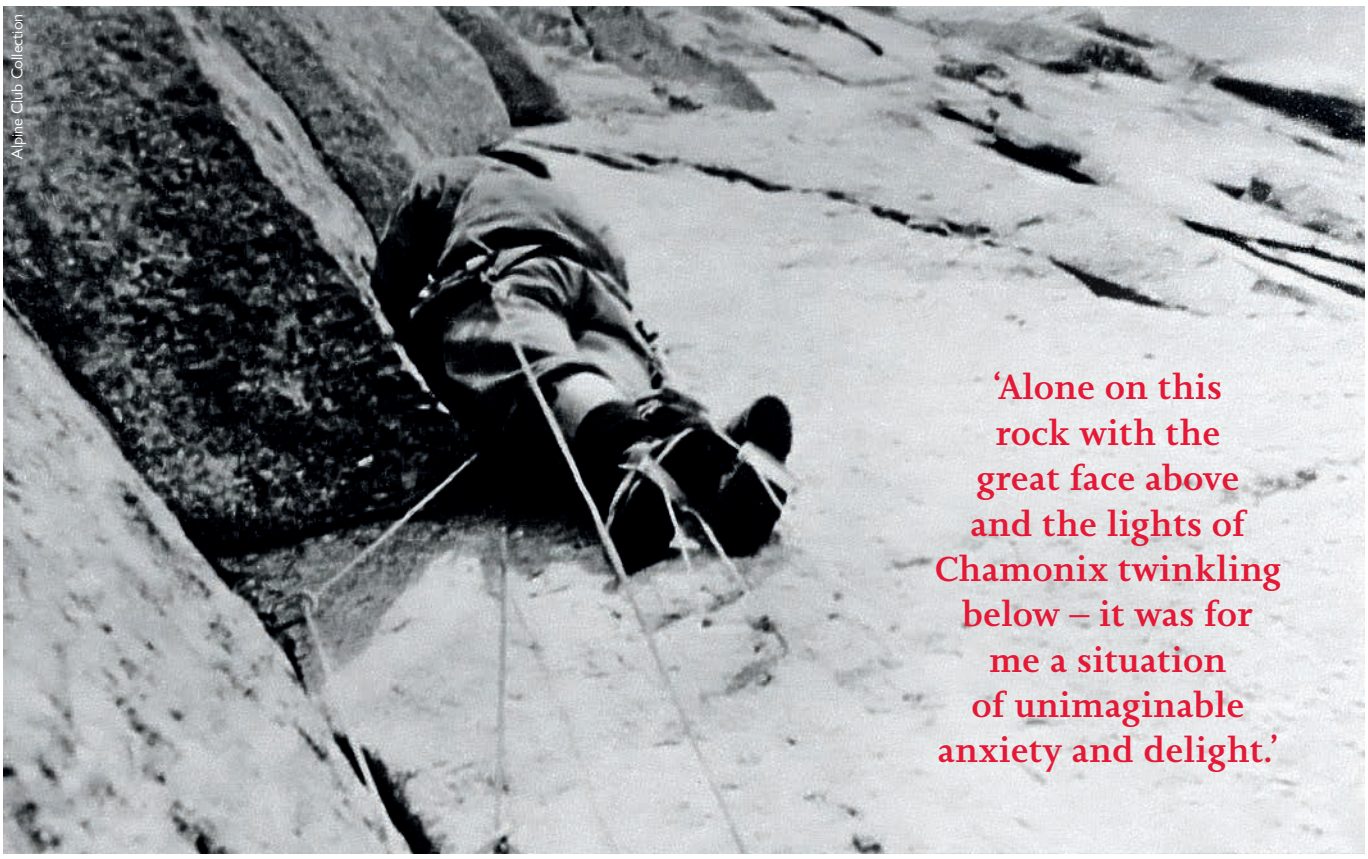
It quickly became evident to me that the dysfunction in our legal systems – on the public and the private sector side – is a design issue. Most political and legal structures underpinning modern society are designed to foster competition, short-term profits, and growth at all costs. We lawyers have significant ethical agency. I believe we should help release our societies from unfit frameworks and reinvent organisations for a new, regenerative purpose. There is a better way to practise law.

Many professionals, decision-makers and ordinary people perceive the dissonance between how work and success are defined today and what needs to be done for a sustainable, nature-positive future. It leads to frustration and often to cynicism and individualistic patches.

Sustainability and regeneration are still not sufficiently taught at the law schools of the world. Universities have an enormous role to play and must step up now. They should become places where regenerative leaders of all disciplines are cultivated to become our ecosystem's stewards, not top-down managers. Of course, education in a regenerative economy still means that competence is essential, but building character is vastly more important.

When I say that I see myself as a 'regenerative lawyer', it means that I practise law in a way that aligns with the principles of nature. Regenerative law recognises the interconnectedness of legal systems, individuals, human society, and the natural ecosystems. A regenerative lawyer approaches their legal practice with a focus on positive impact, sustainability, and the well-being of clients and the legal system.

This is why I have enthusiastically accepted an invitation to join the advisory board of the Oxford Sustainable Law programme, a joint initiative of the Faculty of Law and the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, which will operate as a world-leading centre at the intersection of law and sustainability. We are all impact-oriented practitioners who see the law as a tool to catalyse the transition towards sustainability and ultimately regeneration.



Giving the mountain a chance

The climbing life of Tom Bourdillon (1942)

Tom Bourdillon (1942) was educated at Gresham's School and studied Physics at Balliol. In Oxford he lived in a tiny room which overlooked the Turl, which he chose because of an excellent 80ft drainpipe which led to his window. A strong climber, he reinvigorated the Oxford climbing scene in the 1940s through bold leads on Hiatus on Gimmer crag in the Lakes in December 1948 and Great Slab route on Clogwyn du'r Arddu on Snowdon (both routes graded Very Severe); and he became president of the Oxford University Mountaineering Club (OUMC) in 1950.

After Oxford he worked at the Ministry of Supply experimental station at Westcott, where he developed – along with his father Robert Bourdillon (1908) – the closed-circuit oxygen apparatus that would be used on Everest. He was chosen as a member of the 1951 Everest reconnaissance expedition before joining the 1953 Everest expedition, which made the first ascent.

