

BLUEPRINT

Staff magazine for the University of Oxford | January 2011



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The wonders of the Web

Sport on track | Language learning | Spotlight on Byzantium

News in brief



The OXFORD LONDON LECTURE



A number of courses primarily in science and maths subjects will start making A* grades at A-level part of the conditional offer for candidates applying for entry in 2012. Oxford's policy on the A* grade was to wait two years, as teachers had indicated they were uncertain about predicting who would get the new grade. It is now clear that many A-level students in the sciences get the A* grade and that it would be reasonable to ask for an A* in many science and maths courses. Details will be in the new Undergraduate Prospectus.

The inaugural Oxford London Lecture will take place in Westminster on Tuesday 1 February (www.ox.ac.uk/oxfordlondonlecture). This new annual lecture series, hosted by the Vice-Chancellor, will explore some of the newest research emerging from the University and its impact on the world in the 21st century. The 2011 lecture will be given by Professor Peter Donnelly, who will be discussing advances in genomic science. A limited number of free tickets are available for members of University staff. Email suzanne.veitch@admin.ox.ac.uk or phone the Events Office on 01865 270568.

A survey about religion and belief among staff and students is being conducted by the Equality and Diversity Unit. The survey is designed to gather the views of people of all faiths, as well as those of no faith, in order to build up a comprehensive picture of the experience of members of the collegiate University. The results will be used to inform future policy-making and practical provision in this area. The survey, which closes on 11 February, can be accessed at www.survey.bris.ac.uk/oxford/rb11/.

For a trial period, the Radcliffe Camera will open to readers on Sundays from 11am until 5pm. This initiative is intended to help mitigate the effects of noise from the building work currently taking place on the central Bodleian site, by giving readers a dedicated quiet period in which to study. It will also allow the Bodleian to gauge interest in Sunday opening. The Camera will be open on Sundays until 20 March and in the period from 1 May to 3 July inclusive.

A new range of features has been added to Mobile Oxford, the service that allows you to access University information and tools via the web browser on your mobile phone. 'Favourites' allows you to pick your most used pages from across Mobile Oxford and displays them on the front page; additionally any bus stops you choose as your favourite will also appear in the bus-stop section of the new transport page, which also provides real-time information from BBC travel alerts, National Rail departures, and the status of Oxford's park and rides. For more information, visit <http://m.ox.ac.uk/desktop>.

On 4 January, the Ashmolean opened the Jameel Centre for the Study of Eastern Art, a new facility for scholars, students and members of the public interested in the museum's study collections of Eastern Art. The Eastern Art collections comprise over 30,000 objects spanning 5,000 years. They include ceramics, textiles, sculpture, metalwork, paintings, prints and other decorative arts from the Islamic world, South and South-East Asia, China, Japan and Korea. The Jameel Centre is adjacent to the Eastern Art paintings gallery.

Calling all football fans! Oxford United is offering University staff special rates on tickets. The Club is offering staff a 25% discount on adult and under-16 tickets, free tickets for under-7s and no booking fees. The special rates are designed to encourage Oxford residents to support their local team and to enable whole families to come along to a match. For further information, call the Oxford United Ticket Office on 01865 337533. Please show your University Card when you collect your tickets.

University challenges

The University reported a £6.2m surplus for the year in the Financial Statements for 2009–10. Total income grew by 2% to £880m, a slower growth rate than the 13% rise seen last year. Research grants and contracts, which represent the University's largest source of income, increased by 7.8% to £367m, with over 1,800 new research awards made during the course of the year. The trading operations of Oxford University Press, which made a surplus of £90m for the year, made total transfers to the rest of the University of £68m; while the Oxford Endowment Fund and the Oxford Capital Fund both beat the benchmark returns in a turbulent year for the financial markets, the former returning 14.5% and the latter 11.4%.

However, the upward pressure on costs continues to be significant, with total expenditure increasing by 2% to £884m. Staff costs, which account for just over half of all expenditure, rose by 7.2%, the increase resulting from the annual negotiated 0.5% pay settlement, a 3.5% increase in staff numbers, the costs of the voluntary severance scheme OMIS, and an increase in the employer contribution rate for the USS pension scheme from 14% to 16%.

The Financial Statements are available at www.admin.ox.ac.uk/finance/information/financialstatements, as is a video of Giles Kerr, Director of Finance, talking about the results and the future financial challenges facing the University.

