

BLUEPRINT

Staff magazine for the University of Oxford | May 2011



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD



Dramatic moments | Ascension Day customs | Helping deaf children

News in brief



Oxford has established what is believed to be the world's first academic fellowship to capture the link between sport and art. The Legacy Fellowship is a collaboration between the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, Oxford University Sport and Modern Art Oxford, and will comprise a 12-month artist's residency at the Iffley Road sports complex. Working alongside student sportsmen and women and competitors bound for London 2012, the artist will produce a body of work in time for the start of the Olympics on 27 July 2012.

The collegiate University has welcomed over 40 students from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand as a gesture of support after the earthquake of 22 February devastated their home city of Christchurch. The 31 undergraduate and 12 graduate students will receive free tuition and accommodation whilst studying at Oxford this term. Links between the two universities date back to 1873, when the University of Canterbury was founded.

OUCS has been awarded £1.2m by JISC to develop a shared virtual infrastructure and self-service database tool to support research. The VIDaaS project (Virtual Infrastructure with Database as a Service) will provide a local virtual infrastructure that will host a self-service database, giving researchers a way of creating, configuring, editing and querying databases through a simple web interface. It will interface with a national virtual infrastructure – or 'cloud' – to enable the sharing of services across the higher education sector.

The former office of Bodley's Librarian in the Schola Grammaticae et Historiae has taken on a refreshing new guise. The Old Schools Quad Tea Room, located in the north-east corner of the Quad, opened its doors to readers and staff on 3 May. Operated by Charlton House Catering, the tea room serves sandwiches, soup, cakes and hot and cold drinks and is open 8.30am–6.30pm on weekdays and 9.30am–2.30pm on Saturdays. Show your University Card to receive a 10% discount.

A fourth University nursery will open to staff and student parents on 27 June. Located at 92 Woodstock Road, the nursery will offer 84 places, increasing the University's nursery provision by approximately 25%. The University also offers subsidised places at private nurseries run by Kids Unlimited, Buffer Bear and Oxford Montessori Schools (OMS). OMS became an approved nursery provider to the University in May and operates nurseries in Wolvercote, Iffley Village and Forest Farm. For further information, visit www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/childcare.

The University Church of St Mary the Virgin is to undergo its biggest restoration since the late 19th century thanks to a £3.4m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The grant will enable the chancel to be restored to how it was on the eve of the Civil War, while a sound cone will be introduced so the chancel can act as a place of silent prayer and reflection. For visitors, a hologram exhibition will trace the history of St Mary's and its role in the development of the University.

Grab your racket and head for the University Parks this summer to enjoy a season of lawn tennis. Membership of the Parks Tennis Association costs £35 for University and college staff, for which you can enjoy six months of grass court tennis in the beautiful surroundings of the University Parks. Players of all standards are welcome, and there are regular Club sessions on Wednesdays and Saturdays. For further information, and to download a membership form, visit www.sport.ox.ac.uk/oxford-university-sports-facilities/university-parks-sports-grounds.

Access plans

The University has submitted its draft Agreement to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) for 2012–13. The draft Agreement, which is subject to approval by OFFA, details the extensive access and outreach work being carried out by the collegiate University, and the future activity and investment planned in these areas. A summary is available at www.ox.ac.uk/congregation-meeting.

Oxford currently spends over £2.6m a year on access and outreach work, which is designed to attract applicants from non-traditional backgrounds and equip them with the information they need to make competitive applications. Further investments in access, outreach work and student support from 2012–13 onwards is planned. These measures are likely to include the development of flagship programmes, such as the UNIQ summer schools and Regional Teacher Conferences, which are aimed at increasing the number of competitive applications from the UK maintained sector.

UNIQ, a programme of free residential in July and August for Year 12 students currently studying at UK state schools, was introduced in 2010. The first cohort attracted 3,644 applicants for 507 places. 69% of participants in the programme subsequently applied to Oxford, and 137 were made offers. 650 places have been made available for this year's programme, and 3,400 applications received.

Displays after dark – the Pitt Rivers 'Night at the Museum' on 13 May



Research round-up

A project to record one of the world's rarest languages is back on track after its last three speakers survived heavy flooding on the Indonesian island of Papua. Dr Suriel Mofu and Professor Mary Dalrymple of the Faculty of Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics are documenting the language of Dusner after discovering it during a previous study. Their 14-month project will put recordings and videos of Dusner's speakers online. Dusner's three remaining speakers, aged 45, 60 and 70-plus, have not passed the language onto their children because their job prospects are better served by speaking Malay. 'I stumbled across Dusner by accident, from the comfort of an office in Oxford, when I recognised that despite growing up on Papua I had never heard this very distinctive language before,' Dr Mofu explains. It is estimated that half of the 6,000 recorded languages spoken in the world will vanish in the next 50 years.



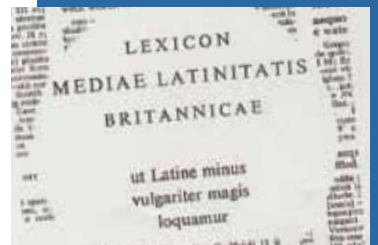
For the first time, scientists have been able to combine observations from a ground-based telescope (the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope) with those from a spacecraft (NASA's Cassini) to study one of Saturn's rare powerful storms. The observations are helping them to build up a 3D picture of Saturn's weather. Dr Leigh Fletcher from Oxford's Department of Physics, who led the observation team, says: 'Having both the VLT and Cassini investigating this storm at the same time gives us a great chance to put the Cassini observations into context. Previous studies of these storms have only been able to use reflected sunlight, but now, by observing thermal infrared light for the first time, we can reveal hidden regions of the atmosphere and measure the really substantial changes in temperatures and winds associated with this event.' A report of the research is published in *Science*.



