Curious Hieroglyphick Valentine

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As Xists for no other
News in Brief

- The University has reported a £60.7m surplus for 2012/13, up from £39m in 2011/12. The increase was largely due to the donation of heritage assets totalling £28.5m, including the Wellby collection of silver artefacts valued at £20m, and the portrait of John Ruskin by John Everett Millais valued at £7m. Total income was £1,087m, with research grants and contracts increasing by 6.8% to £436.8m, while expenditure rose by 5.9% to £1,037m. The Financial Statements are available at www.ox.ac.uk/financial_statements.

- The University has submitted its return to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, a peer-review process to assess the quality of research activity at UK higher education institutions. Oxford’s submission comprises over 8,400 research outputs from 2,500 members of staff, £1.9bn of research income and nearly 5,000 DPhil’s awarded over the last six years, statements about our research environments and approach to securing impact for each research area, and 270 case studies demonstrating impact. The outcome will be published by the UK Funding Councils in December 2014.

- The Ashmolean has acquired one of the world’s most significant collections of modern Chinese art. Some 400 works were bequeathed by Chinese art expert Professor Michael Sullivan, who died in September. The collection comprises work by the principal artists of 20th-century and contemporary China, including paintings by Qi Baishi and Zhang Daqian, as well as more recent acquisitions such as Landscript (2002) by Xu Bing. The works will be displayed on rotation at the Ashmolean in a gallery dedicated to Sullivan and his wife Khoan.

- Stay secure online and avoid becoming another cybercrime statistic by taking an information security course. For a general introduction, sign up to ‘You are the target!’ – an overview of why your personal information is valuable, how it may get into the wrong hands and practical measures to reduce the risk of data theft. Other one-hour courses include creating secure passwords and spotting phishing scams. And for training you can do at your desk, log onto the information security awareness module, which sets out the common risks associated with working online and handling data. Details at www.it.ox.ac.uk/infosec.

- Interest-free loans are now available for quarterly and annual parking permits for Oxford’s five Park & Ride sites. Staff wanting to take advantage of a loan should purchase their permit and then apply to the University’s season ticket loan scheme for reimbursement. Proof of purchase (a receipt or payment confirmation email) must be attached to the application form. Details at www.admin.ox.ac.uk/estates/travel.

- Are you interested in working as a science reporter? If so, the British Science Association Media Fellowships could be for you. Each year up to ten media fellowships are offered to scientists, clinicians and engineers to experience first-hand how science is reported. Spend three to six weeks on a summer placement with a national journalist, working with them to produce well-informed news pieces about developments in science. Details at www.ox.ac.uk/staffnews. The deadline for applications is 16 March 2014.

- Stephen Fry has been named as Cameron Mackintosh Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre, a post based at St Catherine’s College. Fry’s 30-year career has ranged over stage, film, radio and television; he has also written four novels and two volumes of autobiography. He will deliver his inaugural lecture on 20 February and is expected to undertake at least one student workshop a term. The visiting professorship has previously been held by actors, writers and directors including Michael Boyd, Meera Syal, Trevor Nunn, Michael Frayn and Kevin Spacey.

- The Ashmolean has opened its doors to a new exhibition of Chinese art. The works will be displayed in a gallery dedicated to Sullivan and his wife Khoan. The collection comprises work by the principal artists of 20th-century and contemporary China, including paintings by Qi Baishi and Zhang Daqian, as well as more recent acquisitions such as Landscript (2002) by Xu Bing. The works will be displayed on rotation at the Ashmolean in a gallery dedicated to Sullivan and his wife Khoan.
Fungi, often seen as pests, play a crucial role policing rainforest biodiversity, a study led by Dr Owen Lewis from the Department of Zoology reveals. The team found that fungi regulate diversity in rainforests by making dominant species victims of their own success. Fungi spread quickly between closely packed plants of the same species, preventing them from dominating at other species’ expense. ‘In the plant world, close relatives make bad neighbours,’ says Dr Lewis. ‘Seedlings growing near plants of the same species are more likely to die and we now know why. It has long been suspected that something in the soil is responsible, and we’ve now shown that fungi play a crucial role. It’s astonishing to see microscopic fungi having such a profound effect on entire rainforests.’

A gene therapy trial for an inherited cause of blindness has shown very promising initial results. Choroideremia is a rare genetic condition for which there is currently no cure. Vision slowly deteriorates as the disease progresses, as cells in the retina of the eye gradually stop working then die off. The aim of the study was to get the gene therapy into the cells in the retina without causing damage, but after six months the first six patients actually showed improvements in their vision in dim light and two were able to read more lines on the eye chart. Wayne Thompson, 43, an IT project manager in Staffordshire, was treated in April and says: ‘One night in the summer, my wife called me outside as it was a particularly starry evening. As I looked up, I was amazed that I was able to see a few stars. I hadn’t seen stars for a long, long time.’ Professor Robert MacLaren of the Nuffield Laboratory of Ophthalmology led the trial. ‘It is still too early to know if the gene therapy treatment will last indefinitely,’ he says, ‘but we can say that the vision improvements have been maintained for as long as we have been following up the patients, which is two years in one case.’

Comedians show high levels of ‘psychotic’ personality traits, according to new research. The Oxford psychologists who led the study suggest that an unusual – but still healthy – personality structure could help in making other people laugh. Over 500 comedians completed an online questionnaire designed to measure psychotic traits in healthy individuals. Most striking was their high scores for both extroverted and introverted personality traits. Professor Gordon Claridge of the Department of Experimental Psychology says: ‘The creative elements needed to produce humour are strikingly similar to those characterising the cognitive style of people with psychosis – both schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.’

