

# BLUEPRINT

Staff magazine for the University of Oxford | November 2015



*A*LICE IN OXFORD | *T*HE VICE-CHANCELLOR LOOKS BACK | *G*ENDER INITIATIVES



# NEWS IN BRIEF

◆ An Oxford-led research programme has launched a new system to help dementia researchers make the most of existing study data. The Dementias Platform UK's data portal is a secure online research environment that provides access to large and complex datasets. As the first portal with a specific focus on dementia, it will enable researchers from around the world to share and analyse a wealth of information on health and lifestyle, with the aim of accelerating research into dementia and ultimately finding a way to treat the disease.

◆ The University has opened a Data Science Lab in collaboration with Emirates airline. The new lab, situated within the Mathematical Institute, will bring together mathematicians, scientists, engineers and social scientists to work on Emirates' datasets in order to help the airline understand its processes and customer preferences in greater detail. The aim is to use data analysis to make the airline's services more efficient and develop products better suited to the needs of its passengers.

◆ Keble College is to receive a £25m capital grant from the H B Allen Charitable Trust. This represents the largest single donation in the 145-year history of the college and the largest grant ever awarded by the trust. The money will go towards a £60m project to redevelop Keble's Acland site in central Oxford to provide space for research and graduate accommodation. Construction is due to commence in July 2016, with the building scheduled for occupation in October 2018.

◆ The Bodleian Libraries' collection of 1.3 million maps and 500,000 printed music scores can now be discovered by searching SOLO, the Libraries' online catalogue. In a three-year project funded by the Andrew W Mellon Foundation, almost half a million catalogue records have been converted to fully digitised records and added to SOLO. The collection of music scores includes the original conducting score of Handel's *Messiah*, while the map collection includes the Selden Map, a late Ming watercolour map showing trade routes in the South China Sea.

◆ Are you interested in having a say on issues that may affect equality and diversity within the University? If so, why not join a new staff advisory group, which is being set up by the Equality & Diversity Unit. The group, which will meet virtually rather than physically, will be used to canvass opinion on issues that may affect equality and diversity, such as caring for children or elderly relatives. As a member, you will be invited to complete a number of short online surveys every year. For further details, email [sara.smith@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:sara.smith@admin.ox.ac.uk).

◆ The OXONBIKE self-service bike hire scheme, which enables you to hire bikes on a short-term basis across the city, will see 16 electric bikes added to its fleet in the spring thanks to a government grant match-funded by the University. The e-bikes will join 50 cycles currently available for short-term rental at 11 docking stations across the city, including the JR, Old Road Campus and the University Science Area. Details at [www.oxonbikes.co.uk](http://www.oxonbikes.co.uk).



Stockphoto/Alex Raths



Rick Walker Architects



OUP Public Affairs Directorate

FROM TOP: DATA FOR DEMENTIA RESEARCHERS; REDEVELOPING KEBLE; MUSIC GOES SOLO



OUstaff20 at checkout. And don't forget that a year-round 10% discount is available to University cardholders at the shops of the Ashmolean, Bodleian and Museum of Natural History (on purchases over £5), as well as the OUP Bookshop.

◆ Keen to make a start on your Christmas shopping? Why not take advantage of staff discounts and special events at the University shops in the run-up to Christmas? On Friday 4 December the Bate Collection shop will be open from 1pm to 5pm with music, mince pies and hot spiced apple juice on offer. On Thursdays 3, 10 and 17 December the University of Oxford Shop is offering a double discount to staff. Located at 106 High Street, the shop will be open until 7pm and you can claim a 20% discount by presenting your University Card. You can also enjoy the same discount at [www.oushop.com](http://www.oushop.com) – just enter the code



Credit: Botanic Garden/Lilli Friend

COVER: GETTING INTO THE FESTIVE SPIRIT AT THE BOTANIC GARDEN (SEE P11)

# RESEARCH ROUND-UP

◆ Researchers in the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics have found how to precisely control the waves regulating our heartbeat: using light. Heart cells communicate by electrical signals travelling fast from cell to cell as ‘excitation waves’. Damage in the heart can slow part of the wave, causing re-entrant waves that spiral back around the tissue. The result is the heart beats too quickly, which is potentially fatal. Current options to keep the waves in check can stop or start them but cannot provide fine control over speed and direction, so the team aimed to steer excitation waves using techniques from the field of optogenetics (which genetically modifies cells so they can be activated by light). A protein called channelrhodopsin was delivered to heart cells using gene therapy techniques. Using a computer-controlled light projector, the researchers could control speed and direction of the waves and even the orientation of spirals in real time.

◆ Singing is a great ice-breaker, bonding groups of people more quickly than other activities, according to Experimental Psychology researchers. They worked with adult education charity the WEA to run courses in singing, crafts and creative writing. Surveys at points during the courses asked attendees to rate how close they felt to classmates. ‘The difference between the singers and the non-singers appeared right at the start,’ says Dr Eiluned Pearce, who led the research. ‘In the first month, people in the singing classes became much closer to each other over the course of a single class than those in the other classes. This is the first clear evidence that singing is a powerful means of bonding a whole group simultaneously.’

◆ A new study by Oxford researchers has revealed that large land animals, whales, seabirds and fish previously played a vital role in fertilising the planet by recycling nutrients from the ocean depths and spreading them far and wide across the globe. However, massive declines in their populations, coupled with the extinction of most of Earth’s large mammals, have disrupted this efficient system of recycling important nutrients – particularly phosphorous. The researchers, from the Environmental Change Institute at the



OPERATING AT A REDUCED CAPACITY – THE WHALE AS NUTRIENT RECYCLER

School of Geography and the Environment, calculate that the ability of whales and terrestrial megafauna to transport nutrients around the globe has been reduced to just 6% of the capacity before mass extinctions and population declines took place.

◆ A haul of undelivered 17th-century letters recently discovered in the Netherlands will be analysed by an international team of academics including Oxford’s Dr Daniel Starza Smith. 600 unopened letters were discovered in a postmaster’s trunk at The Hague’s Museum voor Communicatie in 2012, along with 2,000 opened but undelivered letters. They date from between 1689 and 1707 – just after William of Orange’s invasion of England, Scotland and Ireland, known as the ‘Glorious Revolution’. The letters will now be analysed by Dr Starza Smith and colleagues in a new project called ‘Signed, Sealed, & Undelivered’. X-ray technology from the field of dentistry will be used to read the closed letters without breaking their seals in order to preserve unique material evidence. Dr Starza Smith, a British Academy postdoctoral fellow, believes the letters could shed important light on cultural life in 17th-century Europe: ‘Many of the writers and intended recipients of these letters were people who travelled throughout Europe, such as wandering musicians and religious exiles,’ he says.