A climbing partnership

During Bourdillon's last couple of years at university (after his studies were interrupted by military service) he and Hamish Nicol (1949) climbed together with Oxford University Mountaineering Club (OUMC). Nicol writes in the 1973 journal of the OUMC that in the 50s the OUMC ran a meet 'every vacation', held 'either in Wales, the Lakes, Scotland or abroad'. Nicol was introduced to these trips in December 1949 at a meet run by Bourdillon at the Robertson Lamb Hut in Langdale in the Lakes. He describes Bourdillon's 'idea of catering' as buying 'a sufficient quantity of oatmeal and jam, and to leave the rest to chance'. One morning they woke up to find six inches of snow, but this did not put off Bourdillon, who announced (Nicol says) 'that this was just the day to tackle Gimmer Crack […] He was a great believer in "giving the mountain a chance". There was no point in his view, in doing hard climbs on dry summer days. They had to be done when there was a reasonable chance of failure.' This training in poor conditions forged a strong climbing partnership between the two men.

Left: Tom Bourdillon using an *étrier*, while leading on the East Face of Grand Capucin, by Hamish Nicol.

Alpine ascents

Bourdillon and Nicol went on to climb in the Alps together during a summer holiday in Chamonix in 1950. During this trip they climbed the North Face of the Petit Dru, which is graded as TD (*très difficile*).

This route now sees frequent ascents, but Nicols writes that 'it is hard to comprehend the aura of impregnability with which it was then invested. We bivouacked on the rognon [rock] at the foot of the face and I was so excited and frightened that I could not sleep. Alone on this rock with the great face above and the lights of Chamonix twinkling below – it was for me a situation of unimaginable anxiety and delight.' They were remote and contemplating something not done by a British team before. Following the Second World War, British climbing standards were behind those of continental Europe, and this was the first Grande Course to be climbed by a British party. (A Grande Course is a big route, requiring not only commitment and climbing ability but also the stamina to climb all day or even longer, as well as mental resilience.) Nicol believes that their success in completing it was due to 'Bourdillon's ambition and drive but partly also to the development of new and better footwear in the shape of Vibram-soled boots.'



Alpine Club Collection

Tom Bourdillon in army uniform in the 1940s.

'He was chosen as a member of the 1951 Everest reconnaissance expedition before joining the 1953 Everest expedition, which made the first ascent.'

Tom Bourdillon spoke at the Alpine Club (AC) about their ascent of the Grand Capucin (TD+) in 1955, describing climbing on the overhanging face using aid by saying 'for the next hour we were hardly in contact with the rocks'. The AC was founded in 1857, making it the world's first mountaineering club, and as such it is a prestigious institution, but this also makes it sometimes slow to change. It's understandable, then, to hear that several older members questioned why Bourdillon had bothered to go to the mountains at all if he wasn't in contact with the rock.

Nicol expands on the preparation for the climb in the 1973 OUMC journal, writing that 'Tom and I' practised 'artificial climbing on a large tree in his garden at Quainton, Bucks. We had only the haziest ideas about étrier [a rope ladder] design, none having been used in England up to that time. Ours were far too long and clumsy.'

The Everest attempt

Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans started their attempt for the summit of Everest in bitterly cold conditions on 26 May 1953. They had waited for six weeks and were more than ready to get going. From Camp 8, high on the South Col, they had to climb 3,000ft over mostly unknown ground and then return to camp in the same day, which would require a big effort. They got up at 5.00am, drank lemon juice from their flasks which they had brewed the previous night and were ready by 6.00am. They were set back by malfunctioning oxygen sets but managed to make the South Summit, the highest anyone had reached, having gathered information on the route for Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. They also left vital oxygen canisters that would be used by the summit pair.

For Tom Bourdillon, despite the physical exhaustion he felt, on arriving back at camp he was still muttering 'we should have gone on'. He was filled with both pride and regret when listening to Hillary and Tenzing talking about their success and wrote to his wife Jennifer on 30 May: 'It's very good work, but I wish it could have been Charles and me.'

After Everest

After Everest Bourdillon settled down and he and Jennifer had two children. He worked as a rocket scientist and always maintained that he and Charles could have made the summit. In 1956 he went to the Alps with some friends and died along with Richard Viney on the East Buttress of the Jägihorn in the Bernese Oberland on 29 July.

John Hunt, the leader of the 1953 Everest expedition, always made efforts to ensure that the first ascent of Everest was seen as a team effort, but the summit pair received the most attention and are really the only names remembered now. The achievements of Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans on their attempt should be remembered, as well as Bourdillon's work on the oxygen set.

This article is based on the catalogue for the Library's mountaineering exhibition, *Going Up to Balliol*, held in Trinity Term 2024. The catalogue is available for purchase at £5.00 plus postage and packing: please email library@balliol.ox.ac.uk.



Mount Everest

Victor Saunders

‘On Everest I shared the mountain not only with the ghosts of famous Cambridge climbers like Mallory, but also Tom Bourdillon (1942).’

From Balliol to the top of world

Seven-summiteer James Ogilvie (1976) reflects on his passion for ‘getting high’ and mountaineering as ‘the search for one’s own soul’.

In 1948, whilst climbing the Matterhorn, a Balliol undergraduate fell tragically to his death. That student was my uncle and namesake, James Ogilvie (1943). He had been spending the summer enjoying post-war freedoms with other Oxford undergraduates, travelling and climbing in the Alps. He was one of three members of the Oxford University Mountaineering Club – founded by Arnold Lunn (1907) – to lose their lives that day. As it was for my uncle – and for my second cousin, Stephen Venables, a New College graduate with whom I shared a house during my Master’s year at Oxford and who became the first Brit to summit Everest without bottled oxygen – the climbing gene turned out to be dominant for me. With such a violent death of the uncle I never knew, one might imagine that mountain climbing would have been discouraged in the family. But to their credit, my parents kept any misgivings to themselves and never prevented me from pursuing my passion for ‘getting high’.

When dinner table conversation throws up the question ‘Why climb mountains?’ climbers smile and exchange knowing glances: ‘If you have to ask that question, you won’t understand the answer’, they respond enigmatically. The issue was explored in detail by Mateo Cabello, who was inspired to write his book *Of Mountains and Men* (2016) after chancing upon my uncle’s grave at the climbers’ cemetery in Zermatt. There he was moved to wonder what is it that compels people to climb deadly mountains and why he himself had no such compulsion. Sigmund Freud’s students suggested that climbers derive a pleasurable thrill, an emotional charge, and a sublime ‘out of this world’ feeling as motivators. But this view overlooks the unmitigated toil, slog and mental grit needed to

overcome the hardships of extreme cold, thin air and physical deprivation that characterise climbing at altitude.