Women with painful periods show increased sensitivity to pain throughout the whole month, a study by researchers in the Nuffield Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and the Centre for Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the Brain has found. The researchers applied controlled pain (through heat on the skin) to women while imaging their brains, at different points in the menstrual cycle. Women who suffered period pain reported greater pain for the same level of heat at all points in their cycle than women who did not suffer from painful periods. The imaging data showed changes in activity in brain areas known to be involved in the pain response in those women, also at all points in the cycle. As the findings show that period pain causes long-term changes in sensitivity and processing of pain, the researchers argue that the condition should always be given prompt and adequate treatment.



A new Latin dictionary that is nearing completion represents 100 years of Oxford research into language and ancient history. The *Dictionary of Medieval Latin* is an attempt to compile the world's most comprehensive dictionary of Medieval Latin. Experts began collecting material early in the 20th century, and the dictionary has drawn on the largest collection of literary and epigraphic sources of any similar project. Entries range from words used in high literature to those common in day-to-day speech, many of which did not appear in text for hundreds of years. Professor Tobias Reinhardt, Corpus Christi Professor of the Latin Language and Literature, is responsible for bringing the project to completion by 2014.



A new drug for the muscle-wasting disease Duchenne muscular dystrophy has shown significant benefits in mice, opening the door for human clinical trials. The disease is caused by problems in a gene for a protein called dystrophin that is found in muscle fibres. Previous work by Professor Dame Kay Davies' group in Oxford showed that increasing the amount of a related protein, utrophin, in muscle cells could help compensate for the lack of dystrophin. The team went on to develop a lab test that could detect increased production of utrophin in human muscle cells, and this allowed a UK-based biotechnology company, Summit plc, to use the test to screen a huge number of drug compounds for any that could increase levels of utrophin. They have now identified the most promising of these compounds, currently named SMT C1100, and three independent groups, including Professor Davies' group in Oxford, all found the drug allowed mice with models of Duchenne muscular dystrophy to run 50% further. The promising results indicate that, whether or not this specific drug formulation makes it all the way through clinical trials without further development, a simple, daily pill to treat all patients with Duchenne muscular dystrophy should be possible.

People & prizes



Judith Armitage, Professor of Biochemistry, has been elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Microbiology.



Archie Brown, Emeritus Professor of Politics and Emeritus Fellow of St Antony's, has been awarded the 2011 Alexander Nove Prize of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies for the *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, deemed the most outstanding book in Russian, Soviet or post-Soviet studies.



Russell Foster, Professor of Circadian Neuroscience and head of department of the Nuffield Laboratory of Ophthalmology, has been appointed to the

Council of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.



Dr David Levy, Director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, has been appointed to Ofcom's Content Board, which deals with TV and radio

content issues, including the setting and enforcing of quality and standards.



Barry Parsons, Professor of Geodesy and Geophysics, has been elected a Fellow of the American Geophysical Union. The honour recognises

those who have made exceptional contributions and attained acknowledged eminence in the earth and space sciences.



Professor Sir Adam Roberts, Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Politics and International Relations and President of the British Academy,

has been elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Physics prizes

The American Physical Society has made awards to two Oxford physicists.



Simon Hooker, Professor of Atomic and Laser Physics, has been awarded the 2010 John Dawson Award for Excellence in Plasma Physics Research, alongside collaborators from the US's Lawrence

Berkeley National Laboratory. The award is for 'experiments and theory leading to the demonstration of high-quality electron beams from laser-plasma accelerators'.



Ian Walmsley, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Academic Services and University Collections) and Professor of Experimental Physics, has been awarded the 2011 Joseph F Keithley Award for

Advances in Measurement Science for 'the development of concepts and methods for the complete characterisation of ultrashort electromagnetic pulses by means of spectral shearing interferometry'.



In addition, **Dr Leigh Fletcher** from the sub-department of Atmospheric, Oceanic and Planetary Physics and **Dr Sugata Kaviraj** from the sub-department of Astrophysics have won Winton Capital Awards from the Royal Astronomical Society. The awards recognise promising research by a postdoctoral fellow in a UK institution no more than five years after the completion of a



PhD. Dr Fletcher won the geophysics award for his work on Saturn's atmosphere and Dr Kaviraj won the astrophysics award for his work on early-type (elliptical) galaxies.

High honour for Lars Fuggar



Lars Fuggar, Professor of Neuroimmunology and Fellow of Oriel College, has been awarded a Danish 'knighthood' – the Order of Dannebrog – by Queen Margaret II of Denmark.

The Danish Ambassador made the award at Oriel on 5 May, pending later presentation by Her Majesty in Denmark. In addition to his studies at Oxford's Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine on the neuroimmunology of multiple sclerosis, Professor Fuggar has for the past four years been the Chief Executive Officer of the Danish Medical Research Council, flying over to Denmark for one to two days every week. His knighthood recognises his enormous contribution to Danish biomedical science.

New 'Brain Prize'



Péter Somogyi, Professor of Neurobiology and Director of the Medical Research Council Anatomical Neuropharmacology Unit, is one of three joint winners of the Brain Prize 2011, a major

new award for neuroscience research.

The €1m prize is awarded by the Grete Lundbeck European Brain Research Foundation, a Danish charitable organisation. Professor Somogyi shares the award with Professor Tamás Freund of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Professor György Buzsáki of Rutgers University in the USA. It recognises 'their wide-ranging, technically and conceptually brilliant research on the functional organisation of neuronal circuits in the cerebral cortex, especially in the hippocampus, a region that is crucial for certain forms of memory'.

Chinese honour

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Andrew Hamilton, received a rare honorary doctorate from Tsinghua University, a leading Chinese university, last month. He was in Beijing as part of a longer trip to Asia and while there celebrated the centenary of Tsinghua University and received the honour. Professor Hamilton is one of very few westerners to have ever received an honorary degree from Tsinghua; Bill Gates is also one of the select group.