◆ ‘Good bacteria’ in the human gut compete like trees in a jungle, Oxford zoologists have found. Using mathematical modelling, researchers showed that competition between microbes can be key to maintaining a healthy gut – contrary to the popularly held belief that different communities of bacteria work cooperatively. The team, led by Professor Kevin Foster, speculates that people may be helping to maintain their gut’s natural stability by acting as ‘ecosystem engineers’ who intervene in a number of ways – including the suppression of overabundant bacteria by the immune system. Understanding the massive communities of microbes we carry inside us – the microbiome – is fundamental to our health because they provide us with many benefits, including the breakdown of food and protection from pathogens.



SIGNED, SEALED AND UNDELIVERED – A POSTMASTER’S TREASURE TROVE

► For more information, visit [www.ox.ac.uk/news](http://www.ox.ac.uk/news) and [www.ox.ac.uk/staffnews](http://www.ox.ac.uk/staffnews)

# PEOPLE AND PRIZES



**Dr Tessa Baker**, postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Physics, has won the Women of the Future Award for Science.



**Dr Molly Crockett**, Associate Professor of Experimental Psychology, has been given an Early Career Award by the Society for Social Neuroscience.



**Benjamin Davis**, Professor of Chemistry, has won the 2016 Roy L Whistler International Award in Carbohydrate Chemistry, presented by the International Carbohydrate Organization.



**Nicole Grobert**, Professor of Nanomaterials, has been elected Chair of the Young Academy of Europe, an international, non-governmental association of individual scientists and scholars who are experts and leaders in their respective fields, as recognised by their peers.



**Hugh Jenkyns**, Professor of Stratigraphy, has been elected a Foreign Member of the Milan-based Lombard Institute of Science and Letters in recognition of his research on Italian geology that led to a greater understanding of global climatic and environmental change in deep time.



**Peter Read**, Professor of Physics, has been awarded the Lewis Fry Richardson Medal of the European Geosciences Union for his exceptional contributions to non-linear geosciences.



**Stephen Roberts**, Professor of Machine Learning, has been elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering. He is recognised for his work in developing methods for automated reasoning and decision-making in complex engineering problems, especially those in which noise and uncertainty abound.



**Robert Saxton**, Professor of Composition, has been shortlisted for a British Composer Award 2015 for his work *Sonata for Brass Band on a Prelude of Orlando Gibbons*. The award ceremony on 9 December will be hosted and broadcast by BBC Radio 3.



**Rajesh Thakker**, May Professor of Medicine, has been awarded the Dale Medal by the British Endocrine Society in recognition of research which has changed our understanding of endocrinology in a fundamental way.



**Ian Walmsley**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and Hooke Professor of Experimental Physics, has been elected to the Board of Directors of the Optical Society of America. He will serve as President in 2018.

# LMS PRIZES

Six Oxford mathematicians are among the 2015 London Mathematical Society prizewinners.



**Jon Chapman**, Professor of Mathematics and its Applications, was awarded a Naylor Prize and lectureship in Applied Mathematics for his contributions to modelling and methods development in applied mathematics.



**Boris Zilber**, Professor of Mathematical Logic, was awarded a Polya Prize for his contributions to model theory and its applications.

Whitehead Prizes were awarded to the following:



**Peter Keevash**, Professor of Mathematics, for his work in combinatorics, in particular his proof of the existence of combinatorial designs for all parameters satisfying the obvious necessary conditions.



**Dr James Maynard** for his results on gaps between prime numbers: he simplified and extended the work of Zhang on bounded gaps between primes, then made the most substantial advance for 75 years on how large the gap between consecutive primes can be.

**Mason Porter**, Professor of Nonlinear and Complex Systems, in recognition of his interdisciplinary contributions, particularly to the emerging field of network science where he has combined unique analysis of biological, social and political datasets with novel methods for community detection and other forms of coarse graining.



**Dr Dominic Vella**, Associate Professor of Applied Mathematics, for his contributions to the modelling of instability and interfacial phenomena in fluids and solids.

# VIEWFINDER FOUND

These lovely lights (p20) can be seen in the foyer of the T S Eliot Theatre at Merton College, named in honour of the Nobel-winning poet and playwright who studied philosophy as a graduate student at Merton. The theatre, which opened in June 2010, offers conference facilities. The lights pick out the shape of the constellation visible on the night of 14 September 1264, the day the college was founded.

## BRITISH ACADEMY AWARDS

6 Oxford academics in the humanities and social sciences were among the 23 people who received prizes and medals from the British Academy this year. Oxford is the only institution to have more than one academic on the list of awardwinners.



**Patricia Clavin**, Professor of International History, received a British Academy Medal for landmark academic achievement for her book *Securing*

*the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations 1920–1946*.



**Ankhi Mukherjee**, Professor of English and World Literatures, received the Rose Mary Crawshay Prize for her book *What is a Classic? Postcolonial Rewriting and*

*Invention of the Canon*.



**Ralph Hanna**, Emeritus Professor of Palaeography, won the Sir Israel Gollancz Prize for ‘his contribution to, and

prolific research in medieval book history and paleography’.



**Roy Foster**, Carroll Professor of Irish History, also received a British Academy Medal for landmark academic achievement for his book *Vivid*

*Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890–1923*.



**Nigel Wilson**, Fellow of Lincoln College, won the Kenyon Medal for Classical Studies and Archaeology for his ‘significant contributions to the study of Greek palaeography

and the history of Byzantine and later scholarship, and his editing of Greek texts’.



**Dr Brian A'Hearn** of the Department of Economics won the Serena Medal for Italian Economics for his ‘reputation

in, and contribution to the study of Italian economic history’.

## BIG DATA BUILDING SHORTLISTED

The Big Data Institute building, which forms part of the University’s Old Road Campus research site, has been shortlisted for the Buildings & Energy Efficiency awards (previously known as the Greenbuild awards).

The BDI building, which is due for completion in November 2016, will accommodate two research departments plus seminar rooms and a data processing facility. Its passive design seeks to achieve energy savings without the use of a power plant or mechanical equipment, and uses natural ventilation principles wherever possible to reduce the energy consumed by mechanical ventilation and active heating and cooling systems. The design also seeks to capture energy once it has been used and continuously recycle it where possible.



## EBOLA MEDALS FOR RESEARCH TEAM

A University of Oxford Ebola medal has been presented to researchers from 14 countries who worked with an Oxford-led team to combat Ebola in West Africa and find an effective treatment for the virus.

The Prime Minister announced in June that UK staff who had worked to fight Ebola would receive an Ebola Medal for Service in West Africa; the University decided to also recognise the contributions of the Oxford-led international teams who carried out clinical trials of two possible Ebola treatments. The trials were set up within a few months – far faster than usual – despite the challenges of working in countries affected by a highly contagious disease. Medal recipients included staff from Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia – the three nations hardest hit by Ebola.

The medals were presented by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Andrew Hamilton, and the head of the Nuffield Department of Medicine, Professor Sir Peter Ratcliffe. The ceremony in September took place at a conference that reunited the volunteers to discuss the lessons they had learned from the trials.

## WAYNFLETE PROFESSOR OF METAPHYSICAL PHILOSOPHY



**Ofra Magidor**, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Fairfax Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy at Balliol College, took up the post of Waynflete Professor-elect of

Metaphysical Philosophy in the Faculty of Philosophy on 1 September and will become Waynflete Professor of Philosophy on 1 October 2016, when she will also become a Fellow of Magdalen College.