My own journey started as an ascent of Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa, and then progressed to Aconcagua in South America and Denali (McKinley) in North America. I had never anticipated climbing Mount Everest; the idea only became a reality after I realised that I had seamlessly morphed into a 'wannabe seven summiteer'. In reality my personal quest to achieve the seven summits prize – the highest peaks on all continents – was rather slow and steady: it took 17 years and I only started it aged 40.

'Slow and steady' is how I've always approached climbing, I suppose. On too many expeditions I have observed 'summit obsessives' parading their macho credentials at base camp, impatient to get to the top. But all too often these are the very people who fail. High-altitude climbing is a marathon, not a sprint, and not just a physical marathon either: the mental and psychological aspects – being in the right frame of mind and having the right attitude – are every bit as important. The summit is what drives climbers, but the climb itself is what matters. It has been said that there are two kinds of climbers: those who climb because their heart sings when they're in the mountains and the rest. For a usually impatient person like me, climbing patience is a virtue ('slowly, slowly' – or '*pole, pole*', as they say in Swahili when climbing 'Kili'). It's all about being 'in' and not 'on' the mountain, enjoying each day for what it brings, and not even thinking about the summit day until it becomes a reality. These attributes – patience, being in the moment, seizing each day and enjoying it to the full – are as necessary to climbing Britian's hills as they are to climbing the Alps or the Himalayas. Training is essential, of course. Living in Scotland gave me plenty of opportunities to complete its 282 Munros (mountains over 3,000ft/914m): good preparation for the rigours of big peaks … except for the altitude, that is! But in the end, mental discipline is – in my view – as important to summit success as physical preparation, and for that I owe Balliol a great debt.

Clearly student life is largely about mental and intellectual discipline, but there were other aspects of Balliol that served as a vital preparation for future mountain expeditions. The physical training required to row stroke for the College's second eight was a vital precursor for building up stamina, perseverance, determination, teamwork, dedication and more. And my first proper taste of a serious expedition was through the Oxford University Expedition Society, when four like-minded undergrads from different colleges undertook the OU expedition to Svalbard or Spitzbergen (our tents were pitched not far from Balliolbreen glacier – my home from home!).

The literal high point of my climbing career was summiting Everest in 2007, which I described in detail in my book *Getting High: A World at My Feet*.[1] What is it like to stand on top of the world? In truth not many people can answer that today: many fewer than 2,000. It's too trivial to say that the experience of gazing down on creation is simply incomparable, matchless, unique. For most climbers it's a life-changing experience: after you've stood up there, nothing is ever the same. On Everest I shared the mountain not only with the ghosts of famous Cambridge climbers like Mallory,[2] but also Tom Bourdillon (1942), who spearheaded the first summit assault on Everest in the 1953 Lord Hunt expedition, coming within 300 feet of the summit, and died on the Jägihorn in 1956. To me, though, the important story is not about how climbers died but rather how they lived. Climbing is about life.

For mountaineers, whether it's the wilderness and isolation, the extraordinary landscapes, or the dopamine hit of physical challenge, there is something wonderfully mindful and escapist about 'getting high'. But for loved ones left behind, fretting about the risks of climbing whilst getting on with the routine of living, it's a different story. And because there is something egotistical (selfish, even) about mountaineering, I have sought to assuage my guilt by raising money on all of my climbs for the charity Tree Aid.[3]

Now advancing years have put the brakes on 'getting high', but in 2022 I crewed a 100-year-old tall ship from South America to Antarctica on a journey spanning two months, three continents, four time zones and five thousand nautical miles, as recounted in my book *Latitude Attitude*.[4] The flame of adventure still burns bright in me.

'The summit is what drives climbers, but the climb itself is what matters.'



James Ogilvie on the south col of Everest at 26,000 feet/7,925 metres, prior to his climb to the summit.

[1] Ogilvie, J. (2015). *Getting High: A World at My Feet*. Twinlaw Publishing.

[2] For a nice connection between George Mallory and Balliol see *Floreat Domus 2022*, pp16–17. Mallory was a close friend of Francis 'Sligger' Urquhart (1890 and Fellow 1896–1934).

[3] The UK charity Tree Aid works with people in Africa's drylands, tackling poverty and the effects of the climate crisis by growing trees, improving incomes and restoring and protecting land.

[4] Ogilvie, J. (2023). *Latitude Attitude: Polar Adventures by Land and Sea*. Twinlaw publishing.


Stuart Bebb

Stan helping students with their gowns on graduation day.

A porter's view

Alexandru Popescu (1994) spoke to Lodge Supervisor Stan Forbes

At the end of 2023, Stan Forbes retired as Lodge Supervisor (the new name for Head Porter), having organised 'a Lodge team that is second to none', according to the Front of House Manager at his retirement party. A guardian of gate, guest, and gown at the Broad Street Lodge, as former Vice-Master John Jones (1961 and Emeritus Fellow) wrote to him, Stan 'held a key position in the College with friendly efficiency in the tradition of [his] great predecessors: Ezra Hancock, Cyril King, Jack Chapman and Ray North.' He kindly gave an interview from which we have selected a few fragments.

'When you hear the knowledge that some of these folks have got you think, Goodness me.'

From weekender to supervisor

I began as a weekend porter, approximately 12 and a half years ago. I was in a fortunate position: I was able to finish full-time work when I was 54–55. I was looking for a part-time job and had always fancied working in one of the Oxford colleges. I applied for the job and started work. In addition, I'd fill in if anybody was on holiday, and do a few extra shifts as needed. Ian Fifield, who was then Head Porter, said: 'You fit in very well here. There is a full-time position coming up.' I said I'd give it a go and here I am. About 18 months ago, the job came up for the Lodge Supervisor and I got it.

I don't know where the years have gone, to be honest. I suppose in part because I have enjoyed the job and the people as well, from all levels: Fellows, Lecturers, staff, and students.

Looking out for students

The biggest thing is dealing with the students and seeing what they do, working hard and what they do in their spare time and that. When you see the youngsters here, you think, Goodness, what chances they've got. I know they work hard: you see them at three or four in the morning burning the midnight oil, and they can play hard too! I'm not trying to paint all as a bed of roses, because there are always a few little herberts! But to be honest, in the time that I have been here, it's only a

handful. The majority of students have been very good and interesting as well.

I think it's important that students can feel that they've got the porters' confidence, and they know that you are there if they feel stressed. I know there are professionals in place that deal with that kind of thing, but it's great if students come and have a talk, not in detail, but just to know there is a friendly face there as well.