After decades of scholarship denying that the Carthaginians sacrificed their children, new research has found ‘overwhelming’ evidence that this ancient civilisation really did carry out the practice. A collaborative paper by academics from institutions across the globe, including Dr Josephine Quinn of Oxford’s Faculty of Classics, suggests that Carthaginian parents ritually sacrificed young children as an offering to the gods. The paper, published in the journal Antiquity, argues that well-meaning attempts to interpret the ‘tophets’ – ancient infant burial grounds – simply as child cemeteries are misguided. The research pulls together literary, epigraphical, archaeological and historical evidence and confirms the Greek and Roman account of events that held sway until the 1970s, when scholars began to argue that the theory was simply anti-Carthaginian propaganda.

The volatility of oil prices is ‘a fundamental barrier to stability and economic growth,’ according to Zoheir Ebrahim, Dr Oliver Inderwildi and Professor Sir David King of the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment. In a new study published in the journal Frontiers in Energy, they identify the amount of speculative trading currently taking place in the oil derivatives market as a large part of the problem. The behaviour of speculators compounds existing volatility, they say, and previously unrelated volatility is spilling over from the stock market to the oil market and vice versa. This has changed the nature of the oil derivatives market, driving it away from its original purpose of ‘hedging’ – a means by which businesses could protect themselves against price fluctuations. The authors suggest that the EC’s proposed Financial Transactions Tax in the oil derivatives market, currently pegged at 0.01%, is too small and unlikely to deter speculators, and could even carry the risk of curbing hedging as an unintended consequence. The planned EU tax for financial transactions is a good first step, they conclude, but unlikely to be sufficient to cut out unnecessary trading.
PEOPLE AND PRIZES

Daniela Bortoletto, Professor of Physics, has been elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science for her distinguished efforts to promote science.

Professor Sir Ivor Crewe, Master of University College, became President of the Academy of Social Sciences on 1 January and will serve a three-year term.

Danny Dorling, Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography, has received the Political Studies Communicator Award of the Political Studies Association for his pioneering work using infographics to explain complex social science data to the wider public.

Colin Espie, Professor of Behavioural Sleep Medicine, has won a prize for the digital sleep improvement programme that he co-founded. Sleepio (www.sleepio.com), an online cognitive behavioural therapy programme designed to help people overcome poor sleep, won the award for best designed health innovation in 2013 at the World Innovation Summit for Health.

Simon Hay, Professor of Epidemiology, has been awarded the 2013 Bailey K Ashford Medal of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene for distinguished work in tropical medicine.

Dr Rama Mani, Senior Research Associate in the Centre for International Studies, has, together with the Committee for Basic Rights and Democracy, Cologne, received the Peter Becker Prize for Peace and Conflict Research.

Dr David Maw, Research Fellow and Tutor in Music at Oriel College and Lecturer at Christ Church, Queen’s and Trinity, was awarded the Grand Prix André Marchal for organ improvisation jointly with the French organist David Cassan at the 11th Biarritz International Organ Competition in France.

Professor Gilles McKenna, Director of the Gray Institute for Radiation Oncology and Biology, has been awarded the 2014 Gold Medal from the Royal College of Radiologists for his ‘enormous national and international contribution to clinical oncology research and training’.

Dr Henry Smith of the Department of Physics has been named as one of the ten people who made a difference in science in 2013 by the journal Nature, in recognition of his work on next-generation solar power technology.

Dr Jacqueline Seddall, Senior Research Fellow in the History of Mathematics at The Queen’s College, has been awarded the 2013 Neumann Prize by the British Society for the History of Mathematics for her book The History of Mathematics: A Very Short Introduction (OUP, 2012).

STOP FRENCH HONOUR FOR VOLTAIRE FOUNDATION

A ‘towering’ scholarly work published by the University’s Voltaire Foundation has been awarded a prestigious French honour.

The Correspondance générale de La Beaumelle (1726–1773), a 16-volume set of which nine volumes have been published so far, has been awarded the 2013 Prix de la Fondation Edouard Bonnefous de l’Institut de France, on the recommendation of the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques.

La Beaumelle was a French Enlightenment man of letters who lived in the 18th century and was a prominent Hugenot. His correspondence is a vast source of information, not just about his own life and that of his sworn enemy Voltaire, but about 18th-century intellectual life more generally.

The University’s Stroke Prevention Research Unit has been awarded the Queen’s Anniversary Prize for Higher Education, the highest form of national recognition that UK higher education institutions can achieve. This is the ninth time that the University has been awarded the prize – more than any other university.

The unit was founded in 2000 by Professor Peter Rothwell (pictured) to improve prevention of stroke and other chronic diseases in older people. It now comprises over 30 staff, is linked to a world-leading imaging facility, and runs several unique cohort studies in collaboration with 100 GPs in Oxfordshire. In 2013 the unit evolved into the Centre for Prevention of Stroke and Dementia.

In a little over a decade the unit has revolutionised clinical practice in stroke prevention, ranging from emergency treatment of ‘threatened’ stroke to more effective use of surgery to prevent stroke. Research showed that the risk of major stroke in the first few hours and days after more minor warning events – transient ischaemic attacks – was much higher than previously supposed; these events were consequently rebranded as a medical emergency in all international guidelines. The unit developed simple scores to identify high-risk individuals and showed that urgent use of existing treatments reduced the risk of major stroke by 80%. This cheap but highly effective strategy has been adopted internationally, and is estimated to prevent 10,000 strokes per year in the UK alone, saving £200m in annual NHS costs.

The unit has also worked on high blood pressure (BP), the most important treatable cause of stroke and vascular dementia. Studies showed that fluctuations in BP, rather than its actual level, are powerful risk factors for these events and that BP-lowering drugs differ in their effects on variability. Other groundbreaking work has shown that the use of aspirin reduces the long-term risk of several common cancers and, in the shorter term, reduces the spread of cancer around the body.
Ten senior members of the University were recognised in the New Year honours.