A spider's contribution in the frosty Botanic Gardens; the University's web use is highlighted on p14



Research round-up

Hugs and kisses are not normally the raw research material of the Engineering Science Department, but new technology developed there allows computers to identify these human exchanges in video footage. The method, built on algorithms from computer vision and machine learning, is part of research to enable computers to analyse automatically the content of the vast amount of video footage generated from sources such as TV, films, YouTube and CCTV. Recognising the interactions involves many steps, including establishing the presence and position of the humans in a video, and computing different cues such as head orientation and relative motion of bodies. Machine learning methods have been used to 'teach' computers a model for each of four types of interaction so far – handshakes, high fives, hugs and kisses – from several examples of each.



Americans and Britons are much more likely to be obese than Norwegians and Swedes – but the reason may be economic insecurity rather than fast food availability, say researchers from the History Faculty and School of Anthropology. Obesity is a well-established problem in the developed world, but the team wanted to look at what factors caused variation between affluent countries. They compared 11 affluent countries and found that those with strong market incentives and relatively weak welfare states, like the USA, experienced one-third more obesity on average. Countries with higher levels of job and income security, like Norway and Sweden, were associated with lower levels of obesity. The researchers found that these effects were considerably greater in causing obesity than other factors they looked at, including the price of fast food. Animals have been found to increase food intake when faced with uncertainty about future food supply, and it may be that economic insecurity in 'free market' regimes has a similar effect on humans.



Oxford chemists have solved a 50-year-old puzzle about how, why, or indeed if sugar molecules change their shape. Sugars are the most abundant organic molecules in the world, so the fundamental discoveries about their behaviour could have far-reaching implications. Sugar molecules have long been known to adopt chemically unusual shapes. This 'anomeric effect' is fundamental to organic chemistry – 'if sugars didn't change shape, life would be radically different and some, perhaps many, biological processes just wouldn't work anymore,' says Professor Ben Davis, one of the research leaders – but until now, scientists' understanding of it has been fairly limited. Professor Davis, Professor John Simons and their teams found a way to isolate sugar molecules from all other substances – by turning them into a gas – and also invented a method of monitoring their behaviour. Their resulting discoveries could have vital implications for the manufacture of products currently reliant on waning supplies of oil and even for medicine.



We all know we should eat our five a day, limit unhealthy fats, lower our salt intake and eat plenty of fibre, but a study has quantified what the difference would be if we all actually did it. Researchers from Oxford's British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research Group looked at national data for 2005–07, including figures on what we consume and deaths from coronary heart disease, stroke and cancers, and used analyses of several previous studies on the contribution of diet to serious illness and premature death. They fed this information into a model and calculated that 33,000 UK deaths could be prevented or delayed every year if we all followed dietary advice. Eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day would make the greatest difference, potentially preventing up to 15,000 deaths a year.



A project to bring more materials to the attention of ancient historians is leading to more people studying Aramaic. The Arshama Project, a collaboration between Oxford and Liverpool universities, aims to study 13 letters written on leather in a particular dialect of Aramaic in the 5th century BC, held in the Bodleian Libraries. Dr John Ma, Oxford classicist and one of the leaders of the project, says: 'We hope this project will change the way a new generation of historians approach the ancient world, by integrating semitic sources into their worldview...so that reading Aramaic...might be as natural as them as reading Homer or Tacitus.' As part of that vision, free lunchtime Aramaic classes are held in Oxford, and attendance levels have surprised and delighted the organisers. 'You would probably have to go back 2,000 years to find a room so full with people speaking Aramaic – the time when Jesus would have been speaking the language!' says Dr Ma.

People & prizes



Carmela De Santo from the Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine was awarded the £2,000 first prize in the European Cancer Abstract Competition sponsored by MedImmune, AstraZeneca's global biologics unit, with an abstract pertaining to her research in immune modulation.

Thomas Earle, King John II Professor of Portuguese Studies, has been elected a corresponding fellow of the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon. The Academy, which was founded in 1779, is the Portuguese equivalent of the British Academy and the Royal Society.



Professor John Geddes of the Department of Psychiatry has won the Psychiatric Academic of the Year Award in the RCPsych Awards 2010, for research

addressing the use of second-generation anti-psychotic drugs and key clinical questions in bipolar disorder.



The Reverend Professor Andrew Linzey of the Faculty of Theology, and the pre-eminent theologian on animal issues, was presented last year with the Lord Erskine Award, one of the RSPCA's highest awards.

Diarmaid MacCulloch, Professor of the History of the Church and Fellow of St Cross College, has won the 2010 Cundill Prize in History at McGill University for his book *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*. The \$75,000 award is widely regarded as the world's most important prize for historical writing.

Professor Tony Monaco, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources) has

been appointed the next President of Tufts University, Massachusetts, USA. He will leave Oxford in July.