Oops! Apologies to the University's new Proctors, whose roles were inadvertently swapped in the item on p4 in the print version of the March issue of *Blueprint*. Laurence Whitehead is the Senior Proctor and Professor Brian Rogers is the Junior Proctor.

Fellows of the Academy of Medical Sciences

Four leading Oxford medical researchers are among 40 new Fellows of the Academy of Medical Sciences.



Professor Doug Altman has directed the Centre for Statistics in Medicine in Oxford since its inception in 1995. He has published over 400 peer-reviewed articles, many aimed at clarifying statistical ideas for medical researchers, and is involved in developing guidelines for reporting medical research. In 2006 he founded a network which seeks to improve the quality of scientific publications by promoting transparent and accurate reporting of health research.



Paul Bolam is associate director of the MRC Anatomical Neuropharmacology Unit and Professor of Anatomical Neuropharmacology. His current research on Parkinson's

disease looks to understand how the functions of part of the brain called the basal ganglia are altered in Parkinson's, and why

some dopamine-producing neurons are more susceptible than others.



Andrew King is a Wellcome Trust Principal Research Fellow and Professor of Neurophysiology. His research investigates the neural basis of how we hear and process sounds,

and has revealed a remarkable capacity for the brain to adapt at different ages and over different timescales to changes in its sensory inputs.



Professor Frances Platt focuses on a set of rare neurodegenerative conditions called lysosomal storage diseases. Her research in the Department of Pharmacology, in

collaboration with Dr Terry Butters, led to the development of a new drug called miglustat (Zavesca). In 2002 miglustat was approved for clinical use in the commonest of these diseases, type 1 Gaucher disease, and more recently in Europe for treating some cases of Niemann-Pick disease type C.

Learned Society of Wales



Three Oxford academics have been elected as Fellows in the inaugural election of the Learned Society of Wales. Fellowship of the society, which was launched in May 2010, is open to Welsh residents, those born in Wales or with a particular connection to Wales, who have a demonstrable record of excellence and achievement in academia, or who have made a distinguished contribution to knowledge in their professional field. They are (*left to right*): **Patrick McGuiness**, Professor of French; **Christopher Pelling**, Regius Professor of Greek; and **Graham Richards**, Emeritus Professor of Chemistry and co-founder of Isis Innovation.

Viewfinder found

noticed for months. myth that students once turned it upside down and no-one Somerville JCR and installed in 1971. There is a college as it's affectionately known, 'mowmo', was commissioned by the Chapel lawn at Somerville College. 'The Z sculpture', *Triad* (p16), a sculpture by Wendy Taylor, sits on the

What's on

King James Bible events

Manifold Greatness: Oxford and the Making of the King James Bible

Until 4 September 2011

Exhibition Room, Bodleian Library

www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley/about/exhibitions



The story of the most frequently printed book in the English language, the King James Bible. Exploring the political, religious and intellectual context of its time, the exhibition looks

at the events and conditions that led to and shaped this translation enterprise. The unique Bodleian 1602 Bishops' Bible and the surviving working materials used in the creation of the King James Bible are on display.

Melvyn Bragg: *The Book of Books – The Radical Impact of the King James Bible 1611–2011*

Wednesday 8 June, 6pm

The University Church of St Mary the Virgin
www.university-church.ox.ac.uk/lectures.html

Melvyn Bragg lectures on his new book. Entry free.

The King James Bible: End of the Road?

Thursday 7 July, 6pm

The University Church of St Mary the Virgin
www.university-church.ox.ac.uk/lectures.html

A conversation between Melvyn Bragg and Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch, chaired by the University Chancellor, Lord Patten of Barnes. A drinks reception follows the event. Tickets (including wine) £10 from Meg Tissier at general.administrator@theology.ox.ac.uk.

Exhibitions

Heracles to Alexander the Great: Treasures from the Royal Capital of Macedon

Until 29 August

Ashmolean Museum

www.ashmolean.org/exhibitions/heracles/

More than 500 treasures made of gold, silver and bronze, recently found in the royal burial tombs and the palace of Aegae, the ancient capital of Macedon. Most are on display for the first time anywhere in the world. They rewrite the history of early Greece and tell the story of the royal court and the kings and queens who governed Macedon, from the descendants of Heracles to the ruling dynasty of Alexander the Great. Tickets £8/£6, bookable via the website.



Talks

Medieval Buildings – new ways of looking

Tuesday 7 June (Cathedrals), Friday 17 June (Castles), Tuesday 21 June (Homes), 2–4pm
Ashmolean Museum

www.ashmolean.org/exhibitions/events/index.php?id=132

Three talks by Tim Porter, looking at: cathedrals and their place in history; the role of castles as fortifications, palaces, offices, status symbols and more; and how day to day living dictated how a peasant's cottage, a merchant's workplace or a king's hall was built. Tickets £8/£7 (including refreshments) must be booked.

Tales of Eccentricity

Saturday 11 June, 2pm

Museum of the History of Science

www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/events/

A tour of the special exhibition 'Eccentricity' will be followed by a series of gallery talks illustrating eccentricity in the permanent galleries of the Museum of the History of Science. Includes objects from notable scientific eccentrics from the 19th century such as Charles Dodgson, James South, Charles Daubeny and Charles Babbage.

For more events, visit
www.ox.ac.uk/staff/events

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Arrivals board



Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources)

William James, Professor of Virology, Fellow of Brasenose College and James Martin Fellow, will take up this post on 1 August, for an initial term of five years.

He will chair the University's Planning and Resource Allocation Committee and take lead responsibility for ensuring the successful implementation and evolution of the objectives within the University's current Strategic Plan. Professor James will also chair the Joint Teaching and Student Funding Review Group, developing policy following recent developments in national policy on teaching and student funding.

Ieoh Ming Pei Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture



Oliver Watson, Director of the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, State of Qatar, has been appointed to this professorship in the Faculty of Oriental Studies with effect from 1 May. He will be a

Fellow of Wolfson College.