Professor Martin West, FBA, Emeritus Fellow of All Souls College, was appointed to the Order of Merit. Regarded as one of the world’s leading classical philologists, Professor West was Senior Research Fellow at All Souls from 1991 to 2004. In 2000 he won the International Balzan Prize for Classical Antiquity for his masterful editions and explanations of Greek poetry from Homer to the Attic tragedy and for his groundbreaking research into the relationships between Greece and the Orient.

Professor Frances Kirwan, FRS, Professor of Mathematics and Fellow of Balliol College, was appointed DBE for services to mathematics. One of the UK’s leading mathematicians, Dame Frances’s research interests lie in complex algebraic and symplectic geometry, particularly the study of moduli spaces and their topology. She chairs the UK Mathematics Trust, a body concerned with raising the quality of mathematics education and explanations of Greek poetry from Homer to the Attic tragedy and for his groundbreaking research into the relationships between Greece and the Orient.

Professor Paul Collier, CBE, Professor of Economics and Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government, Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of African Economies, and Fellow of St Antony’s College, was knighted for services to promoting research and policy change in Africa. Sir Paul’s research covers the economic causes and consequences of civil war, the effects of aid, and the problems of democracy in low-income and natural resources-rich societies. He is adviser to the Strategy and Policy Department of the International Monetary Fund, to the Africa Region of the World Bank, and to the Department for International Development (DFID). He is also Co-Director of the International Growth Centre, which aims to link recent advances in economics, genomics and cell and chemical biology for improved drug target discovery.

Dr Noel Malcolm, FBA, Senior Research Fellow at All Souls College, was knighted for services to scholarship, journalism and European history. His main research fields are in British and European early modern intellectual history, with particular interests in Thomas Hobbes and in Western knowledge of and involvement in the Islamic/Ottoman world.

Professor Peter Ratcliffe, FRS, Nuffield Professor of Clinical Medicine, Head of the Nuffield Department of Clinical Medicine and Fellow of Magdalen College, was knighted for services to clinical medicine. Professor Ratcliffe’s research focuses on understanding the mechanisms by which cells monitor and respond to hypoxia (low oxygen levels), an important component of many human diseases including cancer, heart disease, stroke, vascular disease, and anaemia. He is also the director of Oxford’s new Target Discovery Institute, which aims to link recent advances in genomics, genomics and cell and chemical biology for improved drug target discovery.

Professor Marian Dawkins, Emeritus Professor of Animal Behaviour and Emeritus Fellow of Somerville College, was appointed CBE for services to animal welfare. Her research interests include the welfare of farm animals, vision in birds, animal signalling, behavioural synchrony, and animal consciousness.

Professor John Kay, FBA, FRSE, Supernumerary Fellow and Investment Officer of St John’s College, was appointed CBE for services to economics. Professor Kay has been a Fellow of St John’s since 1970 and is the founding director of the Said Business School. He has been the college’s Investment Officer for over 20 years and is Visiting Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics.

Ceridwen Roberts, Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Social Policy and Intervention and member of Oxford Centre for Family Law and Policy, was appointed OBE for services to social science. Her current research interests are in the changing nature of family life and the interplay between family change and public policy. She works on the implications for parents and children of changes to adoption law, child contact and transparency and openness in the family courts as well as research on family networks and grandparents. From 1998 to 2004 she was the UK expert on the European Commission’s Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family, and she is currently the social science adviser to the Food Standards Agency’s Microbiological Safety Division.

Karen Hewitt, Tutor in the Department for Continuing Education, was appointed MBE for services to building academic and cultural understanding between the UK and Russia. Teaching in a Russian university in 1989, she realised how difficult it was for Soviet university teachers to understand western societies and culture. In response she pioneered schemes which were supported by the Department for Continuing Education, by the University’s agreement with Perm State University, and later by St Antony’s College’s Russian Centre. In recent years, thanks to the Oxford Russia Fund, she has brought thousands of books, especially of contemporary literature, to teachers and students all over Russia.

Also honoured was Dr Marios Papadopoulos, founder and music director of Oxford Philomusica, who was made an MBE for services to music in Oxford. In 2002 Oxford Philomusica was appointed the University’s first Orchestra in Residence. Dr Papadopoulos is a member of the Faculty of Music and a Fellow by Special Election of Keble College.

Viewfinder found a suitcase and signed papers in the basement of the Museum of Natural History. The suitcase contained rubies and diamonds as well as a rare manuscript. The bust of Charles Darwin was also discovered in the basement. The statue of Charles Darwin was repositioned on the top of the museum’s main entrance.
**ARRIVALS BOARD**

**DIRECTOR, ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM**  
*Alexander Sturgis,* Director of the Holburne Museum of Art, Bath, has been appointed as Director-elect of the Ashmolean Museum. He will take up the Directorship on 1 October and will also be a Fellow of Worcester College.

Dr Sturgis held various posts over 15 years at the National Gallery, London, including Exhibitions and Programmes Curator and Director's Curatorial Assistant. In 2005 he became Director of the Holburne Museum, where he oversaw a major development project, including the complete redisplay and reinterpretation of the permanent collection, and worked to place the museum on a secure financial footing. He also developed a higher education strategy for the museum, extending the use of its collection as a resource for local universities.

**DIRECTOR, MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE**  
*Silke Ackermann,* Professor of Cultural Studies and President, Baltic College, University of Applied Sciences, Schwerin, Germany, has been appointed to this post with effect from 1 March. She will be a Fellow of Linacre College.

Dr Ackermann is an expert on Western and Islamic scientific instruments and has an international reputation for her cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach. She spent 16 years at the British Museum in various leadership and management roles and was a consultant for the new Zayed National Museum of Abu Dhabi. Last year she took up a professorship at the University of Applied Sciences and was subsequently appointed President of the university.