Professor Magidor's research interests are in Metaphysics, Philosophy of Logic and Language, Epistemology, and the Philosophy of Mathematics. She has published work on a wide range of topics including the metaphysics of persistence, category mistakes, arbitrary reference, the problem of vagueness, possible worlds semantics, and strict finitism.

## MARSHAL FOCH PROFESSOR OF FRENCH LITERATURE

**Catriona Seth**, Professor of Eighteenth-Century French Literature at the Université de Lorraine, took up this post in the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages on



1 October. She also became a Fellow of All Souls College.

Professor Seth's research focuses on the long eighteenth century. She has published extensively on fiction, poetry

and autobiographical writing, as well as on the history of ideas – in particular in the field of medical humanities. She has edited numerous texts, including Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* for Gallimard's authoritative *Pléiade* series, and is currently working on Germaine de Staël's novels.

## PROFESSOR OF THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE



**Robert Iliffe**, Professor of Intellectual History and History of Science at the University of Sussex, will take up this post in the Faculty of History on

1 January 2016. He will also become a Fellow of Linacre College.

Professor Iliffe's main research interests include the history of scientific instrumentation 1550–1850; the role of

science and technology in the 'Rise of the West'; the roots of the current environmental crisis; historical interactions between science and religion; the theological and scientific work of Isaac Newton; and the theory and practice of digital editing.

## NOTICE BOARD

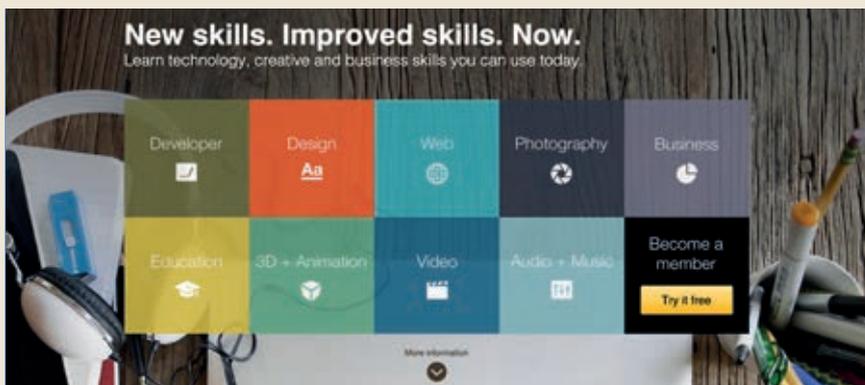


◆ **Sarah Whatmore**, Professor of Environment and Public Policy in the School of Geography and the Environment, has been appointed as

the University's Academic Champion for Public Engagement with Research.

She will lead on developing a strategy for public engagement with research and increasing the visibility of the University's commitment to this agenda, with support from a network of academic champions and staff. She will also play a key role in the project grant awarded to Oxford by Research Councils UK under its Catalyst Seed Fund, which aims to help universities create a culture where excellent public engagement with research is better embedded within the institution.

## HAVE YOU MET LYNDA?



Lynda.com, a large online library of instructional videos covering the latest software, is now available for University staff and students to access for free.

With presentations by industry experts and experienced teachers, lynda.com is a useful resource for those looking to develop skills in a wide range of topics – from commonly used software such as Microsoft Office to specialist applications in areas such as photography and video, as well as more general topics such as project management and social media.

The lynda.com library contains over 4,000 online tutorials aimed at all levels; new content is added each week. Not only can you access the videos from any computer, tablet or smartphone using your Oxford single sign-on, you can also set your own learning pace – whether that's viewing a complete course in a single sitting or opting for a bite-sized video when you need it.

'The great thing about lynda.com is that it offers a really flexible way to learn,' says Dave Baker, the IT Learning Programme's

Teaching Manager. 'You can use it to master a new program from scratch, but you can also go online for a quick answer to a software problem, such as how to use a particular function in Excel.'

All of the content on lynda.com is easily searchable. You can bookmark individual videos or full courses for future reference, and you can create and save lists of courses you want to watch and share your playlists with colleagues. Playlists featuring content relevant to personal and professional development will also be created by the Oxford Learning Institute, with the lists being featured on the institute's website.

The video-based training has been introduced by the IT Learning Programme to sit alongside its classroom-based courses. Scheduled classes cover over 200 topics, from understanding the basics of Microsoft Office to advanced programming, and are held at IT Services' offices at 13 Banbury Road.

To browse the courses on offer with lynda.com, visit [courses.it.ox.ac.uk/lynda](http://courses.it.ox.ac.uk/lynda). For a list of classroom-based courses run by IT Services, visit [courses.it.ox.ac.uk/catalogue](http://courses.it.ox.ac.uk/catalogue).

# SO MUCH MORE THAN STONES

Dr Emma Cunliffe tells *Maria Coyle* about her work protecting endangered cultural heritage sites

Every day Dr Emma Cunliffe, Research Associate in the School of Archaeology, goes online to scan satellite images of areas in Syria and Egypt. It is painstaking, systematic work, scrutinising each and every grid square, primarily using Google Earth to spot signs of cultural heritage sites. Her expertise lies in knowing what they look like from the top; most people are used to seeing things at ground level. What seems like a patch of soil to the untrained eye may be a scattering of ash, pottery and smashed roof tiles. She has recorded forts, crusader castles, nomadic tents and even roads dating back to the Bronze Age.

Emma's interest in archaeology was piqued by a childhood trip to Egypt, but in recent years her love of Syrian history has grown exponentially. 'Syria is where you get some of the oldest churches and mosques in the world: mosques that were built and visited by the Prophet Mohammed; churches that date back to 59AD; Jewish synagogues built where the Prophet Elijah is supposed to have visited,' she explains. 'You can walk down a street where sections of the population have reputedly lived for 7,000 years. It has some of the oldest writing, poetry and law codes in the world. The list goes on.'

Emma is a member of the Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa (EAMENA) project, based at Oxford University and funded by the Arcadia Foundation. The project uses satellite imagery to document and study damage to archaeological sites in peace and conflict across the region. Many of the sites are currently inaccessible on the ground due to ongoing conflicts – although the research team has found that, despite the headlines about damage due to the conflict, the biggest threat to archaeological sites is the pace of development and agricultural practices, with many of them disappearing soon after the advent of the tractor in the 1960s.

Emma and her colleagues not only record the sites on a database, they also assess the likely cause of damage in order to advise



governments and other agencies on the best way of protecting them. Last month she helped organise the Conflict and Cultural Heritage Conference at St John's College – an event to raise public awareness of the issues around protecting heritage sites at risk from armed conflict. She is also involved in coordinating the procedures around documenting the damage to buildings, with a view to long-term restoration and rebuilding, ensuring that in the future people will have all the information they need without there being duplication of effort. She is about to

## **'If cultural heritage is ignored, the mismanagement of a people's heritage can spark riots and violence'**

start a new project which examines how people respond to propaganda videos filmed by Daesh (IS) featuring the destruction of cultural heritage.