Dr Watson is an expert on Islamic Art, in particular Islamic pottery. Following degrees at the University of Durham and London University's School of Oriental and African Studies, he joined the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1979, becoming in due course head of the Department of Ceramics and Glass. He worked as Chief Curator at the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) between 2003 and 2005 before spending three years as Keeper of Eastern Art at the Ashmolean Museum, during which time he was a member of the Faculty of Oriental Studies and a Professorial Fellow at St Cross. He was appointed Director of MIA in 2008.

EP Abraham Professor of Chemical Pathology



Neil Barclay, Professor of Molecular Immunology in the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology at Oxford, took up this post in the same department on 21 March. He is now

a Fellow of Lincoln College.

Educated at Oxford, Professor Barclay's main research interest is the way in which the immune system is highly regulated through interactions of proteins at the surface of leukocytes. The identification of these interactions, their biochemical

characterisation and analysis of the signals that are transmitted on engagement is a priority as some of these proteins are potential targets for therapeutics to regulate immune responses in immunity and cancer. He is also the chairman of Everest Biotech Ltd, a company founded in 2000 that manufactures high-quality novel antibodies for the international research market.

Professor of Biomedical Engineering



Alison Noble, titular Professor of Engineering Science, Institute of Biomedical Engineering, Department of Engineering Science, took up this post in the same

department on 4 April. She also became a Fellow of St Hilda's College.

Professor Noble, who is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering and of the Institution of Engineering and Technology, is the first woman to be elected to a Statutory Professorship in Engineering at Oxford. She is profiled on p13.

Chichele Professor of Economic History



Kevin Hjortshøj O'Rourke, Professor of Economics, Department of Economics and the Institute for International Integration Studies, Trinity College Dublin, took up this post

in the History Faculty on a part-time basis from 21 March and will become full-time in the autumn. He will be a Fellow of All Souls College from 1 October.

Professor O'Rourke's chief research interests centre on economic history and

international economics. He is a co-organiser of the Economic History Initiative of the Centre for Economic Policy Research, Europe's largest and most influential economics research network, and is also currently serving as President of the European Historical Economics Society. He is a Research Fellow of the US National Bureau of Economic Research and a Member of the Royal Irish Academy. He was educated at Trinity College Dublin and Harvard University.

David Phillips Professor of Molecular Biophysics



Mark Sansom, Professor and Director of the Structural Bioinformatics and Computational Biochemistry Unit in the Department of Biochemistry, took up

this post on 1 April. He also became a Fellow of Corpus Christi College.

Professor Sansom took his BA and DPhil at Oxford, and worked at the University of Nottingham before returning to Oxford in 1991. His research concerns the structure, dynamics and function of membrane proteins, and he has an especial interest in using computer simulations to inform membrane protein structural biology. Current areas of research range from the dynamics of ion channels to modelling the structures of transient signalling assemblies in membranes. This work has implications for understanding human disease health and for the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries.

Professor of Scientific Visualisation



Min Chen, Professor of Computer Science and Deputy Head of the Department of Computer Science, University of Swansea, was appointed to this post in the Oxford

e-Research Centre from 1 May. He is a Fellow of Pembroke College.

Min Chen was educated at Fudan University in Shanghai and at Swansea University, where he has since 2009 been co-director of the newly-founded Wales Research Institute for Visual Computing. His chief research interests are visualisation, computer graphics, and multimedia interaction. He is a Fellow of the British Computer Society and of the Eurographics Association.



Greg Smolonski

Immersed in the world of theatre

The collegiate University plays an important role in encouraging student talent to flourish, reports *Matt Pickles*

Above: OUDS performing Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, July 2007 in Christ Church (left) and (right) *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, Hilary term 2008 at the Playhouse



Adam Levy/Pete Hedges

News stories about the death of Elizabeth Taylor in March 2011 offered a reminder of Oxford's important place in the history of drama. In 1966 Taylor starred in a performance of *Dr Faustus* at the Oxford Playhouse alongside her then husband Richard Burton. Those who attended one of the nine performances remember it as a triumph, and the Burton Taylor studio, renamed in their honour, hosts student performances every night during term.

Today the University's drama scene is more vibrant than ever, thanks in large part to the student-run Oxford University Dramatic Society (OUDS). 'What makes OUDS so special is that, unlike a lot of university drama societies, where a small cabal of people choose what plays will be performed, we give students the freedom to put on what they want,' explains Max Marenbon, President of OUDS. 'A production will send us a budget proposal and if we think we can put it on, we will help them to fund it.'

OUDS celebrated its 125th anniversary last year. It exists to support, coordinate and advertise student drama across the collegiate University, working with college and student drama societies to provide them with funding, resources, costumes and advice on how to put on a professional-looking play. Although Oxford does not offer a drama course, there is vast student involvement in drama within the collegiate University. At least 350 people are actively involved in drama productions every year and OUDS has more than a thousand members. Part of the appeal of acting at Oxford is the venues: students are given the run of the intimate Burton Taylor studio during term time and get five week-long slots in the Oxford Playhouse each year.

OUDS is the first port of call for aspiring actors arriving in Oxford. 'Drama Cuppers' in sixth week of Michaelmas term is a week-long event for freshers, allowing first-year actors and directors to put together a half-hour show to represent their college in front of an audience and a panel of judges. Forty teams took part in 2010. Each year OUDS puts on a nationwide summer tour, beginning in Oxford, stopping at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and often ending in London. Some tours go even further afield, with OUDS taking a production to Georgia in 2009 and Japan in 2010.

'There's something happening on nearly every night during term time,' Max Marenbon says. 'Oxford students put on about 30 productions each term and more in the summer, including the famous performances in college gardens, which are great even if the weather doesn't hold out!' He adds: 'My message to staff would be to give student drama a try. It's always going to be rather eclectic – there will be some things that will be rather unusual, but also some absolute gems. Oxford produces some great actors – Richard Burton, Hugh Grant, Diana Quick and Imogen Stubbs to name just a few – so the audience might find themselves seeing the stars of the future at a discount price.'