**WOLFSON PROFESSOR OF MATERIALS**  
*Peter Bruce,* Wardlaw Professor of Chemistry at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, took up this post in the Department of Materials on 1 January. He is also now a Fellow of St Edmund Hall.

Professor Bruce is an internationally distinguished scientist working on energy materials, including those for lithium batteries, and has made fundamental advances in the science of ionically conducting materials including oxides and polymers.

He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1995 and a Fellow of the Royal Society in 2007.

**CONTEMPORARY ART AWARD**

A proposal developed by the Ashmolean Museum in partnership with the Pitt Rivers Museum and the Ruskin School of Art has won the 2013 Contemporary Art Society Annual Award for Museums. Dr Elizabeth Price, Turner Prize winner and University Lecturer in Fine Art (pictured), will use the £60,000 prize to explore the archives and collections of the two museums, looking particularly at photographs and documents used historically by curators, anthropologists and archaeologists working in the field, while simultaneously engaging with the social and psychological implications of digital technologies.

**ACCESS ALL AREAS**

Over the past decade the open access (OA) publishing model has brought about a sea change in the dissemination of research, with scholars and the public benefiting from free online access to peer-reviewed scholarly literature. Recent government statements, together with mandates by research funding bodies, have given further momentum to the open access agenda.

Open Access Oxford is the University’s main online resource in this area. The website describes the two different routes to OA: green (where a copy of the paper is made available in an online repository, often after an embargo period) and gold (where a fee – an APC – is paid to the publisher and the paper is then made open access immediately on the publisher’s website). The site also provides information about the University’s position on open access, news and blogs, and links to further help and training. ‘The site offers advice on what can be quite a confusing topic,’ says Sian Dodd, Senior Project Officer in Research Services.

‘Researchers can find information on a range of subjects, from how to make your publication open access to applying to the two institutional block grants held by the University to help pay gold fees.’

Another key element in the University’s OA initiative is the Oxford Research Archive (ORA), an online archive of research material produced by members of the University. The collection currently stands at over 149,000 items, from journal articles to conference papers, increasing numbers of which have freely accessible copies. ‘ORA offers an easy way to comply with funders’ open access requirements as well as a secure means of archiving your research,’ says Sally Rumsey, Digital Research Librarian and Oxford OA Project Manager at the Bodleian.

‘If you’re choosing the green route, simply go to ORA and click on ‘Contribute’ or deposit via Symplectic. If you’re going for gold, you can use ORA to preserve a copy of your publication for the long term.’

Find out more at openaccess.ox.ac.uk and ora.ox.ac.uk.

**KING JOHN II PROFESSOR OF PORTUGUESE STUDIES**  
*Phillip Rothwell,* Full Professor of Portuguese at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, USA, took up this post in the Sub-faculty of Portuguese in the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages on 1 October. He also became a Fellow of St Peter’s College.

Professor Rothwell’s chief research interests are the literatures of Portugal and Portuguese-speaking Africa. He focuses on the cultural legacies of the Portuguese Empire and how they are often structured through disavowal. He is a leading authority on the acclaimed Mozambican writer, Mia Couto, and the Angolan author, Pepetela.

**BLUEPRINT** February 2014

Find out more at openaccess.ox.ac.uk and ora.ox.ac.uk.

**Prize winner and University Lecturer**

Dr Ackermann is an expert on Western and Islamic scientific instruments and has an international reputation for her cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach. She spent 16 years at the British Museum in various leadership and management roles and was a consultant for the new Zayed National Museum of Abu Dhabi. Last year she took up a professorship at the University of Applied Sciences and was subsequently appointed President of the university.
As a child growing up in Nigeria, Dapo Akande liked nothing better than a good argument – about anything and everything, he says. He has mellowed since then and, as a Yamani Fellow and Tutor in Public International Law at St Peter’s College and Co-Director of the Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, he now concerns himself with how global communities can live together in some semblance of harmony. He still enjoys a lively academic debate, however, in order to ‘get to the bottom of things’.

Dapo studied law as an undergraduate in Nigeria before coming to the UK for postgraduate work. After lecturing at Nottingham and Durham, he arrived ten years ago at Oxford, where he particularly enjoys the variety of his job. He is engaged in teaching and research, editing journals and an international law blog as well as occasionally advising international organisations, NGOs and governments on matters of international law. His work spans the law relating to international organisations, dispute settlement, international criminal law and the law of armed conflict.

As the son of two academics, he had a comfortable middle-class upbringing. Indeed, in a recent radio programme in which he was pitted against the UK Attorney General, arguing that UK intervention in Syria would be unlawful, he was accused of being too removed from ‘the heat of battle’. ‘But that is precisely the role of the academic,’ he says. ‘We must step back from the pressures of the situation to hopefully take a more rounded view.’

Much of his work is about analysing treaties between countries. ‘I have to think about the underlying reasons for particular international legal principles and to consider whether these should be applied or reshaped in new situations,’ he says. Asked if he has made a difference to real-world events, he says it is impossible to quantify what contribution he may have made to a turning point. However, his blog against UK military intervention in Syria was quoted in a House of Commons briefing paper that was given to MPs just before they voted against such intervention.

‘The academic must step back from the pressures of the situation to take a more rounded view’

As a young man, Dapo was impressed by the decisive action taken by the United Nations Security Council following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait: international condemnation led to subsequent successful military intervention. He believes this signalled a new potency for organisations like the UN for building peace and justice. He has since advised UN bodies on issues relating to the law of armed conflict and has also worked as a consultant for the African Union on cases before the International Criminal Court.