Her interest in old buildings and cultural heritage was perhaps passed on from her parents. Her father, a software salesman, travelled around the world on business, but at weekends she and her mother often joined him to do some sightseeing. By the time she was 12 years old she had visited 17 countries at least twice, and was particularly drawn to the ruins and statues of Greece, Egypt and Turkey. After a BA in Archaeology at the University of

Durham, she completed a Master's in Museum Studies at Newcastle University.

Syria, like many countries in the Middle East, has never had a single sites and monuments record that collates all sites. The Endangered Archaeology database is a pioneering initiative that will eventually be publicly available. Emma hopes it will literally provide a roadmap for developments so new roads and buildings will avoid important sites or ensure, at least, that the land is properly surveyed and recorded before the diggers move in. She is also a board member of UK Blue Shield, a charity encouraging the UK government to ratify the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict, and working to assist in the protection of cultural heritage during conflict and natural disasters.

After the war broke out, Emma met Syrian people at an archaeological conference in Jordan, who were passionate about how they could protect their country's heritage. 'You can't help but be drawn in and want to help,' she says. 'Archaeology is not just about stones. If cultural heritage is ignored, the mismanagement of a people's heritage can spark riots and violence. Conversely, it has led to the only peace conference that had people from opposite sides in Syria sit around the same table. Every time people tell me that I shouldn't care about the stones because people are dying, I think of all of my Syrian friends who care so much about their heritage.'

► More information at **EAMENA project** at <http://eamena.arch.ox.ac.uk>

# OXFORD THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Just as Lewis Carroll drew on Oxford for inspiration, so the city reflects his books, says *Matt Pickles*

26 November marks 150 years since the Oxford mathematician Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, under the pen name Lewis Carroll, published *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

If you delve into the origins of the characters and adventures in the book, it becomes clear what a big influence Oxford, its colleges and its inhabitants had on Carroll's writing. This is perhaps not a surprise, given that he matriculated as an undergraduate at Christ Church in 1850 and remained at the college in various positions until his death in 1898.

Carroll came up with the idea for *Alice's*

**'Wonderland's influence is massive – if you look carefully you can see it everywhere in Oxford'**

*Adventures* and wrote the book while he was a tutor and lecturer in maths at Christ Church. Alice is based on Alice Liddell, the daughter of Carroll's friend the Revd Henry George Liddell, who was Dean of the college. Carroll would tell stories to amuse Alice and her sisters Lorina and Edith, and these ultimately led to him writing the famous book. His visits to the Museum of Natural History with Alice and her sisters inspired some of the animals in *Wonderland* – most notably the dodo, which is believed to have been based on Jan Savery's 17th-century painting of the animal in the museum (pictured left).

Carroll was a keen photographer and often took pictures of specimens from the Museum of Natural History. He loved to write logic puzzles and the museum still has a small collection of these games and other memorabilia.

Although Oxford influenced Carroll, his books have also left their mark on the city as it stands today. Every 4 July the Bodleian Libraries and the Story Museum celebrate 'Alice's Day'. This is the anniversary of the first time Carroll told the story of Alice's adventures, while on a river trip on the Isis with Alice Liddell, her two sisters and his friend the Revd Robinson Duckworth in 1862.

'Wonderland's influence is massive,' says David Gibb of the Story Museum. 'If you look

carefully you can see it everywhere in Oxford.' Mr Gibb is not exaggerating. The Sheep Shop mentioned in *Through the Looking Glass* is still open on St Aldate's and now sells Alice memorabilia. Alongside the paintings of its great academics, Christ Church's dining hall has a stained glass window featuring Alice Liddell. And St Margaret's Well in Binsey was the model for the Treacle Well.

This year the 150th anniversary of the book's publication was marked with Wonderday, a special event held on 13 November by Christ Church and the Story Museum. Visitors heard talks about Alice and were taken around Christ Church to see places and objects that related to Alice and Lewis Carroll, including Alice's Nursery, the Deanery Garden, the (mock) turtle shells in the kitchen, and the long-necked ladies in the fireplace in the dining hall (see picture).

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has even inspired an interesting research idea. Franziska Kohlt, a DPhil student in English Literature and the History of Science at Oxford, is one of the scholars who discussed Lewis Carroll and the latest research into his writing on Wonderday. She is investigating links between the development of the psychological sciences in the 19th century and Victorian fantastic literature.

'Lewis Carroll – like many other writers of fantastic literature such as Charles Kingsley or H G Wells – was actually a scientist, and even worked for the Natural History Museum as a photographer for a short time,' she explains. 'He owned a large number of books on the emerging "sciences of the mind", and the "Mad Tea Party" draws on many (then) popular ideas of madness and dream theory. Such links are absolutely crucial to the story and make it far more than just a children's book – it is an incredibly complex document of Victorian intellectual culture.'

Although *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was already celebrated during Carroll's lifetime, he surely could not have predicted that Oxford would devote two separate days to celebrating his life 150 years later. But it seems unlikely that his success would have gone to his head – once *Alice's Adventures* began to sell a lot of copies, Carroll asked Christ Church to reduce his salary.



Oxford University Images



Alice Perez/Untapped Cities



Oxford University Museum of Natural History



Ralph Williamson

RIGHT: 'ALICE'S DAY' ADVENTURES; FROM TOP: THE CHRIST CHURCH WINDOW DEDICATED TO ALICE LIDDELL; CARROLL'S ORIGINAL BOOK, NOW IN THE BRITISH LIBRARY; THE DELIGHTFUL DODO; LONG-NECKED LADIES ADORN THE FIREPLACE IN CHRIST CHURCH DINING HALL

More information at [www.storymuseum.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/alices-day](http://www.storymuseum.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/alices-day)



# JOIN THE CONVERSATION

A free news website allows academics to inform public debate, reports  
*Carolyn Culver*

RIGHT: PENGUINOLOGIST TOM HART TOOK PART IN THE CONVERSATION



Dr Tom Hart is a penguinologist in Oxford's Department of Zoology. He spends several months a year in Antarctica maintaining time-lapse cameras for citizen science project Penguinwatch. Millions of these images are studied by members of the public every year to help Tom monitor the health of penguin colonies.

Just as the internet has allowed thousands of people to contribute to scientific research, it has also seen a proliferation of news websites and blogs that many people read as an alternative to print and broadcast media. These vary in quality, but one such website, The Conversation, offers an interesting alternative because it's packed with articles written by expert academics and researchers – including Tom, who recently co-authored an article with Pete Convey of the British Antarctic Survey about the potential impact of climate change on Antarctica.

Launched in Australia in 2011 and in the UK in 2013, The Conversation has millions of readers worldwide. Articles are free to read and the website is free of advertising – a welcome relief from subscription-only paywalls or being distracted by the visual bombardment of pop-up adverts. Topics include health, science and technology, arts and culture, and politics and society, and the site is curated by journalists with expertise in these areas.