In fact, some of Oxford's student actors have already achieved a taste of fame. Anna Popplewell, who starred as Susan in the film version of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, graduated from Oxford only last year having starred in numerous student plays at the University – even winning a 'best supporting actress' award for Cuppers in her first year. Alfred Enoch, who has developed a popular following among teenage girls as 'Dean Thomas' in the *Harry Potter* films, is a current finalist at The Queen's College. 'Being cast in the *Harry Potter* films gave me the opportunity of working with some wonderful actors, as well as making me realise how much I had to learn,' he says. 'Acting at Oxford has helped me to develop as an actor – I've taken part in Drama Cuppers and travelled to Georgia with a touring party. It's sad to say goodbye to *Harry Potter* but acting in Oxford has given me an experience of theatre which I would otherwise have lacked.'

Those who prefer comedy to tragedy are in luck, as Oxford is arguably as famous for producing comic actors. The Oxford Revue

'It's sad to say goodbye to *Harry Potter* but acting in Oxford has given me an experience of theatre which I would otherwise have lacked'
– Alfred Enoch ('Dean Thomas' in the *Harry Potter* films)

was set up in the early 1950s and its members read like a comedy hall of fame: Dudley Moore, Alan Bennett, Michael Palin, Terry Jones, Rowan Atkinson and Armando Iannucci (no doubt inspiring more recent members such as Katy Brand and Al Murray). The Oxford Imps are Oxford's resident improvisational comedy troupe and perform at the Wheatsheaf Pub just off the High Street every Monday evening during term. Craig Holmes, an 'Imp' who is an Oxford economist by day, explains: 'We improvise everything from short sketches and scenes, songs,

stories, raps and guessing games to longer stuff, like musicals, Shakespeare plays and film noirs. It's all made up on the spot, based on audience suggestions, so it ends up being a completely new show each week. We also dance around badly to loud music between each bit, so some people might like that sort of thing.'

Oxford does not just breed actors. The University's drama scene offers opportunities for directors, writers, visual artists and those who would rather work backstage than tread the boards. The Oxford University Theatre Technicians and Designers society (TAFF) holds workshops for students interested in 'tech-ing' a play and informs its members about opportunities to join the backstage crew for a production. TAFF says its mission is 'to foster greater understanding of technical theatre' while 'encouraging safe working practices'.

Each year, OUDS holds a New Writing Festival which offers scriptwriters the chance to have their work reviewed by an experienced panel and for the best scripts of the year to be performed in the Burton Taylor studio. Judges in recent years included Michael Frayn and Christopher Hampton.

Nor is drama the only route into theatre and film for Oxford students. Paul Franklin, who matriculated at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in 1986, is a visual effects artist and filmmaker who won an Oscar this year for visual art on the film *Inception*. He says: 'Oxford University taught me how to work with an amazingly diverse array of people. The lessons I learned and the insight I gained into the creative visual process play an essential part in my work as a visual effects artist and filmmaker. I met people at St John's and the Ruskin who became friends, colleagues and collaborators as I made my way in the world of cinema.'

Oxford offers plenty of opportunities for aspiring actors to learn their craft by getting straight into rehearsals, but experts are also on hand to teach students more about the theory behind the profession. A full-time



Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor starred alongside student performers in the 1966 OUDS production of *Dr Faustus*. The couple's generosity initiated fundraising for the Playhouse workshop and The Burton Rooms, which later became the Burton Taylor studio theatre

University Drama Officer organises workshops and talks which are free and open to all and can advise those planning a career in theatre or film after graduation. Each year a major theatrical figure is appointed as Cameron Mackintosh Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre, based at St Catherine's College, and gives a series of lectures and workshops for students. Sir Trevor Nunn was appointed for this academic year, following in the footsteps of Kevin Spacey, Michael Frayn and Dame Diana Rigg among many others.

Trevor Nunn gave his inaugural lecture, on Shakespeare, in October 2010 and told a full house of students, staff and other interested parties: 'When I was a student, some days I wanted to be an actor and other days a director, but every day I wanted to be immersed in the world of theatre.' If any current Oxford students feel the same as Sir Trevor, they are in the right place.

College gardens 2011 crop



The Government Inspector
24–28 May, University College
Master's Garden
Tickets from
www.governmentinspector.co.uk

DNA
25–28 May, St Catherine's
College Gardens
Tickets £6/£5
www.dnaoxford.weebly.com

Much Ado About Nothing
8–11 June, Worcester College
Gardens
Tickets £6/£5
liam.steward-george@worc.ox.ac.uk

C.A.R.N
9–11 June, Oriel College
Gardens
Tickets £9/£6.50
christopher.adams@oriel.ox.ac.uk

Lovers: Winners
10–12 June, St Peter's College
Gardens
Tickets £5/£3
jessica.campbell@spc.ox.ac.uk

Charley's Aunt
15–18 June, Merton College
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new.ox.ac.uk &

01865 279519

for more details see **www.newcollegechoir.com**

Oxford's colleges are no stranger to tradition, and Ascension Day – which this year falls on Thursday 2 June – is one occasion on which the observance of some of these traditions can be witnessed.

The ancient custom of 'Beating the Bounds' goes back to medieval times and is still carried on annually by at least two Oxford churches on Ascension Day. At the city church of St Michael at the North Gate (located at the corner of Ship Street and Cornmarket Street), walking the boundaries of the parish takes place after an Ascension Day communion service in the church. The vicar and the choir, together with parishioners and representatives of Lincoln College, leave the church and, carrying long canes, proceed to visit stones set in various walls to 'mark' the parish boundaries.