Looking at the world today, Dapo is unsettled by the practice of US unmanned drones carrying out targeted killings in Pakistan because he says it blurs the line between war and peace, and ‘this requires clarification’. However, he is cheered by the less widely reported, successful interventions elsewhere. He celebrated what he calls ‘a moment of success for the world order’ when al-Qaida affiliates were dispersed from northern Mali by peacekeeping troops.

Dapo’s interest in world affairs started at an early age – the BBC World Service was always on somewhere in the background at home. Aside from world news, Dapo’s passion is sport (and, in particular, arguing about it). Paradoxically, although he believes that state structures are required to give countries some degree of autonomy in their own affairs, he has little interest in international football. This is because the underlying principle of the World Cup, where football players represent their countries, vexes him. ‘I think that dividing players into teams based on their nationalities is a bit of an anachronism because football is now so global. Given my position on state structures, this is curious.’ Unusually, this is one global issue that leaves him quite stumped.

Dapo Akande’s website is at www.law.ox.ac.uk/profile/dapo.akande and his international law blog at www.ejiltalk.org
IN SEARCH OF A CULTURAL HERITAGE

Studies of the ancient city of Balkh are revealing Afghanistan’s early Islamic history, reports Stuart Gillespie

‘How can we build our future if we do not know our history?’ asked Omara Khan Massoudi, director of the National Museum of Afghanistan, at a meeting in Kabul almost five years ago with Dr Arezou Azad of the University’s Faculty of Oriental Studies. That conversation led to the Balkh Art and Cultural Heritage Project (BACH), based at Oxford and carrying out important new research into Afghanistan’s early Islamic history – as well as helping train a new generation of Afghan cultural heritage workers.

Historical Balkh – known to the Greeks as Bactra – was an ancient city in what is now northern Afghanistan, famed for its scholarship, mysticism and beauty. Variously dubbed the Mother of Cities and the Dome of Islam, its ruins have seen surprisingly little archaeological activity or textual study for such an important settlement.

‘I was speaking to Omara Khan Massoudi at the Kabul National Museum in 2009 about a potential future project on Balkh based both on texts and archaeological finds,’ Dr Azad says. ‘That was when he used the phrase about the country being unable to build up its future when it did not understand its own history. He suggested bringing international experts to Afghanistan not only to do research but to teach Afghan cultural heritage workers how to do their own research, as well as giving lectures and seminars on the history of the country’s great dynasties.’

The project received three years’ worth of funding from the Leverhulme Trust and was launched in September 2011. Since then a team of experts from across the globe – including eight from Oxford – have been studying the neglected early Islamic archaeological treasures and textual evidence of Balkh. That includes thousands of coins and ceramic sherds excavated by the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan (DAFA).

‘Afghanistan is literally a museum – the whole country is an underground museum,’ says Dr Azad, who co-manages the project with Edmund Herzig, Oxford’s Soudavar Professor of Persian Studies. ‘But there is this European fascination with Alexander the Great and his time in the east, so until recently the Islamic period in Balkh has largely been ignored from an archaeological point of view.’

She adds: ‘Afghanistan is a place where Islam is a big theme in our consciousness today, yet we know very little about the history of Islam and what foreshadowed the events of today. It’s a big leap, but it’s a much bigger leap from Hellenistic Afghanistan to today, and we are trying to help fill that gap.’

Balkh itself has a rich history, having begun life as an Iron Age settlement before becoming part of the Hellenistic kingdom of Bactria. The city was then conquered by the Sasanian emperors of Iran and, later, the Muslims, with Turkic rulers in between.

Paul Wordsworth, whose research interests lie in mapping and who recently joined the project’s core management team, says: ‘Balkh has enormous historical importance. It has this continuity of occupation over thousands of years, all periods of which are represented at historical Balkh, and the modern town of Mazar-i-Sharif near the ancient city continues to be an important centre in the region.’

A number of books are arising from the project, including one summarising the findings and another providing an updated version of a Persian local history from the 13th century. And, as well as her own book on the continuity of sacred landscapes, Dr Azad has published an article on female mystics in Balkh.

‘What I found during my research was that these women – who you don’t find mentioned elsewhere – are described as strong, intelligent, scholarly, keen travellers, independently minded and coming from important families,’ she says. ‘However, in later sources, from the 15th century onwards, the whole story changes and these women become submissive and weak. It is interesting to see how the descriptions changed, and I think in a way this is the legacy that we live with today.’

‘Afghanistan is literally a museum – the whole country is an underground museum’

Women have been a prominent feature of the training aspect of the BACH project, with a number of female cultural heritage workers taking part. Indeed, two female specialists at the National Museum are now the go-to experts in their field at their institution. They are among around 80 people to have undergone training through BACH in archaeology, manuscript work and history.

‘We call it on-the-job training and what it entails is our experts joining up with one or two young Afghan counterparts when they go out there,’ explains Dr Azad. ‘For example, the numismatists [coin experts] will show their Afghan colleagues things such as how to clean and label coins. The feedback we receive suggests they find it a very useful and positive experience – they particularly appreciate the hands-on work.’

Professor Herzig adds: ‘The really encouraging thing about the BACH project has been that it has shown that even when working on – and in – a country with the kind of challenges faced by Afghanistan, it is possible to do research. The key is to work collaboratively with institutions and individuals “on the ground”, and to seek out and join forces with those specialists who have the disciplinary expertise, the specialist knowledge and the commitment to contribute to the project’s work.’

So what’s next for the BACH project? ‘Now we’ve established a research base on Balkh for the early Islamic period, we want to connect with people working on other cities for that period to carry out comparative research,’ Paul Wordsworth says, Dr Azad adds: ‘From a scientific point of view this would be huge because until now teams have carried out work in these cities largely independently of each other. We want to bring people together to see if we can identify trends in central Asia and thus nuance our understanding of Islamic history, which is still heavily focused on the western Islamic lands.’