The project was established by journalists frustrated with the increasingly politicised agenda of traditional mass media. Their intention was to inform public debate about the big issues of the day by publishing evidence-based comment pieces written by experts. Concerned that academics were withdrawing from engagement with the media, they wanted to give them a platform where their words would not be twisted to suit a particular narrative.

The quality of reporting about major issues of public concern also concerned The Conversation's founders. Cutbacks in news rooms, including specialist reporters, and the need to get stories online quicker than

competitors, mean journalists have less time to write stories and often lack the expertise needed to understand the detail and context of what they are writing about. The founders also wanted an antidote to the traditional media's focus on bad news and drama, believing that academics and researchers can offer a more rounded view, be more honest, and outline potential solutions rather than

## 'The project was established by former journalists frustrated with the increasingly politicised agenda of traditional mass media'

leaving the reader with a sense of doom and gloom.

Oxford researchers are among the most prolific contributors to the website. To date more than 200 Oxford researchers have contributed articles, read by more than 8 million readers. Academics and researchers at all stages of their career are encouraged to contribute: being an early career researcher is no barrier. Indeed, The Conversation's editors are keen to promote the website as an opportunity to develop writing skills and practise writing for a generalist audience.

Oxford is now a formal member of The Conversation, having joined in August, and will enjoy the added bonus of training and support for researchers who would like to contribute but do not feel confident enough to start typing straight away. One such event is being held on Friday 27 November, when editors from The Conversation will visit Oxford to kick off a training programme (see [po.st/TheConversation](http://po.st/TheConversation)).

Writing for the website is a collaborative process. The Conversation contacts member universities each day, listing the topical stories that they would like an expert to comment on. The academic divisions then contact relevant expert researchers and, if they are

interested, put them in touch with the relevant editor. The researcher and editor shape the focus of the article between them and nothing is published without the researcher's final approval.

Tom Hart's article was about how plants and animals might colonise an ice-free Antarctica. 'I found this a really positive experience,' he says. 'It was a chance to think about something peripheral to my main research, but a very interesting aspect of change in Antarctica. I'd encourage anyone interested in engagement to look at this, particularly if they don't have too much time.'

Dr Carlos Vargas-Silva, a senior researcher at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), recently wrote about how many overseas students stay in the UK after completing their studies – a good example of how The Conversation tries to set the record straight about issues that can become politicised in the traditional media. 'The editors understand the need for balancing "newsworthy" material with academic rigour,' confirms Carlos. 'If the content is too technical, they also make suggestions to make it more accessible.'

He is also pleased with the impact his articles have had. 'My pieces on The Conversation have been re-posted on several other websites, including *The New Statesman* and the BBC. Much of the reaction to the articles comes from people reading these other websites. Having these websites republishing The Conversation articles is a way of reaching a broader audience without the extra work.'

Tom Hart's article is at [theconversation.com/polar-invasion-how-plants-and-animals-would-colonise-an-ice-free-antarctica-47369](http://theconversation.com/polar-invasion-how-plants-and-animals-would-colonise-an-ice-free-antarctica-47369). Carlos Vargas-Silva's article is at [theconversation.com/hard-evidence-how-many-foreign-students-stay-in-the-uk-45506](http://theconversation.com/hard-evidence-how-many-foreign-students-stay-in-the-uk-45506).

You can join in The Conversation via [theconversation.com/uk](http://theconversation.com/uk).

# WHAT'S ON

## EXHIBITIONS

### Titian to Canaletto: drawing in Venice

Until 10 January 2016

Ashmolean Museum

Tickets £10 / £9 / £5 / free for members and under-12s

[www.ashmolean.org/exhibitions/titiancanaletto](http://www.ashmolean.org/exhibitions/titiancanaletto)

First major exhibition of Venetian drawings in the UK, which traces the role of drawing in Venice and its importance over three centuries.

### Handwritten in stone

Until 31 January 2016

Upper East Gallery, Oxford University Museum of Natural History

[www.oum.ox.ac.uk/visiting/current.htm](http://www.oum.ox.ac.uk/visiting/current.htm)

Exhibition celebrating the 200th anniversary of the publication of William Smith's first geological map of England and Wales.

### Armenia: masterpieces from an enduring culture

Until 28 February 2016

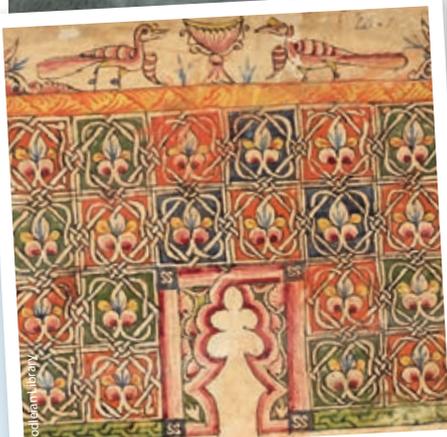
S T Lee Gallery, Weston Library

[www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/whats-on](http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/whats-on)

The Bodleian's winter exhibition celebrates over 2,500 years of Armenian history, from its first mention in the reign of King Darius I (c550–486 BCE) to the modern Republic of Armenia.



Ashmolean Museum



Bodleian Library

## CONCERTS

### Family cushion

**concert: festive folk**

Sunday 6 December, 10am and 11am for under 5s; noon for over 5s

Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, St Hilda's College

Tickets £5; £16 for family of 4

[www.st-hildas.ox.ac.uk/jdp-music-building/familyed](http://www.st-hildas.ox.ac.uk/jdp-music-building/familyed)

A festive version of the cushion concert series, which introduces children to different instruments and styles of music.

### Christmas by candlelight

Saturday 19 December, 8pm

Christ Church Cathedral

Tickets £15 / £8

[cathedralsingers.org.uk](http://cathedralsingers.org.uk)

Seasonal carol concert by the Cathedral Singers of Christ Church, directed by John Padley.

### MASH marathon

Friday 29 January, 6.30pm

Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, St Hilda's College

Tickets £5

[www.st-hildas.ox.ac.uk/jdpevent/mash-marathon](http://www.st-hildas.ox.ac.uk/jdpevent/mash-marathon)

A new music marathon featuring a wide range of experimental, minimal and electronic music created by UK-based composers.

## LECTURES AND TALKS

### Brexit seminar: conclusions; political considerations

Thursday 3 December, 5.30pm

Old Library, All Souls College

[www.asc.ox.ac.uk/event/brexit-seminar-series-conclusions-political-considerations](http://www.asc.ox.ac.uk/event/brexit-seminar-series-conclusions-political-considerations)

Panel discussion featuring Professor Sir David Edward, Lord O'Donnell and Dr John Redwood MP.

### Sylvia Pankhurst, feminism and social justice

Friday 4 December, 5pm

Lecture Theatre, Mansfield College

[www.mansfield.ox.ac.uk](http://www.mansfield.ox.ac.uk)

Talk by writer and historian Dr Rachel Holmes.