At about noon on Ascension Day – and for only some two minutes – a small door at the back of Staircase Three in the main quad of Brasenose is opened...

A cross is drawn in chalk on each stone, with the year, and the choir and others then beat the 'marks' on the stone with their canes, shouting 'mark, mark, mark'. Some of the stones are set in shops such as Marks and Spencer, others in colleges, including St Peter's, Lincoln and Brasenose. All in all, the perambulation takes about two hours.

The custom of Beating the Bounds is also observed at the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, which is on the High Street. It starts with a sung Eucharist in the church. The first stone visited is at Brasenose College; it is marked with the letters 'SMV' and the choir sings some verses of an Ascension Day carol or anthem in the main quad. At All Souls the party is served breakfast in hall. The meal always includes cherry cake, a reminder that part of the college was built on an orchard that once belonged to the parish. After breakfast the party crosses to University College and Oriel before returning to the church.

These ancient rites have their origin in the days before maps were common, when it was important for property owners to 'mark' and maintain the boundaries to their land. The boundaries were regularly walked and stones established and struck to 'mark' these bounds. It is thought that in days gone by, children would be punished if they could not identify parish boundaries, and the beating of sticks was an annual revenge on boundary markers.

One of the most pleasing and ancient customs of Beating the Bounds in Oxford concerns the colleges of Brasenose and Lincoln. At about noon on Ascension Day – and for only some two minutes – a small door at the back of Staircase Three in the main quad of Brasenose is opened. It is a connecting door between the colleges and it is the only time in the year when this door is unlocked. Brasenose members (and the St Michael at the North Gate party) go through this small door into the kitchens of Lincoln and are then served a college ale, which is traditionally flavoured with ground ivy.

Graeme Richardson, chaplain at Brasenose, says explanations of the origins of drinking ivy beer vary, but the two most popular are that centuries ago a Brasenose man was pursued by a mob from the town and murdered, after Lincoln students refused to open their gates to him; alternatively, the second reason for the tradition may be that a Lincoln man killed a Brasenose man in a duel. Whatever the truth may be, why does Lincoln offer ivy beer? Graeme Richardson, who serves the ivy beer along with the Lincoln chaplain, suggests that historically it was to discourage Brasenose students from over-indulging in Lincoln hospitality. More fanciful theories relate to the Brasenose man being pulled down by the ivy of the Lincoln walls as he sought sanctuary.

It may all be a long way from the religious import of Ascension Day, but such ancient customs have a continuing place in Oxford and its University – and flourish even in 2011.



Behind the scenes

Cherry cake and ivy beer

Alastair Lack uncovers some unusual habits as the colleges mark Ascension Day

Top: The boundary stone in the Oxford branch of Marks & Spencer (ground floor). It was repositioned in 1978 and now lies 12 metres from its original position, which is marked with a brass cross in the floor. *Bottom:* The Lincoln College Choir processes down Turl Street as they 'Beat the Bounds' in 2009

More information at www.bnc.ox.ac.uk/345/brasenose-college-archives-and-history-38/brasenose-traditions-and-legends-215.html

Projects & services

I'll be seeing you

If you want to make a video call, most people nowadays would turn to Skype. But what do you do when you're giving a conference paper remotely and need high-definition resolution, or you want to speak to people across different locations and require multi-point videoconferencing facilities? That's where a service offered by the University's Media Production Unit (MPU) comes into its own.

The MPU has been running a videoconferencing service for the past 13 years. Launched in 1997 using Tandberg equipment – one of the first UK universities to do so – the service was updated last year with the opening of two new meeting rooms at 6 Worcester Street. The conferencing suite, which can accommodate up to 30 people, features multisite conferencing for up to ten sites, meaning you can stream lectures to a



'Why travel to the other end of the world when you can do it in comfort from central Oxford?'

range of different audiences; a more intimate environment, suitable for interviews, is provided by a smaller room seating up to four.

'The facilities are incredibly easy to use,' comments Will Pye, Media Coordinator in the MPU. 'You don't require any technical knowledge. Just turn up, sit down and let us do the rest. We'll carry out a test call beforehand to make sure everything is working correctly, and then we'll provide full technical

support during the conference call.'

Available 24/7, the service allows members of the collegiate University to connect with colleagues across the world, day or night. 'People are increasingly realising the benefits of high-definition videoconferencing when compared with the time, expense and frustration involved in air travel,' says Will. 'Why travel to the other end of the world to interview prospective students, when you can do it in comfort from central Oxford?'

To find out more about videoconferencing, come to the MPU Open Day on 15 June. Further information at www.ox.ac.uk/staffnews. For details of videoconferencing services across the collegiate University, visit www.admin.ox.ac.uk/estates/travel

Training & benefits

In the interests of equality

Over the past 18 months, the Equality and Diversity Unit has been supporting the development of equality networks that bring together staff and students across the collegiate University. Offering a range of activities, from weekly newsletters to annual conferences, these groups provide opportunities for people to network and socialise as well as a forum in which issues can be debated and views canvassed.

OWN, the Oxford Women's Network, was relaunched in June 2009. It has almost 300 members and is designed to foster a virtual community of women across the collegiate University. An e-newsletter is circulated to members each week, with news and details of talks and social events.

The University's LGBT staff group was set up in July 2009 to provide a supportive environment for staff who identify as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) to meet and share views and experiences.



The group has an email list that acts as a confidential discussion forum, and events include an annual lecture in February. The inaugural lecture was given in 2010 by Paul Gambaccini, who spoke about changing attitudes to gay people over the last 40 years, while this year's speaker was Angela Eagle MP, the first openly gay woman in Parliament.

The Race Equality Network (REN) was launched in October 2009 to provide a forum for the discussion of issues relating to race and ethnicity and a vehicle for

connecting staff and students. One key event this year was the Race Equality Conference, a half-day event in March, which featured talks, workshops and a keynote address by Afua Hirsch, Legal Affairs Correspondent at *The Guardian*. 'It was a really positive day,' recalls Leyla Okhai, Equality Advisor (Race, Religion and Belief). 'We had 95 attendees, including academics, administrative staff and students, and it provided a valuable forum to debate the subject of race equality as well as a great opportunity to network.'