Further information on the BACH project at www.balkheritage.org
Oxford’s new Target Discovery Institute (below) and Structural Genomics Consortium are bringing the best researchers from academia and industry together with the latest genetic and cell biology techniques.

The 15th-century shrine and mosque of Khwarra Abu Nasr Parsa at the centre of Balkh.
‘Lord Raglan: pay a fine of two counters to Sebastopol’, ‘Miss Nightingale: go on to hospital nurse, 52’. A fascinating glimpse into history is provided by board games such as Siege of Sebastopol, a ‘new and amusing game’ in which directions are received and fines (counters) are ‘inflicted, in every instance, on account of the disaster which befell the places or persons represented’ when a player lands on them.
A programme from the last play or football match you went to, or an advert dropped through your letterbox, might not seem to be of much significance. But more than a million items of ephemera collected over the past few centuries form an important collection in the Bodleian Library, offering a fresh view of British history.

The John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera is one of the largest and most important collections of printed ephemera in the world. It comprises primary, uninterpreted printed documents which, produced for short-term use, have survived by chance. This includes advertisements, ballads, menus, greetings cards, posters, postcards, and programmes from plays or sporting events.

Ephemera – previously somewhat undervalued – are now avidly sought and studied for the evidence they provide in many areas of history. Trade cards, for example, can show premises (albeit sometimes idealised) which no longer exist. Playbills detail the variety of plays, dances and other entertainments which formed a typical evening at the theatre in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Board games were not just recreational but often educational – many also reflect the preoccupations of their times. Ephemera can provide important ‘missing’ information for local and family historians, and the topics for which the collection has been used are many and various. ‘I have rarely had the same enquiry twice and that makes my job really fascinating,’ says Julie Anne Lambert, Librarian of the John Johnson Collection.

Some items in the collection have also been studied in their own right. In recent years successive students from the University’s Department of the History of Art have focused on single items for their first-year dissertation, exploring in depth the subject matter, iconography, artist, printer, printing method and context.

The John Johnson Collection is constantly receiving new additions. Recent major donations have included the Richard Ballam Collection (of board and other games) and the John Fraser Collection of Propaganda Postcards. ‘We collect pre-1960 ephemera and more modern items. The latter are collected throughout the year in all areas, but also intensively for significant events such as the Olympics or the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee,’ says Julie Anne. ‘Over the next few years, we will be collecting ephemera generated for the centenary of the First World War, and would be grateful for contributions. In parallel, we will be putting online original material from the war, especially from the John Fraser Collection.’

The John Johnson Collection is also particularly keen to acquire past and current ephemera from Oxford University societies, such as term cards and posters.

John Johnson (1882–1956) was Printer to the University of Oxford from 1925 to 1946 and built up the collection of printed ephemera at Oxford University Press after the First World War, collecting retrospectively. The earliest item dates from 1508, but the collection is strongest in the 18th to early 20th centuries. During the Second World War, Johnson lived at the Press and kept the area secure, often rising at 4am to work on his ephemera. He established 680 subject headings for the collection, which was transferred to the Bodleian in 1968.

‘The Collection is particularly keen to acquire past and current ephemera from Oxford University societies, such as term cards and posters’

So how can interested readers access the John Johnson Collection? Much is catalogued in detail online, with a wealth of digital images. The John Johnson website (see below) gives information about the various resources and projects. The largest (65,000 items) and most significant project, in which the Bodleian was partnered by ProQuest, The John Johnson Collection: an archive of printed ephemera, is domain-controlled so requires a single sign-on. It is also available through those UK public libraries and schools which have signed up for this (free) resource. ‘However, there is much, much more which we have not catalogued, so if you have a subject of research and think that we may have relevant ephemera, please get in touch,’ says Julie Anne.

Social media has allowed the collection to reach an even wider audience. ‘Tweeting, blogging, etc have enabled us to engage more directly with users and to promote the collection more widely,’ she adds. ‘For example, I have prepared a Pinterest page for Valentine’s Day in collaboration with the National Valentine Collectors Association in America.’ Interested readers can follow the collection through the blogs linked from the website, or on Twitter.

More about the John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera at www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/johnson or @jjcollepemera; contact the Librarian, Julie Anne Lambert, via jjcoll@bodleian.ox.ac.uk
A flower and leaf sketch of the aquatic plant *Nelumbo lutea* made by the English naturalist Mark Catesby in the 1720s when he collected the specimen in South Carolina; the plant and sketch are both stored in the historic Sherard herbarium of the Oxford University Herbaria.
Imagine compiling a catalogue that describes all the plant species from a country, with pictures and details of where each can be found. In paper form, such a reference could fill volumes, occupy metres of shelf space and prove impossible to sift through. Fortunately, Oxford researchers realised years ago that a digital solution could save many headaches; the resulting software has become a valuable tool for researchers around the world.

Conceived in 1985 as a means to coordinate expanding volumes of species records in the Department of Plant Sciences, the Botanical Research and Herbarium Management System – BRAHMS – was an early database system run on the University’s mainframe, back in the days when computers weren’t as small as they are today. ‘It wasn’t the dawn of computing – we weren’t using punch cards and the like,’ says Denis Filer, who leads the BRAHMS project. ‘But with a 50MB disk filling a machine the size of a washing machine, it was challenging.’

Initially funded by the UK government’s Overseas Development Administration – later the Department for International Development – BRAHMS slowly evolved on smaller yet more powerful computers within the Department of Plant Sciences. It’s been developed there ever since, naturally growing in complexity to include more varied data and imagery plus new features to summarise, report and map data, helping to name and classify plants and to understand why each species occurs where it does.