FROM TOP: COLOURFUL GEOLOGY; VENETIAN DRAWING; ARMENIAN CULTURE



University Museum of Natural History

### The travelling Santa problem and other seasonal challenges

Wednesday 16 December, 4.30pm

Mathematical Institute, ROQ

[www.maths.ox.ac.uk/events/public-lectures-events](http://www.maths.ox.ac.uk/events/public-lectures-events)

Professor Marcus du Sautoy will examine an aspect of Christmas not often considered: the mathematics.

### Britain's black debt: reparatory justice and the restoration of 'moral nation status'

Tuesday 26 January, 5pm

Oxford Martin School

[www.race-and-the-curriculum.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.race-and-the-curriculum.eventbrite.co.uk)

Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, will deliver the inaugural Race and the Curriculum in Oxford Lecture.

## FAMILY FRIENDLY

### Pitt Stop: jingle beads

Saturday 5 December, 1–4pm

Pitt Rivers Museum

[www.prm.ox.ac.uk/events.html](http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/events.html)

Make your own beaded Christmas decorations and jingle all the way.

### Lightning strikes!

Saturday 5 December, 2–4pm

Museum of the History of Science

[www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/events](http://www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/events)

Find out about the story of electricity and Benjamin Franklin's life-saving invention. Drop-in event for children aged 7 upwards.

### Recycled Christmas

Saturday 12 December, 10.30am–12.30pm

Botanic Garden

[www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk/whatson](http://www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk/whatson)

Get in the festive mood and make some Christmas decorations from natural materials.

# GENDER EQUALITY TAKES CENTRE STAGE

*Julia Paolitto reports on current interventions to embed gender equality into university life*



The appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor is always a highly anticipated event, but the appointment of Louise Richardson as Oxford's 272nd Vice-Chancellor was seen as something special well beyond Oxford. The arrival of the first female Vice-Chancellor at one of the world's most recognisable educational institutions has been met with excitement and optimism, as well as the sense among many that the change was long overdue – both at Oxford and in a sector where leadership remains 80% male.

The change of leadership at Oxford comes at a time when gender equality initiatives across the University are gathering momentum. The last decade has produced a series of interventions to embed gender equality into university life and the University's engagement with the Athena SWAN charter since 2005 has had a defining impact on its work to further gender equality in the sciences in particular. Established originally to combat the under-representation of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine) subjects, Athena SWAN awards recognise practices and achievements supporting the career development and progression of women in academia.

The awards have been successful in engaging the many people across the University dedicated to pursuing gender equality in activities that are structured and effective, says Trudy Coe, head of the University's Equality and Diversity Unit (EDU). 'Engaging with Athena SWAN enables the whole department to take a view on what matters locally in terms of recruitment, progression and retention – of women and men – at every career stage, from outreach with prospective students to the most senior professorial appointments. Completing the

application form and action plan is just the first step in a continuing process of culture change over many years.' And thanks to work across the Medical Sciences and the Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS) Divisions, Oxford is one of the very few universities in the country to hold awards in every STEM department.

While the under-representation of women in the social sciences and humanities is less severe, the proportion of women at more senior levels remains relatively low and is an area of work for both divisions. The Social Sciences Division is preparing its departments for Athena SWAN

**'The University has signed up to the UN's HeForShe campaign as one of ten international universities to commit to promoting gender equality across the higher education sector'**

awards (newly open to non-science subjects as of May), while Humanities is reviewing hiring practices to achieve ambitious targets for leadership by women in its faculties.

The huge amount of work is undoubtedly helping raise awareness of gender equality as a priority across Oxford. For all the steady progress being made, however, the academic gender balance remains an area of concern: the proportion of female teaching and research staff at Oxford remains well below the sector average (26% compared with 30% in the Russell Group and 39% nationally). To address this, in 2014

the University conducted a comprehensive review of recruitment procedures for statutory professorships and approved a set of gender equality targets to support its aim of increasing the proportion of women in senior roles – to 20% of statutory professors and 35% of associate professors by 2020. The effects are already being felt: only a year after revising the process for statutory professor recruitment, the proportion of women appointed has significantly increased.

Change at Oxford rarely happens overnight, but pressure and funding from the top certainly helps speed up the process, and to that end the £1m Vice-Chancellor's Diversity Fund was created in 2013. Established to promote diversity across the University, the fund has helped take forward practical initiatives such as the Women in Science project, launching early next year. Conceived by Sue Ziebland, Professor of Medical Sociology, the project is an online resource showcasing the personal experiences of 40 female scientists in Oxford through more than 200 video and audio clips. The project highlights many of the concerns common among women making career development choices – from applying for fellowship funding to approaching maternity leave, through achieving culture change in the sciences.

The fund also makes possible the Returning Carers' Fund, which provides small grants to support women and men returning to work following a period of leave for caring responsibilities, to help them re-establish their research. It can be used, for example, to provide research assistance or bring collaborators to Oxford for a period of time to reduce the travel burden on those with demanding responsibilities at home.



HIGH-PROFILE WOMEN (CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT): ROBYN NORTON, PROFESSOR OF GLOBAL HEALTH, GIVES THE OXFORD INDIA LECTURE; DR PHUMZILE MLAMBO-NGCUKA, UN UNDER SECRETARY-GENERAL, IN OXFORD AS THE UNIVERSITY COMMITS TO THE HEFORSHE CAMPAIGN; SUSAN JEBB, PROFESSOR OF DIET AND POPULATION HEALTH, GIVES THE OXFORD LONDON LECTURE; DAME SALLY DAVIES, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER; VICE-CHANCELLOR-ELECT PROFESSOR LOUISE RICHARDSON; GUARDIAN EDITOR KATH VINER

The Diversity Fund is, through EDU, also taking a cue from Hertford College's decision to temporarily replace its hall portraits with photographs of female alumni. A major portraiture project will electronically capture portraits of women across the University and place them in an online repository. This will be followed by a series of commissioned photographs of women of achievement from across the University, and eventually a portrait of a prominent woman will sit in the entrance to Wellington Square alongside Harold Macmillan, Roy Jenkins and Lord Patten.

February 2016 will see the launch of 'Women of Achievement,' a lecture series that Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education Sally Mapstone describes as 'using the lecture concept to do something different'. A pop-up nursery at each lecture – Chief Medical Officer Dame Sally Davies and *Guardian* editor Kath Viner will deliver the first two in the series – will make them more accessible to those whose childcare commitments would otherwise rule them out of attending evening lectures.

Gender equality as it plays out in the student experience is another important priority for the University's work. Centuries of (largely all-male) traditions have contributed to Oxford's unique status in Britain. They also arguably make it more important to ensure that female students feel supported, and that men across the University are engaged in promoting a positive environment for female students. 'Diversity enhances Oxford as an institution,' says Vice-Chancellor Professor Andrew Hamilton. 'To make progress we need students who will eventually be leading our institutions to be engaged with equality. Ensuring that Oxford is a safe and inclusive space for all

our students, and thinking about what gender equality means in practice for them is an important part of this work.' To that end, in June the University signed up to the United Nations' HeForShe campaign for gender equality as one of ten international universities to commit to promoting gender equality across the higher education sector.