You try to point students in the right direction when they have a problem. It's not just me, it's also the other porters. I've been part of building a very good team in the Lodge. The folk that serve here have good life skills and work hard. They're people who've done various things in life. To use an old term, we've been round the block a few times. When I came on the scene, my daughter was at college in Chichester and I always thought, Well, if things are getting a bit over the top there is hopefully somebody, like me or others, she can go to.

I've actually had to say to some students sometimes, when I've done some night shifts and lights are still on in the Library: 'Are you still here? I know you're working, but would you just like to go and have a shower or a couple of hours' rest and then come back?' And quite a lot of them have taken that advice. When you know some of the students, it can get a wee bit worrying. I know they are trying to cram for exams but again it's just going back to their welfare.

I've always taken that side seriously. I know we have summer schools and tourists, but at the end of the day this is a college and the students to me are paramount: not just with their learning, but with the environment they live and study in.

It's pleasant to see the students when they are doing their degree ceremonies. I've seen them come as Freshers and then you're going to the Sheldonian with them and getting them ready – that's a nice touch, especially with some students. Maybe you find they've worked harder than others and it's rewarding when you see them to say: 'Well, you've got there in the end, which we knew you would do.'

Later some of them come back – whether for a Gaudy or another function – and they talk to you about what they are doing and where they've gone workwise. That is very reassuring, seeing how they're doing in life. It is always good when old students pop in and say hello.

'The students to me are paramount: not just with their learning, but with the environment they live and study in.'

Some challenges

Security is very important. Fairly recently we had a bomb scare, so we had to evacuate the College's two suites where we had a conference taking place. The police said, 'You have to get out', and people were dragging their feet a bit, and it got a little bit heavy. I said, 'Let's have the old fire alarm and when they hear that they'll know they've got to evacuate.' We had to go around and lock the College up basically.

Several years ago, there was a fire in the IT office, down in the basement.


Stuart Bebb

Stan Forbes

'I couldn't have wished for a better place to finish my working life.'

An electric cable which was thought to have been disconnected, behind a big filing case, had rotted and the place was getting filled with smoke. The fire brigade came out and we managed to get the door open. They had to get Southern Electric out to dig the road up to disconnect the whole section of electrics which teed off from Broad Street.

You can look back at things that happened, not as drastic as that, but to be honest you just deal with them. That was part and parcel of the job. You've got to think on your feet and get on.

Memorable conversations

I have had several discussions with Fellows about history. It intrigues me how things have happened and how history has changed. Of course, when you hear the knowledge that some of these folks have got, even just in chit chat and when you hear things and ask or discuss things, you think, Goodness me. But I think it must be a lovely thing.

Most of the tourists who come here are very nice, and those from abroad can be very interesting, as well, because they are coming from all parts of the globe. You can have some good conversations with them. You do have a few pain-in-the-neck sort of things, when they try to get in when we are closed. But all in all, the visitors that come here are very nice folks and very appreciative as well. We get a lot of praise about how well the College looks, and I always say how lucky we are to have our gardeners: they're always out in all weathers working hard.

Lord Patten was always a pleasant chap: he'd come into the Lodge and have a little chat. He once came in and said: 'Can I ask you a favour', and he was quite humble in his approach. And I said, 'Yes, sure, what can we do for you?' He was going to a big function and said, 'I forgot to bring my gown – can I borrow a gown?' And I said, 'Yes, of course you can.'

Final thoughts

It's been a big part of my life: Balliol and the people here, especially the students – I keep going back to the students. I've really enjoyed working at Balliol. It has been a pleasure working here, honestly. I couldn't have wished for a better place to finish my working life.

A long walk from Balliol

PPE undergraduate Marina Ristuccia (2021) interviews Rory Stewart (1992)

It is early morning in late January: Rory Stewart picks up my call on his mobile phone, wearing AirPods and holding a cup of tea. He is pacing around his apartment in London, as though the answers to my questions lie somewhere in the short stretch between his living room and the dining-room table. Walking, in fact, seems to have been a central part of Stewart's career. Born in Hong Kong in 1973, he attended Eton College and arrived at Balliol in 1992, originally to read History but changing to PPE in his second year. Upon graduating, Stewart joined the Foreign Office, serving in the British Embassy in Jakarta during the Asian Financial Crisis and the fall of Suharto, and then as British representative to Montenegro in the wake of the Kosovo campaign. In 2000, he took leave and embarked on a walk across Iran, Pakistan, and the Indian and Nepali Himalayas, finishing with a solo walk across Afghanistan in 2002, following the US invasion. His book *The Places In Between* (Picador, 2004) reflects his changed views on international intervention and in 2005 he set up the Turquoise Mountain Foundation in Afghanistan, an NGO which seeks to revive historic neighbourhoods and traditional crafts.



Tom Campbell

Rory Stewart

Walking also emerged as a central practice in Stewart's work as the Conservative MP for Penrith and The Border (2010–2019). He has called himself a 'walking politician', and in a 2016 interview with the *Financial Times*, he explains: 'What I hope I take from walking is the idea that it is vital to get out there, that not much can be done from an office in the capital, and, in the end, politics isn't a question of technical expertise or models, it's a question of walking into different people's lives and trying to elicit from them their descriptions of their priorities.' In *Politics on the Edge* (Jonathan Cape, 2023), a critique of Westminster and those who walk its corridors of power, Stewart struggles to achieve things from his 'office[s] in the capital', and argues for a more local politics, both nationally and abroad.

When I ask how this applies to women's liberation in Afghanistan, Stewart makes a differentiation between poverty alleviation and rights, where 'things are more challenging'. He argues for the importance of governments and civil society in advocating rights; 'My scepticism is about the extent to which the international community is able to foster or create those things. Those kinds of social drives have to be driven from within.' There have, of course, been drives for women's liberation from within Afghanistan, but Stewart contends that the campaigners 'often ended up being fatally compromised by being associated with a government that was perceived as corrupt and funded by foreigners'. He sticks close to his idea that localised politics is the best vehicle for change, even in cases as extreme as Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

When it comes to poverty alleviation, Stewart argues that the international development system's idea that what the extreme poor lack is *knowledge*, rather than *cash*, is mistaken. 'The evidence is overwhelming that the most effective way to do it is to give unconditional cash because it allows each individual to address their needs', he says, and he currently works as President of the non-profit organisation GiveDirectly, which provides unconditional cash transfers to those living in extreme poverty in East Africa. He believes that the international aid system wastes a huge amount of money on 'capacity building': paying salaries, providing offices, vehicles, training courses 'to people who often don't want or don't benefit from [them]'. I ask him how the West should adapt its foreign aid policy, in the wake of failed interventions in the Middle East and a history of disastrous structural adjustment programmes in Africa, leaving growing anti-Western sentiment which China has capitalised on in its recent aid policies. He doubles down on the idea of local direct cash payments ('at the risk of sounding like a broken record'): by providing aid like this 'you're getting out of the traps of old patronising models. You're demonstrating that you trust people and that you respect them and you're giving them dignity.'