More information at www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop



A matter of interpretation

Applying engineering methods to medical imaging is revolutionising what doctors can deduce from scans, Alison Noble tells *Jenny Lunnon*

Rob Judges

Biomedical engineering is transforming medicine. What started as the application of mechanical engineering principles to help design artificial joints or model blood flow has now evolved into an armoury of powerful new tools to help doctors with both diagnosis and treatment.

Alison Noble, Oxford's recently appointed Professor of Biomedical Engineering, specialises in biomedical imaging. Educated at Oxford, she joined the Department of Engineering Science as a lecturer 16 years ago, since when she has been developing new approaches to using images of the human body obtained via X-rays, ultrasound, X-ray Computed Tomography (CT) and MRI (magnetic resonance imaging).

At the start of Professor Noble's career, medical imaging was being used in clinical practice, but the images generated were either stored on video or printed out. The quality of data was therefore quite poor, making it difficult to develop automated image analysis tools for doctors to use. But things have changed. 'Today everything is stored digitally,' she explains, 'and because of the volume of data acquired in clinics, there is a real clinical need for computer-based techniques to assist in image interpretation. A lot of our research deals with developing software algorithms for quantifying disease and assessing change using one or more imaging sources. My particular interest is in ultrasound as an information source – alone or with MRI or CT – and how image analysis

software can provide new information for clinical decision-making.'

Professor Noble and her team in the Biomedical Image Analysis (BioMedIA) Laboratory are, for example, currently working with researchers from the Department of Cardiovascular Medicine to develop a more accurate way to measure heart function through stress echocardiography, an existing technique which involves comparing images of the heart at rest and during exercise: 'We're mapping ultrasound images acquired at the same stress state on to MRI images to create a composite movie and to get a better field of view,' she says.

'Today, medical images are stored digitally and there is a real clinical need for computer-based techniques to assist in image interpretation'

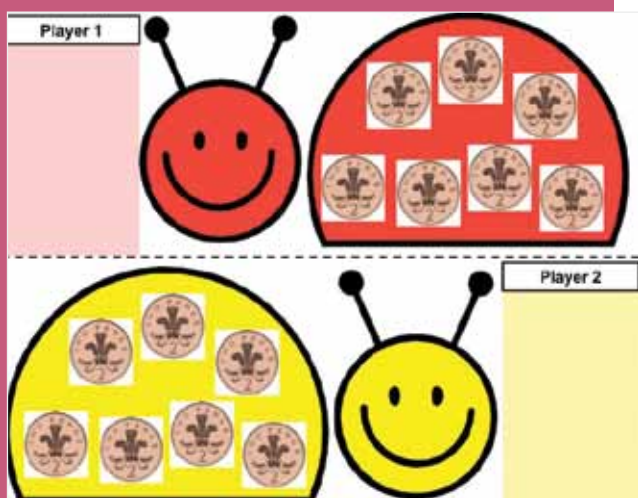
Other research involves the diagnosis of breast cancer, using ultrasound to ascertain whether suspicious masses are benign cysts, fibroadenomas or invasive cancers. Cancerous tissue is usually stiffer than healthy tissue, so applying force to the mass and measuring the strain using elastography can aid diagnosis. Professor Noble's team is also measuring how much the mass slips, because a cancer generally does not slip around in the same way as a fibroadenoma. Working

with breast radiologists, they have shown that combining the measurement of both strain and mobility is improving the accuracy of diagnosis without the need for a biopsy.

An expanding area of research involves monitoring the health of babies in the uterus and after birth. Until now it has been hard to distinguish an *in utero* baby who happens to be small but is nonetheless healthy from a baby who is not developing normally. New ways of quantifying fetal growth, including measuring soft tissue around the femur (thigh bone) and upper arm, are being investigated to enable doctors to make this distinction and indicate which babies – especially those born prematurely – will need a special feeding regime to get them back to a healthy weight. This is of crucial importance: recent research showed a correlation between poor fetal and newborn development and a greatly increased risk of health problems in adulthood.

Alison Noble's journey to becoming an engineer began with a passion for both medicine and physics. At Oxford she has helped to develop teaching and training in biomedical engineering at all levels and is Director of the RCUK Centre for Doctoral Training in Healthcare Innovation. Her contribution was recognised with a University Teaching Award in 2010. Today every Oxford engineering undergraduate can choose to take an option in this exciting area of research.

For more information, see www.ibme.ox.ac.uk/biomed



Why deaf children miss out at treat time

Maria Coyle investigates Oxford resource packs that help deaf children with literacy and numeracy concepts

Above: Making maths fun with appealing materials designed for deaf children

The simple business of hearing mum or dad count aloud as they dole out sweets is an important first lesson in numeracy for most under-fives, but many deaf children miss out on this type of incidental learning. Some of the key concepts that hearing children learn informally are still challenging for deaf children after one or even two years at school.

Helping deaf children to catch up is a major project for Professor Terezinha Nunes and her team in Oxford's Department of Education. After 15 years of research in this area, she has devised a series of teaching resources which can be downloaded for free from the departmental website. These literacy and numeracy exercises and board games are supported by notes for teachers, and have already been successfully trialled in schools in England and Scotland. Carol Hambly, a teacher of the deaf at the ARP-HI Stoke Mandeville Combined School, has used the PowerPoint presentations, books and games with selected Key Stage 2 deaf children, and praises the child-friendly materials as 'varied and appealing'. 'The children really enjoy the sessions', she says.