Peter Sleight, Emeritus Fellow in Cardiovascular Medicine at Exeter College, has been awarded a European Society of Cardiology Gold Medal in recognition of his exceptional contributions to medicine. Professor Sleight is one of the founders of multicentre trials in cardiology and was appointed to the first British Heart Foundation chair at Oxford.

Peter Somogyi, Professor of Neurobiology and Director of the MRC Anatomical Neuropharmacology Unit at the Department of Pharmacology, received the Sanford L Palay Award for his contribution to neuroscience from the *Journal of Comparative Neurology* and the Officers of the Cajal Club at the 40th Annual Meeting of the Society for Neuroscience. He was also recently named Honorary Guest Professor at the Medical University of Vienna, Austria.

Dr Martin Stokes, Lecturer in Ethnomusicology, is the 2010 winner of the Dent Medal, awarded by the Royal Musical Association for an outstanding body of academic work. Ethnomusicology is the social and cultural study of music, and Dr Stokes developed his particular interest in Middle Eastern music during time spent living and working in Turkey in the mid-1980s.



Professor Tran Tinh Hien, Director of Clinical Research at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases and the Wellcome Trust-Oxford University Clinical Research Unit in Vietnam, has been awarded the 2010 Mackay Medal by the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene for his outstanding work in infectious diseases in Vietnam for over 20 years.

New Year Honours

Five University academics and two senior University members were recognised.



Professor David Butler, Fellow of Nuffield College, was awarded a knighthood for services to political science. A scholar of electoral politics, he has worked on the Nuffield

Election Studies of each UK General Election since 1945. He was instrumental in the establishment of the UK's electoral commission and is the author of numerous books on elections and politics.



Professor Rory Collins, Co-director of the Clinical Trial Service Unit and Epidemiological Studies Unit and Fellow of Green Templeton College, was awarded a knighthood for

services to science. Since 2005 he has acted as the Principal Investigator and Chief Executive of the UK Biobank prospective study of 500,000 British men and women aged 40–69. His work has been in the establishment of large-scale epidemiological studies of the causes, prevention and treatment of heart attacks, other vascular disease, and cancer.



Professor Charles Godfray, Hope Professor of Entomology and Fellow of Jesus College, was made a CBE for services to science. His research focuses on population and community ecology, and evolutionary biology.



Dr Christopher Brown, Director of the Ashmolean Museum and Fellow of Worcester College, was made a CBE for services to museums.



Mark Damazer, Master of St Peter's College, was made a CBE for services to broadcasting. He is the former Controller of BBC Radio 4 and Radio 7.

Professor David Mant, Emeritus Professor of General Practice and Emeritus Fellow of Kellogg College, was made an OBE for services to medicine. Head of the Department of Primary Health



Care, his research focuses on the prevention and early diagnosis of common diseases in primary care, particularly childhood infection, cardiovascular disease and stroke.

All change for PVCs

On 1 January, **Professor Ewan McKendrick**, formerly Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education, Academic Services and University Collections), took up the position of Registrar. **Dr Sally Mapstone** became Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education). **Dr Stephen Goss** became Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Personnel and Equality) in an interim appointment on a 50% basis while continuing as Director of the Learning Institute, and **Professor Ian Walmsley**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), took on additional responsibility for Academic Services and University Collections.

Malaria research recognised

Two Oxford researchers are among five doctors from Britain and the US who have won the Thailand-based 2010 Prince Mahidol Award in the field of medicine. The international award this year recognises outstanding work in medical and public health development on malaria treatment and zinc supplementation.

Nicholas J White, Professor of Tropical Medicine at Oxford and Professor of Clinical Tropical Medicine and chairman of the Wellcome Trust–Southeast Asian Tropical Medicine Research Unit at Mahidol University, is a world leader on the treatment of malaria, particularly the use of artemisinin-based combination therapies.

Kevin Marsh, Professor of Tropical Medicine at Oxford and Director of the Wellcome–KEMRI–Oxford Research Programme in Kenya, pioneered the study of the immune epidemiology of malaria. His clinical studies among young children in Africa have led to today's understanding of the disease process and the effects of treatment.

Global thinkers



The 2010 list of '100 top global thinkers' published by *Foreign Policy*, a Washington-based magazine, includes three Oxford researchers.

Paul Collier, Professor of Economics, is placed 29th 'for showing that natural resources don't have to be a curse'; **Tariq Ramadan**, Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies, is placed 62nd 'for remaining convinced Islam can make peace with the West'; and **Dr Sabina Alkire** (above), Director of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, is placed 66th 'for showing that poverty is about more than just money'.