When I ask whether he thinks change is best effected from inside the system or outside, Stewart responds: 'I think you need an alliance of both, but usually change is driven from the outside.' He lists as examples the Civil Rights Movement and women's suffrage in Britain. These, he contends, were largely driven from the outside and then politicians saw an opportunity in getting behind them. 'What you need to do', he explains, 'is develop such a strong social movement for change that it dominates the conversation and forces politicians to adapt.' Can he see himself leading the movement for the kind of change he wants to see in the British political system? No, he doesn't think so, but he's 'passionately committed' to the cause. When I ask if he thinks such a movement could develop, or is developing, he pauses. 'I think there's incredible support for the idea that our system is broken, that we need to change our electoral system, that we need different types of MPs, that we need to run our system in a different way.' Another pause. 'But there is also incredible despair and apathy', he continues; 'in some ways it's been abandoned to politicians.' Stewart has stopped pacing and has sat down at the dining-room table. 'That is one of the reasons that we end up with the very dispiriting political culture that we live in.' 'One of the most depressing things about the Conservative party', he comments, is that politicians who have behaved in 'a completely pathetic and disappointing way' tend to resign only to reappear a few months later. 'We seem to have lost our sense of horror.'

'What you need to do is develop such a strong social movement for change that it dominates the conversation and forces politicians to adapt.'

Reflecting on his book, I wonder why he so frequently compares UK politicians to schoolboys and schoolmasters, invoking images of old-fashioned public boys' schools. Stewart tells me that the comparisons are revealing of the culture in Parliament: the 'sense that things are a competitive game', 'driven by status and gossip'; 'a very tight, intimate environment of often pretty mediocre people jostling', like the schools Stewart attended. But 'these are adults, and they're adults who are much more diverse in terms of ethnicity and class than in almost any previous parliament'. Stewart seems to be hinting at the fact that the culture in Westminster has not changed with the change in demographic; it remains defined by the culture of the all-male institutions which historically ran Britain. Despite this, Stewart contends that 'Parliament is not a version of *Saltburn*'.

'I think there's incredible support for the idea that our system is broken, that we need to run our system in a different way.'

Looking back to Stewart's time at Balliol, I ask him which books that he read as an undergraduate made a lasting impression on him. He lists three: *The Disinherited Mind*, by Erich Heller; Peter Gay's *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*; and Aristotle's *The Nichomachean Ethics*. 'Aristotle made a huge difference to me. It was slightly unexpected, I'm not sure why I ended up doing Aristotle but, for the last 30 years, Aristotle has probably stuck more with me than any other philosopher I studied.' On the PPE degree, he is very positive, remembering his tutorials with Adam Swift (1980, Fellow and Tutor in Politics 1988–2013, Emeritus Fellow) fondly: 'I still remember quite clearly classes on equality, on liberty, on communitarianism and the conservative tradition which have been really helpful framing devices for thinking as a working politician.' Stewart also remembers the Pathfinders scheme (now the William Westerman Pathfinders scheme which funds Balliol students to travel to North America or Asia each summer, staying with Old Members of the College). 'It was the most wonderful thing for me', he reflects; 'it showed me American politics at its most serious and dignified – it was a huge inspiration for me.'

It was a great pleasure to speak to Rory Stewart about his career and his time at Balliol. I left for the Library that morning thinking about how much the world has changed since he graduated in the mid-'90s, and how different the challenges that face my graduating cohort will be. We can learn something from Stewart's ability to change his views over his career, to keep learning after leaving the tutorial rooms of Oxford.

The importance of play

At the Usborne Dinner, Farrah Jarral (2000) spoke on a subject close to the heart of the late Peter Usborne (1958)

I'm sad I never had the chance to meet Peter Usborne, not least because the extraordinary legacy he leaves behind in his publishing house has touched my everyday life. As the mother of a toddler, I get through a lot of Usborne Books and I find them delightful.

I'm especially fond of the series that deals with the tricky 'Why'-type questions that leave parents floundering. The title currently on heavy rotation in my house is a persuasive treatise entitled *Why Should I Brush My Teeth?*. The book has a picture of a toothless crone in it explaining that she has no teeth because she ate too many sweets growing up. She's apparently not too upset about it – she's still living her best life with dentures – but it illustrates to children that actions have consequences. The series not only covers practical questions but also veers into the faintly philosophical. As well as the title *Where Does Poo Go?* – which I trust will have been updated to include all British rivers and beaches – there is also *What is Poo?*, which is described as 'a surprisingly charming lift-the-flap book'.

But moving on to the subject of this talk: birds do it, bees do it – I'm not sure about educated fleas, but one thing that we humans and most animals have in common is our capacity for play,



particularly when we are young. Yet it's a magical aspect of being alive that recedes tragically as we move through adulthood, like hairlines and our ability to tolerate hangovers. My memories of life at Balliol are of three years of rip-roaring fun, punctuated by essay crises; being playful was part of daily life, certainly for my year group. But by the time we hit our thirties, it can feel as if our capacity for play has been ground into oblivion by the hard slog of life: tax returns, commuting, colonoscopies – the list of un-playful things goes on.

The apparent disappearance of true play for adults is echoed in our language. I spoke to the lexicographer Susie Dent about this, and she said that for her, 'Play is first and foremost an expression of liberty.' She noted that 'play' is an intransitive verb – there's no direct object. Yet we only really use the word in that way in relation to children. 'The children are playing.' If I were to ask 'What's Bob doing?' about a grown man and you said 'Bob? Oh, he's just playing upstairs,' I'd find that slightly alarming. We'd normally say about adults that they're playing something specific – playing tennis or playing Scrabble. As Susie Dent put it, 'It's only really children in language who have the absolute liberty to just play by itself without us having to explain it in any other way.'

Many activities masquerade as play but are in fact self-improvement tasks in disguise. The Silicon Valley tech-bro attitude of treating everything in life as an investment to be maximised may seem as if it squeezes the juice out of life, but really, it has the opposite effect, robbing us of life's essential sweetness, which is often in its atelic moments: when we are free to exist in play mode, without thinking about excelling, racking up brownie points or gaining public recognition. Especially the moments when we allow ourselves to be messy, or not good at something because that thing is entirely inconsequential.