As part of the University's pledge to promote gender equality and create a safe University environment, Oxford has funded or helped develop a range of student-led activities, from sexual consent workshops in all undergraduate colleges to engaging male students in promoting positive masculinity. Other initiatives have included substantially revising the University's policy and procedure on sexual assault and harassment, including recruiting and training more college- and department-based staff in how to respond appropriately to incidents of sexual assault.

In February 2015 Dr Rebecca Surender was appointed Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Advocate for Diversity – a new position signalling that equality and diversity are important enough to merit a senior representative who will coordinate and promote initiatives across the University. 'Oxford takes its position

seriously,' she says. 'For good and bad we get lots of attention, but it means that we can use this platform to provide leadership because what we do matters – and thanks to a strong commitment to evidence-based policy and practice, our initiatives and activities reflect a good understanding of best practice and what works.'

All these activities are just the tip of the iceberg – gender equality is clearly on the agenda all over the University, driven from the bottom up as much as from leadership commitments at the top. There's undoubtedly more to do, but Oxford today looks decidedly different from when Sally Mapstone arrived in 1975. Her first evening at Wadham College, she remembers, featured a women-only talk from the college doctor about contraception. 'My peer group still recalls that because we were so horrified by it. It showed that "mixed" colleges had some way to go to understand what being "mixed" really meant,' she notes. 'Fast forward 40 years and our student union is running sexual consent workshops in colleges. Some people might worry that that should be necessary; I think it shows enlightened progress and responsibility, and a whole institution approach.'

#### Further information:

Athena SWAN: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/gender/athenaswan](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/gender/athenaswan)

HeForShe: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/gender/heforshe](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/gender/heforshe)

Equality and Diversity Unit: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/gender](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/gender)

VC Diversity Fund: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/inpractice/vc-fund](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/inpractice/vc-fund)

Gender equality targets: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/policy/equalityobjectives](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/policy/equalityobjectives)

# THE DAY JOB — AND OTHER OBSERVATIONS

Departing Vice-Chancellor  
Andrew Hamilton tells  
*Stephen Rouse* about his  
Oxford experience



Challenging one's DPhil supervisor is a common occurrence for postgraduate Oxford students. In fact, it's positively encouraged. But what if that supervisor is also the Vice-Chancellor? For Professor Andrew Hamilton, leading a research group at the frontiers of organic and biological chemistry has been a vital break from the 'day job' of being VC for the past six and half years.

Reflecting on his time at Oxford, two months before he is due to depart to become President of New York University, Professor Hamilton says: 'I try hard to get to the lab two or three times a week. I don't always make it but it's been an important part of my life in Oxford,

ensuring I stay connected with my subject and also giving me the pleasure of talking to students about research, feeling the excitement when one of them points to a finding that helps with part of the puzzle we are pursuing. They actually help me do my job as VC – not least because they keep me sane in what can often be the very surreal world of academic administration.'

Fortunately for any student wishing to challenge the VC's assessment of new data, Professor Hamilton has never been one to stand on ceremony – in the lab or in the office. 'I hope I follow a style of leadership that welcomes challenge. That can be my Pro-Vice-Chancellors, who are perfectly willing – even jump at the opportunity – to challenge me. Or it can be my students, who I have always encouraged to be critical thinkers.'

'This University is great because it works on consensus. If an idea for a new project, a new building, a new degree, isn't good enough to build consensus among academic experts, then it doesn't deserve to see the light of day. So, to me, the building of consensus is not a weakened model of leadership, it the very epitome of how to achieve things.'

The achievements of this consensual style have indeed been significant. Taking up office with the UK economy in deep recession, Professor Hamilton impressed upon the collegiate University the importance of a united

response to inevitable government funding cuts. In the face of the economic gale, the University has achieved annual income growth of 6–7% and an even higher increase, 8–9%, for research income. That distinctive, challenging, Oxford education system has been protected with a £120m pot for undergraduate teaching and more than £100m for graduate student scholarships.

There are also more tangible results of the perpetual modernisation of the University infrastructure: new buildings for Mathematics and Earth Sciences; the transformation of the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. Two vitally important areas of study – China and the Middle East – have been enhanced by striking new buildings at St Hugh's and St Antony's. Oxford has been number one in the world in medicine for the past five years, with new developments like the Big Data Institute set to keep it there.

The ever-evolving city has given Professor Hamilton a lot of pleasure. 'I walk past the ROQ every day, watching it change in front of my eyes. To me, it sums up Oxford – the cutting-edge 21st-century scholarship represented by the Mathematical Institute and, reflected in its windows, the 18th-century scientific endeavour represented by the exquisite Radcliffe Observatory.'

Less visible, but no less remarkable, are the





stories of the Moritz–Heyman undergraduate scholars, whose first cohort has recently graduated. The internet investor Sir Michael Moritz and his wife, the writer Harriet Heyman, endowed the University with £75m to support students from the lowest income families in the UK.

Professor Hamilton is credited with bringing about the Moritz–Heyman gift and, more widely, the collegiate University’s record success in reaching £2bn of philanthropic donations. But he rejects the notion that, as a former Provost of Yale, he has brought the US style of fundraising to Oxford: ‘I hope what I have done is build in Oxford a sense of strength for the challenges to come – but a strength based firmly on Oxford’s own character and values.’

He adds: ‘I also like to point out to all our students, on graduation day in the Sheldonian, that philanthropy is not a new phenomenon. They are sitting in a wonderful building funded through the generosity of Gilbert Sheldon, with the philanthropy of John Radcliffe evident just next door. All I have done is help co-ordinate

a sometimes overly devolved approach to philanthropy and remind people that we are at our strongest when we work together.’

Professor Hamilton highlights those graduation ceremonies, and the expressions on the faces of graduates, family and

### ‘I hope what I have done is build in Oxford a sense of strength for the challenges to come’

friends, as one of the particular joys of his post. The excellence, diversity and global reach of Oxford’s research has been another: ‘I’ve talked often about a very rainy day at Begbroke Science Park. Instead of cutting a ribbon for the new road, as any sensible university might do, I was placed in the passenger seat of a robot car and driven at around 40 mph through the ribbon. But that research project is a wonderful example of Oxford’s scientific and engineering excellence

being applied to a very real-world challenge in automotive vehicle design.’

A small toy lion sits on the Vice-Chancellor’s meeting table. It’s a ‘Cecil’, created to raise funds for the Department of Zoology’s WildCRU team. The researchers attracted worldwide support earlier this year after the real-life Cecil, a lion they were studying, was shot dead in a Zimbabwean nature reserve.

Noticing Cecil, the Vice-Chancellor smiles. ‘You might say he reflects the changes I’ve seen here. There was worldwide, 24-hour media coverage of Cecil’s sad death and WildCRU’s response. There is the excellence of the Oxford research itself, its impact around the world in many significant ways, and the range of ways in which it can be funded. And that brings me full circle. The financial challenges of my time at Oxford have reinforced the importance of a diversity of income streams to underpin everything we do in teaching and research. Yes, it can be philanthropy; yes, it can be corporate and charitable sponsorship; and it can even be the profits from a cuddly lion called Cecil.’