Now in its eighth iteration and home to millions of plant specimen records, BRAHMS is accessible online from anywhere in the world and is used by researchers from Mauritius to Manaus. ‘We have projects running in about 60 countries,’ says Filer. ‘Within the Netherlands, for example, there are probably about 20 people at any one time using their national networked system.’ And use it they do, for curation and an incredibly diverse range of research.

‘Some researchers might be looking at plant diversity across South Africa; others gather data from 400 years’ worth of botanical collections,’ explains Filer. Another common activity is to bring together all the knowledge of a particular group of plants, say the papaya family Caricaceae, to ensure that the species are indeed distinct, and not muddled up with other plants or older, unused names.

‘Some researchers look at plant diversity across South Africa; others gather data from 400 years’ worth of botanical collections’

There’s more power to be tapped from the database, though. ‘Understanding the true geographic distribution of plant species is vital,’ explains Filer. ‘We can use that information to help understand how species have evolved, draw accurate distribution maps, and make decisions on rarity and conservation status.’ Indeed, with researchers from Kew he recently created an atlas which brings together data from 37,000 specimens to map all 615 species of conifer in unprecedented detail.

Such maps aren’t just of casual interest either. By bringing together data for all species in selected areas, it becomes possible to evaluate not just the diversity but the bioquality of those areas. Dr William Hawthorne, also in the Department of Plant Sciences, uses those BRAHMS capabilities to analyse data gathered from his botanical field surveys. ‘If people want to use land, they can evaluate how precious certain areas are,’ explains Filer. Imagine a large company wishes to mine iron ore in South Africa, and has several possible sites it could work on. With help from BRAHMS, Hawthorne can identify which areas are the most valuable to conserve based on their bioquality scores.

BRAHMS continues to grow apace. Having just received (in collaboration with Kew Gardens) a Big Data grant from the Natural Environment Research Council to develop the system to the next level, it’s hoped that the software will continue to be used internationally, with an increasingly large team developing and using it. And, with help from Andrew Liddell at Plant Sciences, these data and images are now being published online – sharing the digital resource not just with scientists, but with anyone else who’s interested.

More about BRAHMS at http://herbaria.plants.ox.ac.uk/bol
**Visiting the University’s Keeper of the Archives is like stepping back in time. It requires a walk through the Bodleian Library, an ascent up several flights of narrow stone stairs and entry into an ancient panelled room. It is here (and in an office on the floor above) that Simon Bailey and his fellow archivists work. This portion of the Old Bodleian is called the Tower of the Five Orders and it has housed the University’s archives since 1634. Today, ten per cent of the collection still remains here. The oldest document in Bailey’s care is known as the Award of the Papal Legate. Dating back to 1214, the document will be 800 years old in June this year – coincidentally also the year the renovated New Bodleian reopens to readers as the Weston Library, housing the Bodleian Libraries’ special collections, which include a sizeable portion of the University archives. The small, single-sheet document is painstakingly inked onto parchment, Bailey explains, is highly abbreviated (the full translation spans two dense pages). It is contained within a glass case and, as he places it down on the wooden table, Bailey explains that the Award, arguably the first evidence of the infamous town and gown disagreements, marks ‘a rather dark’ moment in early history. In 1208 (or possibly 1209, sources are unclear) a woman was found dead in one of the University halls. She was presumed murdered, although sources suggest it may have been accidental, and the perpetrator was immediately singled out as being a student (or clerk as they were then called). He fled the town, and when the mayor and several other townspeople stormed his home, they arrested his housemates instead. Chronicles written nearer the time suggest two or three men were seized – the number is unclear – but what is clear is that, in the absence of the actual perpetrator, the town, in possession of an order by King John, hanged the unfortunate students instead. Appalled, the remaining masters and students of the University (probably around a thousand members) left Oxford in protest. ‘Some of them settled, or resettled, in Cambridge,’ says Bailey, ‘and this is how Cambridge University came into being.’ Bailey references a 2012 *English Historical Review* article called ‘The Dispersal of Scholars from Oxford and the Beginnings of a University at Cambridge’, written by Cambridge’s own Keeper of the Archives, Patrick Zutshi. The article, drawing on information from the Award of the Papal Legate as well as several historical chronicles and documents, concludes it was likely that this exodus of protest from Oxford did indeed spark the beginnings of Cambridge University.**

*

**The small, single-sheet document is painstakingly inked onto parchment**

The Award was issued in 1214 by the papal legate Nicholas Cardinal Bishop of Tusculum in an attempt to heal the rift between the town and University. It overruled King John’s order to hang the students and set out the conditions under which the scholars were to return to Oxford by imposing penalties on the town. Some of these edicts included:

- For ten years, rent for students in the town must be half of what it had been previous to the hangings and, for a further ten years after, no more than it had been.
- The town had to pay 52 shillings a year in perpetuity to the University for the benefit of poor scholars and provide an annual dinner for one hundred poor scholars.
- The citizens must swear to supply food and other necessities of life at reasonable prices.

Bailey says it isn’t really surprising that the oldest archived document, which is also responsible for creating the office of Chancellor, should be one of such significance rather than something administrative and mundane, because these sorts of documents – along with property deeds – are more likely to be preserved. ‘Oxford University doesn’t have a foundation charter,’ he says, ‘but this is the nearest we’ve got.’

More at www.oua.ox.ac.uk/holdings/1214%20document.html and (via University login) at http://tinyurl.com/nn69kl6
Lectures and Talks

My government, my security and me
Monday 10 February, 5pm
The Pichette Auditorium, Pembroke College
www.humanities.ox.ac.uk/humanitas
Talk by General Michael Hayden, former director of the CIA and inaugural Humanitas Visiting Professor in Intelligence Studies.

Re-examining the history of sexuality in the Christian West
Thursday 13 February, 6pm
Museum of Natural History
www.ox.ac.uk/lgbt
Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch will give the annual Oxford University Lecture for LGBT History Month.