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Peter Usborne

This article is an edited version of a speech given at the Usborne Dinner on 16 November 2023. You can hear the original as a podcast at https://on.soundcloud.com/xPJwu.

The Usborne Dinner was founded by Tommy Usborne (1926) after the Second World War to provide returning servicemen with the opportunity to meet and network with contemporaries and their younger Balliol connections in London. It has evolved to become the College's annual London dinner and an opportunity for Old Members to meet and create connections with peers and other Old Members. After Tommy Usborne died, it was hosted by his son Peter Usborne (1958) until his own death in 2023. Traditionally, Old Members bring new, more recently matriculated guests to the dinner who are then invited in their own right in subsequent years.

Right: Balliol students playing Jenga during an Open Day.

Taking time out of our busy, serious lives to do a little more play might well be worth it.

The definition of play is a little slippery. One definition of play is that it is a pleasurable, voluntary, apparently purposeless activity that induces in the player a sense of timelessness and a loss of self-consciousness – a state of flow. Patrick Bateson, who was a professor of ethology at Cambridge, offers a broader definition: anything that is isn't serious, or work. Professor Peter Gray at Boston College considers play to be a 'self-chosen and self-directed', imaginative, non-literal activity 'in which means are more valued than ends'.

For Carrie Lobman, Associate Professor of Education at Rutgers, play is 'the activity where human culture gets created, where it comes into existence'. I recently visited Chauvet 2 in the Ardèche province in France, a 3D reconstruction of the Chauvet cave complex with its spectacular 30,000-year-old cave art. Going into it feels like connecting with a crucible of human culture. It's spellbinding to see the depictions of woolly mammoth, lion, and bison, but as well as the stunningly accurate drawings in charcoal and ochre, there are some bloopers: a woolly rhino that looks like it's had a Brazilian bumlift, bison teetering on wonky legs – outtakes, mistakes, evidence of learning through doing, of the artist's evolution. Without those, there's no way the perfectly drawn animals could have existed.

We can think of play, as Carrie Lobman does, as experimenting with ways of being before they become more concrete; as a sphere in which we are, as children, 'supported to be both who we are and who we're becoming'. She gives the example of the way we speak to babies. They say 'abababa', and we say 'Aww, you want your bottle?' They say 'googoo gaga', and we say 'Yes, the recent cabinet reshuffle **is** yet another terrible chapter in a slow-motion car crash.' We relate to infants as if they were speakers, and in doing so, we help them to become speakers.

'Apart from the fact that play feels good, play helps us to figure out who we are, allows cultural and creative expression, promotes social bonding, reduces stress, encourages cognitive flexibility, improves learning and teaches us motor skills.'



Stuart Bebb



Balliol students playing table tennis in the JCR.

Lobman argues that 'in pretending to be who you're not, you become, you grow into something else. And then you can start pretending,' playing at the next iteration of yourself again. This applies to adults as well as children. If there are any silks in this room, then you know exactly what I'm talking about. Any role like that demands an enormous amount of charismatic authority that takes years to acquire. Nobody's born with that. So how does one morph from a pimply adolescent Fresher at a Balliol bop to, say, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Force? In some ways we do play throughout our lives, in constantly trying out other versions of ourselves. In play, there is inherent possibility. And if we can actively cultivate it there is much to be gained.

When I said that bees do it, I wasn't joking – a research project at Queen Mary University of London last year found that bees will essentially play football if you give them the opportunity. But play, from an evolutionary perspective, is a costly thing to do. Scientists in Monterey Bay in California observed that when baby seals play and frolic in the gorgeous Pacific kelp forests there, they are at a significantly higher risk of being eaten or injured by predators. Yet they keep doing it. So it must have some serious upsides.

Apart from the fact that play feels good – it's associated with the release of our endogenous opioids – play helps us to figure out who we are, allows cultural and creative expression (as with those cave artists), promotes social bonding, reduces stress, encourages cognitive flexibility, improves learning and teaches us motor skills.

When people are deprived of the ability to play as children, the results can be serious. In 1966, in the aftermath of the University of Texas tower massacre in which 15 people were killed, Stuart Brown, who was then an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, was tasked with trying to figure out why the 25-year-old perpetrator, Charles Whitman, had committed what was then the biggest mass murder in US history. Brown was intrigued by the fact that Whitman had been severely play deprived as a child. Brown went on to study the histories of a number of incarcerated male murderers and compared them to a control population. And he came up with the theory that healthy play helps prevent violent antisocial behaviour and shapes emotional competencies.

'Taking time out of our busy, serious lives to do a little more play might well be worth it.'

The type of play might make a difference too. A well-known example is the problem that NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory faced in the late 1990s. The team of scientists and engineers who'd put men on the moon and sent probes into space in the 1960s were retiring. Despite being the cream of the crop from MIT, CalTech and Stanford, the new recruits weren't problem-solving as well as their older colleagues. Theoretical mathematical problems, sure. But the younger engineers often struggled to break problems down, flip things around, tease them apart and come up with original solutions. NASA noted that older employees had played differently as kids – they'd taken apart clocks and appliances, built little soapbox cars, tinkered with their hands. Young engineers who'd done this kind of play – what Stuart Brown calls 'joyful hand-brain activities' – were nailing the problem-solving. But the ones whose play had been more focused around screens – TV and video games – weren't so good at it. JPL-NASA then started to include questions about people's play histories in their recruitment processes.

I hope you are now convinced that play isn't something minor that we can allow to atrophy, to lie dormant in ourselves, but that it will reward time and attention.

I'd like to end with a story about Kurt Vonnegut. Back in 1996, he described his life philosophy in a magazine interview. He said: 'I'm going down the steps, and my wife calls up, "Where are you going?" I say, "Well, I'm going to go buy an envelope." And she says, "You're not a poor man. Why don't you buy a thousand envelopes? They'll deliver them, and you can put them in a closet." And I say, "Hush." So I go down the steps here, and I go out to this newsstand across the street where they sell magazines and lottery tickets and stationery. I have to get in line …' He goes on to describe a multitude of little playful, interesting experiences he has while running his errand and continues: '… and I stamp the envelope and mail it in a mailbox in front of the post office, and I go home. And I've had a hell of a good time.'

Fundamentally, Vonnegut was talking about cultivating a playful, curious, non-instrumental attitude to life that allowed him to experience many tiny riches and enjoy the means rather than just focusing on the ends (in line with Peter Gray's definition of play). 'I tell you,' he concluded, 'we are here on Earth to fart around, and don't let anybody tell you any different.'