Professor Hamilton’s enthusiasm for the University’s research and education is infectious. Yet he has always been equally clear about the importance of administrative staff in supporting the brilliance of the academics and students. ‘The 21st century is a complex place for administrators, with an increasing regulatory burden, greater media scrutiny and sometimes demanding academics. Contemporary scholarship – in the labs, in the complex modern libraries or even more complex ancient buildings – would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of Oxford’s administrative staff. For that, and for all the support they have given me over the last six years or so, I am enormously grateful.’



FAR LEFT: CONGRATULATING A NEWLY GRADUATED DPHIL STUDENT; ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: INSTALLATION AS VICE-CHANCELLOR, WITH DEPARTING VC JOHN HOOD; BEING INTRODUCED TO AUNG SAN SUU KYI BY THE CHANCELLOR, LORD PATTEN; PRESENTING THE VC’S CIVIC AWARD TO UNDERGRADUATE VOLUNTEERS WITH KIDS ADVENTURE; LEFT: ‘CUTTING THE RIBBON’ IN THE DRIVERLESS CAR AT BEGBROKE

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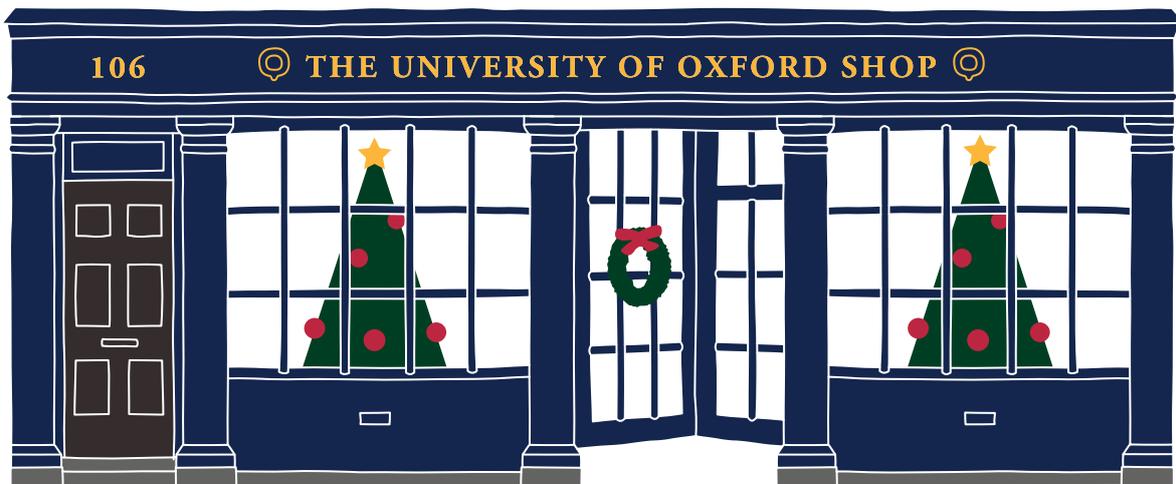
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# WHY AM I HERE?

ROBERT QUINNEY

*Director, New College Choir*

## Tell us a bit about the choir.

New College has had a choir since its foundation in 1379, with boy choristers being educated at the associated school. Our regular team comprises 16 choristers aged 8 to 13, and there are two years of boys below that being trained up as Probationers. The 'back row' comprises four altos, five tenors and five basses; six of these are professional Lay Clerks and the rest Academical Clerks (students at New College).

## What does being Director entail?

I direct almost all the choral services, all of which are preceded by a rehearsal; the boys also come over to college at lunchtime to rehearse with me. There's a lot of administration: planning music, auditioning singers, keeping an eye on the boys' progress and welfare, communicating with their parents, overseeing arrangements for tours and recordings, and so on. I'm also Tutorial Fellow at New College and an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Music.

## What are the choir's duties?

We sing every day except Wednesday in University term, and for Gaudies and other special occasions. The college chapel services are popular with tourists and the wider Oxford community, but they're also (I like to think) the beating heart of the college. Our regular service of Evensong is really what each individual makes of it: you can enter fully into its devotional purpose, or use it as space toward the end of the day to reflect, or as a quick cultural apéritif before dinner!

Outside engagements (mostly out of term) regularly include concert tours beyond the UK. In June we were in Rome as guests of the Pontifical Choir, singing with them in both the Sistine Chapel and the Basilica of St Peter – an unforgettable experience. We also make recordings for our in-house Novum label: our recent CD of some wonderful anthems by John Blow, a contemporary of Purcell, should be ready for release in spring 2016. In December we'll be recording carols – for Christmas 2016.

## What are your own musical interests?

I'm fairly omnivorous, but I have a particular interest in J S Bach – an inexhaustible well of inspiration and fascination. I've made three discs of his organ music on the Coro label (the latest has just been released: <http://thesixteenshop.com/collections/new-releases/products/cor16132>).

## Did you always want to be a musician?

I was fairly focused on the idea from the age of about 12, though the seeds were sown earlier, when I sang as a treble – first in the choir of Dundee Cathedral, then in a Royal School of Church Music choir that sang in various northern cathedrals. I think perhaps I was hooked as much by the history and beauty of the buildings as by the music.

I became Organ Scholar at King's College, Cambridge, a demanding role that involved performing every day with King's College Choir alongside my degree – a great education in managing time! I've subsequently worked at Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral and Peterborough Cathedral, before coming to Oxford.

## What was it like playing the organ at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge?

One of the things I enjoyed about working at the abbey was the great variety of special events mixed in among the daily services. The royal wedding was very memorable, not least because the abbey precincts, where we were then living with two small children, were completely locked down for a couple of days while the world's media descended. It came at the end of a very intense period of work – Holy Week and Easter, with another televised service – but when the day arrived, it was actually very enjoyable, and tremendously exciting of course.

## What will the choir be doing in the run-up to Christmas?

We sing three big services, for which the chapel will be jam-packed: the Advent Carol Service on 29 November and Christmas Carols on 6 and 12 December (the latter for Old Members). We also have a concert for the Home Farm Trust in Dorchester Abbey on 8 December. So, while our schedule is not quite the endurance test of a cathedral choir (they'll all be singing right up to Christmas Day itself), it's taxing in that our 'early Christmas' comes straight after the end of a long term. But it's also a lot of fun, and a coming together of the whole college community.

## Finally, where can we find out more?

All our activities and recordings are listed at [www.newcollegechoir.com](http://www.newcollegechoir.com), plus information on choristerships (which come with a generously subsidised place at New College School). You can also follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Failing that, call 01865 279108 or come to Evensong!



*Blueprint* is published bimonthly for the staff of the University of Oxford by the Public Affairs Directorate

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## VIEWFINDER

WHERE SHOULD YOU GO TO FOLLOW THESE 'STARS' – AND WHAT DO THEY SIGNIFY? ANSWER ON P4.