Good value for money: reflections on the Public Accounts Committee
Friday 7 March, 5pm
Butler Room, Nuffield College
https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/events
Talk by Margaret Hodge MP, Chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

Keeping our secrets?
Tuesday 18 March, 6.45pm
Church House, Westminster
www.ox.ac.uk/oll14
In the fourth Oxford London Lecture, Dr Ian Brown of the Oxford Internet Institute will discuss how internet technologies can be shaped for the public good.

Special Events

BIRDS in the Pitt Rivers Museum
Thursday 13 February, 7–10pm
Pitt Rivers Museum
Tickets £5 including complimentary drink
www.prm.ox.ac.uk/specialevents.html
A ‘twilight takeover’ by a group of current anthropology students who curate a night of performance, intrigue and cocktails. Online booking recommended.

Into the light: reopening the museum
Saturday 15 February, 7am–5pm
Museum of Natural History
www.oum.ox.ac.uk
The museum reopens after having been closed to the public during 2013 for the restoration of its glass-tiled roof. The reopening event comprises talks, live music, star specimens, bug handling and more.

Roadshows

Have a climate-relevant idea?
Friday 7 March, 12–1pm
Oxford Martin School
http://climaterelevantidea.oxford.eventbrite.com
A roadshow for researchers working in the field of climate change to find out about funding opportunities and support available from Climate-KIC, Europe’s largest public-private innovation partnership focused on climate change. Please register.

Workshops

Willow weaving with Tom Hare
Saturday 8 March, 10am–4pm
Harcourt Arboretum
Tickets £60
www.harcourt-arboretum.ox.ac.uk
Artist Tom Hare demonstrates how to create interesting plant supports for the garden.

Family Friendly

Half-term activities
15–21 February
University Museums
www.oum.ox.ac.uk/visiting/OUMSFamilyFriendlyLeaflet.pdf
Discover some of the Museum of Natural History’s biggest stars and the Pitt Rivers’ best-kept secrets, make an incredible kaleidoscope, join the tree trail or play games at a variety of half-term free drop-in sessions for (accompanied) children.

Exhibitions

Crystals: beauty, science, structure
Until 30 March
Museum of the History of Science
www.mhs.ox.ac.uk
A look at the history of the study of crystals – prized for their mysterious and natural beauty and probed for their fundamental atomic structures.
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JULIE BLACK
University Safety Officer

Tell us a bit about the University Safety Office.
The Safety Office supports the University's teaching and research and ensures that it complies with relevant health and safety, fire, environmental and any other legislation that applies. There are 14 of us: 8 safety officers, 3 technical and 3 administrative staff. It's our job to distil the regulations into something that's legally compliant but workable too, so we draft safety policies for Council. We provide advice to all departments on how to implement them, carry out audits to see how well departments are doing, report serious accidents and incidents, and work with enforcing agencies.

What's your own remit?
I help deal with the general safety issues that crop up, which can be very diverse, such as advising on computer ergonomics, reviewing high-risk travel assessments or discussing arrangements for asbestos removal. I'm also Secretary to the University's two senior safety committees which consider and approve the safety policies that we draft. In addition, I coordinate the safety training syllabus and deliver a number of courses on various topics.

Ever get asked unusual questions?
We do get asked surprising things, all the more so when you think how clever the people asking are: 'We've got spiders, can you deal with them?' 'I have an old Christmas tree, is it hazardous?' and 'I've cut my finger on the first aid box, what action should I take?'

Childhood ambition? And your first job?
I wanted to be an air hostess, but was told I was too short and needed to count to 46 every day – though it was worse if you came up with anything else. I moved to Papua New Guinea, where I worked for nine years as a research assistant at the hospital in Port Moresby. I picked up lab management responsibilities along the way, some of which were safety-related. Back in London I decided to specialise and qualified in health and safety. I joined the University's Department of Clinical Medicine in 2001 and have been at the Safety Office since 2006.

What's the most unexpected thing you've found yourself doing?
One of the research topics in PNG was on snake bite and an eminent Oxford professor would visit to see how research was going. The local PNG defence force would catch snakes for us when they were on patrol in the bush. We'd place the snakes in a bag and pop them into a freezer for 15 minutes to slow them down before milking their venom. They don't like it very much and tend to empty their digestive tract during handling. One of my jobs was to hold the back end, with my finger strategically placed over the 'vent' to stop the snake pooping on Professor X's feet. The snakes have a tendency to warm up abruptly and once we all had to leap onto various tables and chairs to avoid a very large, cranky taipan. I don't believe we ever did a risk assessment for that activity!

I've also lived with French nuns in an African village and shared a cooker with Professor X's feet. The snakes have a tendency to warm up abruptly and once we all had to leap onto various tables and chairs to avoid a very large, cranky taipan. I don't believe we ever did a risk assessment for that activity!

And finally, what's your most prized possession?
Several knick-knacks have sentimental value and I would be sad to lose them, of course, but I have a shell that I picked up when diving in the Solomon Islands, which has no obvious value to anyone but me. It looks and feels like porcelain and it's hard to believe that a simple mollusc made it. I have a sense of place and time when I handle it and I'm transported back to the same stretch of beach.

So how did you get to this job?
I rather drifted into it. After graduating I trained as a cytogeneticist (doing chromosome analysis) but was bored counting to 46 every day – though it was worse if you came up with anything else. I moved to Papua New Guinea, where I worked for nine years as a research assistant at the hospital in Port Moresby. I picked up lab management responsibilities along the way, some of which were safety-related. Back in London I decided to specialise and qualified in health and safety. I joined the University's Department of Clinical Medicine in 2001 and have been at the Safety Office since 2006.

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