A many-sided 'Balliol-Scot'

John Sloan (1978) considers the career of scholar and journalist Andrew Lang (1865)

Benjamin Jowett (Master 1870–1893), writing in 1886, predicted that Andrew Lang (1865), his former pupil, would be one of the greatly regarded literary men of his generation. With his remarkable literary career, in which his immense body of work challenged the increasing specialism of his times, Lang would prove Jowett right.

Lang was what we might call a 'Balliol-Scot'. His student life began at the University of St Andrews, where his uncle, William Young Sellar (1842), one of the first generation of Jowett's pupils, was Professor of Greek. Encouraged by his uncle, Lang attended a session at Glasgow University, which qualified him for a Snell Exhibition at Balliol.

When he came up, the College was in serious disrepair. The construction of the new dining hall and kitchen, described in last year's *Floreat Domus* ('A Taste of Balliol', June 2023) was still a decade away. As Lang recalled with affectionate humour in his 'Reminiscences of Balliol College', the buildings were 'almost dangerous, falling about our ears'. A keen cricketer, he played for the second eleven. The truth of his claim to student friends back in St Andrews that this was almost equal to 'the first eleven of most colleges' is perhaps to be doubted. His essay-writing skills, however, became legendary. A contemporary remembered that those in their set struggling to put together the general essay they had to read every Saturday to the Master occasionally had recourse to Lang, who was able 'to knock off an essay on any subject in half an hour'. Lang got a First in 'Greats' and was elected to a Fellowship by examination at Merton College.

Lang's time at Balliol as an undergraduate was formative. He fell under the lasting spell of early French verse forms. He was excited, too, by the challenge of archaeology and anthropology to traditional classical studies – an enthusiasm which

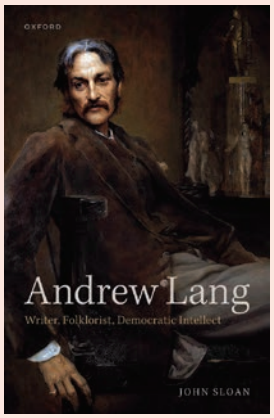
'Lang authored an extraordinary body of combative, ground-breaking studies in a wide variety of subject fields.'

Jowett did not share. At Merton, he pursued his new interests. His verse translations of French poetry put him in the vanguard of the avant-garde taste for the fixed forms of Old French verse in English poetry. An amiable contrarian, he courted controversy too with his arguments for anthropology as the key to ancient myth, rather than the philological approach that held ascendency at Oxford. In 1875, having decided that he could best serve his university by coming out of it, he married Leonora Blanche Alleyne, whose family had made its money from plantations in Barbados, and gave up his Merton Fellowship for a career in London journalism.

Lang thereafter lived a kind of double existence. On the popular front, he turned out inexhaustible columns of prose journalism to make money, and wrote novels and short stories, some anonymous, magazine verse, and numerous essays, reviews, and introductions to other people's books. Many people today, though unaware of his wider achievements, recall from childhood his books of fairy stories and legends, edited in partnership with his wife, each designated by colour – the Blue, the Red, the Yellow, and others – and their reading pleasure enriched by H.J. Ford's Pre-Raphaelite illustrations.

Simultaneously, on the scholarly front, Lang authored an extraordinary body of combative, ground-breaking studies in a wide variety of subject fields: classics, social anthropology, folklore, history, the origins of religion. Devoted to Homer, he single-handedly turned academic opinion against the dominant German theory of Homer's epics as the work of many hands over several centuries, in favour of the unity of the epics. He received honorary doctorates from both his *almae matres*. He was elected Gifford Lecturer at St Andrews (1888–1890) and Ford Lecturer in English History at Oxford (1904–1905).

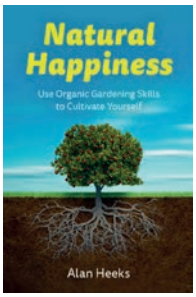
On Lang's death in 1912, G.K. Chesterton compared him to a 'kind of Indian god with a hundred hands'. Lang's many-sidedness undoubtedly owed something to his being a 'Balliol-Scot' who united the classical culture of Dervorguilla with the more generalist habits of mind and approach to knowledge encouraged in Scottish universities. With the perceived value today of multidisciplinary study, and the movement encouraging academics to share their knowledge with a wider public, Lang is again beginning to receive the recognition that his remarkable life and work deserve.



John Sloan's biography of Andrew Lang, *Andrew Lang: Writer, Folklorist, Democratic Intellect* (2023), is published by Oxford University Press.

Bookshelf

Alan Heeks (1966)
Natural Happiness: Use Organic Gardening Skills to cultivate yourself
O-Books, 2024



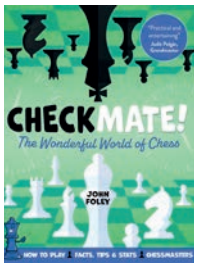
Having started an organic farm and created gardens, Alan Heeks realised what a powerful model organic cultivation principles are for human wellbeing, and he has been helping people learn from nature for many years by leading workshops for groups, individuals and NHS doctors. These experiences form the basis of this book. In his 'Seven Seeds of Natural Happiness', he shows how gardening methods like composting, mulching and crop rotation, and skills like observation and patience, can be used to cultivate human nature, by adapting them to deal with both daily stresses and big issues such as climate change.

Brian Groom (1973)
Made in Manchester: A People's History of the City that Shaped the Modern World
HarperNorth, 2024



Brian Groom tells the tale of England's second city, from its earliest days during the Roman era through to its rise to global prominence with the Industrial Revolution, and its subsequent economic decline and recent recovery. Combining historical narrative with social and cultural themes – politics, science, industry, commerce, sport, music, literature, ideas and much else – and including portraits of Manchester personalities (amongst them Emmeline Pankhurst, Anthony Burgess, L.S. Lowry and Victoria Wood), the book is a wide-ranging account of a metropolis that is famous worldwide.

John Foley (1974)
Checkmate!: The Wonderful World of Chess
Welbeck Children's Books, 2023



John Foley – Director of ChessPlus, which works to highlight the educational benefits of using chess as an educational tool to prepare children for life – has distilled his passion and knowledge of chess into a book that shows readers in simple, fun stages and with clear, original board diagrams showing what every chess piece can do, how to use them on the board and the best tactics to use against their opponent. With chess trivia, true chess stories from history, a glossary of chess terms and profiles of some of the world's greatest players, *Checkmate!* is a guide to chess which presents chess as the ultimate fun strategy game.