Since 2002, the Department has produced five separate teaching packs tailored for different needs. This latest numeracy pack for the deaf is for Key Stage 1 and 2 children who are deaf or who can hear but struggle to grasp the basics of maths. The resources have brightly coloured images of animals and faces that children will respond to. The real value of the 11 booklets and five board games lies in the visual cues, which help pupils gain a better understanding of the reasoning behind numerical problems.

'A lot of the lessons for deaf children are centred on language rather than numeracy in their first years at school,' explains Professor Nunes. 'We have devised activities that are designed to help children reason about quantities, not to practise calculations.' In one game, pupils can exchange cardboard cut-outs of snails carrying coins of different values so they learn about addition and multiplication. In another activity the children count bricks in a row, which is then partially hidden under a cloth. The teacher adds and subtracts the same or nearly the same number of bricks to the row and asks the children how many bricks are under the cloth. This allows the children to think about the inverse relationship between addition and subtraction and how to reason about quantities without having to count the objects.

'We have devised activities that are designed to help children reason about quantities, not to practise calculations'

With the support of the RNID, the UK charity taking action on hearing loss, and the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS), the University has since 2008 provided onsite training for about 50 teachers on how to implement the programme. 'Deafness is not a learning disability and yet government figures show that 43% of deaf children fail to achieve the expected level at Key Stage 2 Maths, compared with just 9% of children with no identified special educational need,' says NDCS spokesman Brian Gale.

Assessments carried out both before and after deaf children used the new resources have already revealed some encouraging results. After just six months of the year-long trial in 28 schools, the children in the taught group gained on average seven percentile points more on a mathematical standardised test than one would have expected based on their initial results. 'This may seem like a small gain but it is a measure of the acceleration in their learning,' says Professor Nunes. 'The concepts seem obvious to adults, yet about one third of hearing children actually start primary school without a good understanding of these concepts and many deaf children are in the same situation.'


RNID's Research Programme Manager, Dr Joanna Robinson, endorses the early intervention strategies to try to improve later attainment levels at secondary school. 'Deaf children achieve substantially fewer good grades at GCSE level than their hearing peers,' she says. 'This tailored resource could make a significant impact helping to reduce this difference in performance.'

More at www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/child-learning/resources/

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Why am I here?

David Holt

Building Surveyor, Estates Directorate

In a nutshell, what do you actually do?

I work within a multidisciplinary team in the Conservation and Buildings Section of the Estates Directorate. We're responsible for the repair, maintenance and conservation of the University's 'functional' buildings, i.e. the department buildings, including the museums and libraries. My own primary responsibility is 'planned maintenance' (repairs), normally to the external fabric of the buildings, although I do occasionally get involved with internal refurbishment projects or in carrying out alteration works on behalf of departments.

What do you most enjoy about it?

The University has an incredibly diverse range of buildings, varying from the medieval to state-of-the-art highly-serviced research laboratories. This is one of the things that makes the job so interesting, but I have to admit that I've always preferred carrying out conservation and repair work on older traditional property. It's a privilege to care for such magnificent and historically important buildings, albeit for a relatively short period in their long lives. Hopefully, given the right care and attention, they'll still be here for future generations to appreciate and enjoy for centuries to come.

What have been your favourite projects here in Oxford?

Without doubt, my two favourites have both been within the Sheldonian Theatre – the University's principal assembly hall and Sir Christopher Wren's first commission. After identifying the cause of a problem with the cornice and ceiling paintings in 2004, I was extremely proud when the paintings were reinstated in the building at the end of 2008 after four years of off-site conservation and repair work in Bristol. Then last year I was able to realise my 13-year-old dream of removing the Theatre's 1960s brass and crystal light fittings, replacing them with new discreet lighting. Not only that, we reintroduced Wren's original painted colour scheme – the first time it had been seen since the 1720s.

Did you always intend this to be your career?

After being advised, not particularly diplomatically, that I should not try to become a professional golfer or follow in the footsteps of my father – a professional footballer – my school's Careers Officer suggested a career in accounting. However, during the first year of my Accounting degree course, and after falling asleep once or twice during my Politics lectures – my lecturer was a certain Mr Gordon Brown – I decided it wasn't really for me.

So how did you get to where you are today?

Following a four-year diploma in Building Surveying, my first proper job was in Glasgow as an assistant building surveyor. I moved 'down South' in 1985 and have worked mainly in building surveying but with a few years in loss adjusting. Dealing with insurance claims was interesting work, but after receiving one too many death threats from dissatisfied insurance claimants in South London (many of whom were submitting fraudulent insurance claims), I joined the Building Consultancy Department in Adkin Estate Agents in Abingdon. I've worked here at the Malthouse since 1997.

What do you enjoy outside work?

I love listening to music and watching – as opposed to participating in – most sports. When the opportunity arises I enjoy playing golf, but my main interest is cycling and I try to get out on the bike as often as possible.

As *Blueprint* goes to press, you're preparing for a big adventure, aren't you?

Yes, I'm cycling with Tracey Iles, a colleague from Estates, from Land's End to John O'Groats in nine days, alongside about 150 other cyclists raising money for Action Medical Research, a charity dedicated to improving the health of babies and children in the UK. We start from Land's End on Sunday 22 May, winding our way up the west coast and up to the finishing post at John O'Groats on Monday 30 May. So as *Blueprint* is published on 26 May, all being well we will be on the seventh and longest stage of our ride, doing 137 miles from Helensburgh to Fort Augustus (at the south end of Loch Ness).

Can *Blueprint* readers still offer support?

Action Medical Research, (www.action.org.uk/about_us) relies entirely on donations to fund its research so any sponsor money pledged will be very gratefully received by us both and would certainly make the saddle sores, aching legs, back, neck and hands that bit more bearable. To donate, please click on www.action.org.uk/sponsor/oued.

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Editor:

Sally Croft

Designer:

Laëtitia Velia

Picture research:

Janet Avison

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Viewfinder

Where's this stunning sculpture?
Answer on p5.