Sarah Percy (1999)
Forgotten Warriors: A History of Women on the Front Line
John Murray, 2023



From Boudicca to Ukraine, battlefields have always contained women, but their role has been overlooked. Tracing the long history of female fighters – from the Mino, the all-female army that protected Dahomey from the West for 200 years, to the Night Witches, Soviet flying aces that decimated the Nazis; from the real story of Joan of Arc to the cross-dressing soldiers whose disguises were so effective the men around them never realised who they were fighting with – Sarah Percy tells the stories of a series of extraordinary women, so shedding new light on the history of warfare.

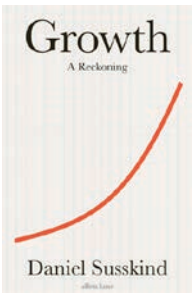
Robert Peston (1979) and Kishan Koria
Bust?: Saving the Economy, Democracy and Our Sanity
Hodder & Stoughton, 2023



Robert Peston – ITV's political editor, presenter of the politics show *Peston on Sunday* – and Kishan Koria ask has the West gone bust, economically, politically and socially, or is there another way? Explaining how the economy is flatlining, society is fracturing, Parliament is unfit for purpose and the state is failing, they argue that we can fix ourselves, by harnessing artificial intelligence, remaking our important institutions, and recognising that we can and must learn from the rest of the world.

'*Bust?* asks all the right questions with the urgency of our times and trials. Most importantly, it answers (most of them) with strategies to transform penury to prosperity.' – Mark Carney

Daniel Susskind (2006 and Career Development Fellow in Economics 2018–2020)
Growth: A Reckoning
Allen Lane, 2024

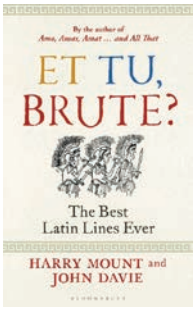


Over the past two centuries, economic growth has freed billions from poverty and made lives healthier and longer. As a result, the unfettered pursuit of growth defines economic life around the world. Yet this prosperity has come at an enormous price: deepening inequalities, destabilising technologies, environmental destruction and climate change. Writing at a time of uncertainty about growth and its value,

Daniel Susskind argues in a sweeping analysis full of historical insight that we cannot abandon growth and shows how instead we must redirect it, making it better reflect what we truly value. He explores what really drives growth, and offers original ideas for combatting our economic slowdown.

'Daniel Susskind writes with verve, style and conviction about one of the most important issues of our age.' – Rory Stewart (1992)

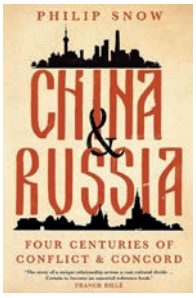
John Davie (1972) and Harry Mount
Et Tu, Brute? The Best Latin Lines Ever
Bloomsbury, 2022



Classical scholars John Davie and Harry Mount present a light-hearted look at the Romans in their own words. In chapters with titles such as 'Cicero on How to Grow Old Gracefully', and 'Bathtime, Feasts and La Dolce Vita', and on romance, Roman Britain, jokes, insults and more, they illuminate well-known phrases. In doing so they provide insights into life in ancient Rome and the Roman empire, and share some of the wisdom of the ancients.

'Filled with memorable and fun facts.' – *Times Literary Supplement*

Philip Snow (1970)
China and Russia: Four Centuries of Conflict and Concord
Yale University Press, 2023



An expert in China's international relations, Philip Snow provides an account of the delicate relationship between two global giants, from the 17th century to the present. Looking at politics, religion, economics and culture, he uncovers the roots of the two nations' alignment; he explores shifts in the balance of power – from the wealth and strength of early Qing China to the Tsarist and Soviet ascendancies – and episodes of intense conflict followed by harmony; he looks at the experiences and opinions of ordinary people, which often differed vastly from those of their governments; and he considers how long the countries' current amicable relationship might endure.

'Snow navigates this huge panorama with a fluency and a lightness of touch that makes his book a wonderfully readable guide.' – *Irish Times*

Matthew Parker (1989)
29 September 1923: One Fine Day: Britain's Empire on the Brink
Abacus, 2023



Described as 'a new way of looking at the British Empire', *One Fine Day* is about 29 September 1923, when the Palestine Mandate became law and the British Empire reached its maximum territorial extent. Matthew Parker immerses the reader in that moment, focusing on people and stories from that day, gleaned from newspapers, letters, diaries, official documents, magazines, films and novels – from a remote Pacific Island facing the removal of its entire soil, across Australia, Burma, India and Kenya to London and the West Indies, from the grandest of the colonisers to the humblest among the colonised – to create a portrait of the Empire in all its complexity at a time that was to prove to be its zenith.

'Superb … his research is prodigious, his mastery of detail impeccable … [an] excellent book.' – *Sunday Times*

Halik Kochanski (1985)
Resistance: The Underground War in Europe, 1939–1945
Allen Lane, 2022

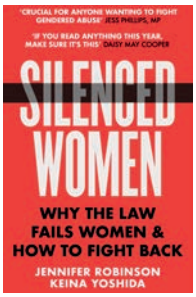
Wolfson History Prize winner *Resistance* is an account of how and why all across Nazi-occupied Europe some people decided to resist the Third Reich. Through powerful and often little-known stories of resistance –



from open partisan warfare in the occupied Soviet Union to dangerous acts of defiance in the Netherlands or Norway, from home-grown resistance movements to others supported by the Allies – Halik Kochanski describes the exceptional acts of defiance and resistance carried out by ordinary people and examines the challenges they faced.

'Unveiling lesser-known acts of defiance, this is a remarkable history of pan-European resistance to the Nazis. Through diverse sources and captivating storytelling, it presents a compelling exploration of this critical era.' – Wolfson History Prize judges

Jennifer Robinson (2006) and Keina Yoshida
Silenced Women: Why the Law Fails Women and How to Fight Back
Endeavour, 2024



In 2017, allegations against Harvey Weinstein prompted a worldwide sharing of sexual harassment and abuse stories on social media. Yet just as #MeToo began to empower survivors to speak out about their abuse, perpetrators and their lawyers got to work trying to silence them. In *Silenced Women*, human rights barristers Jennifer Robinson and Keina Yoshida expose the ways that the establishment has mobilised against change and sought to reinforce a system that keeps women voiceless. From the difference between the Amber Heard cases in the UK and the US to the story of how Zelda Perkins became the first person to break her NDA against Weinstein, they draw on their own and others' cases to explain how the law is being used to curtail women's free speech and what people can do to fight back.



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