Advent doors cover

In response to requests, information about the University and college doors featured on Blueprint's November cover can be found at www.ox.ac.uk/blueprint.

Viewfinder found

This stone staircase (p16) is inside Sir Christopher Wren's Tom Tower at the entrance to Christ Church. The bell, Great Tom, is still sounded 101 times every night, signifying the 100 original scholars of the college plus one (added in 1663) at the curtain of 9.05pm (corresponding to what used to be 9pm Oxford time, five minutes later than Greenwich time). This is used to be the signal for all Oxford colleges to close their gates.

Arrivals board

Dubai Ports World Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation



Linda Scott, Professor of Marketing in the Saïd Business School, took up this post on 1 October, when she also became a Professorial Fellow of Green Templeton College.

Professor Scott joined the Saïd Business School in 2006 from the University of Illinois, where she held appointments in advertising, art, women's studies and communications. Since arriving in Oxford she has focused her research on innovative technologies and entrepreneurship systems designed to benefit women in the developing world.

Director of Research, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism



Robert G Picard, formerly Director of the Media Management and Transformation Centre and Hamrin Professor of Media Economics at Jönköping International Business School in Sweden, in November became the first Director of Research of Oxford's Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ).

Professor Picard is a specialist in media economics and government media policies. He has worked at Louisiana State University and California State University in the US and at Turku School of Economics, Finland. In public life, he has been a consultant in media affairs for governments in the US and Europe, investment firms, media companies and media labour organisations. He has also served as an expert witness at congressional and parliamentary committees and inquiry boards. At RISJ he will direct projects across its main research areas, examining changes in the business of journalism, the practice of journalism, and journalism and accountability.

Director, Environmental Change Institute



Jim W Hall, Professor of Earth Systems Engineering at Newcastle University, has been appointed Director of the Environmental Change Institute from 7 February. The title of Professor of Climate and Environmental Risks has been conferred on him and he will be a fellow of Linacre College.

Professor Hall is a civil engineer who has made significant research contributions in the fields of flood risk analysis, systems modelling, uncertainty analysis and adaptation to climate change. He has held academic posts at the universities of Bristol and Newcastle and has been a visiting researcher at Delft University of Technology and the EC's Joint Research Centre, Ispra, in Italy. At Newcastle he was Director of the Centre for Earth Systems Engineering Research and Deputy Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research. He is a fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering and has led several major initiatives that take an interdisciplinary approach to the challenges of adapting infrastructure systems and cities to the impacts of climate change.

Political books win prizes



Archie Brown, Emeritus Professor in the Department of Politics and International Relations and Emeritus Fellow of St Antony's College, has been awarded the 2010 WJM Mackenzie Prize of the Political Studies Association (PSA) for best political science book of the year. His book, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (Bodley Head 2009; Vintage paperback 2010), was deemed 'destined to become a central text in the analysis of communism and regime change'. He also received the PSA's Diamond

Jubilee Award for Lifetime Achievement in Political Studies.

In addition, **Dr David Butler**, Emeritus Fellow in the Department, has been recognised for the PSA's 'Best Book in British Political Studies, 1950–2010' following a poll of PSA members. *Political Change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice* (David Butler and Donald Stokes; Macmillan 1969) reported the first-ever nationwide survey of electoral behaviour in Britain. What subsequently became known as the Butler–Stokes model of voting emphasised the role of long-term forces in influencing the party choice of electors.

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Osler memorial medal



The University Medical School has awarded the Osler Memorial Medal for 2010 to **David A Warrell**, Emeritus Professor of Tropical Medicine and Honorary Fellow of St Cross College.

The Osler Memorial Medal (named after the distinguished physician Sir William Osler, Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford 1905–19) is awarded once every five years to the Oxford medical graduate who, in the opinion of the Board of Awarders, has made ‘the most valuable contribution to the science, art or literature of medicine’ and who has not previously received the medal.

Professor Warrell made pioneering contributions in setting up Oxford’s clinical tropical medicine research effort in Thailand, which led directly to the establishment of equally successful bases in Vietnam and Kenya. He has also made valuable contributions in the treatment of malaria and snake bite and undertook a central role in producing the *Oxford Textbook of Medicine*.

Leverhulme prizes

Four University academics have been awarded a Philip Leverhulme Prize. The £70,000 prizes recognise outstanding young scholars whose work is acknowledged at international level and from whom greater achievements are expected.

Dr Tamsin Mather (Department of Earth Sciences) was selected for her work



in the area of earth, ocean and atmospheric sciences. She is particularly interested in the atmospheric chemistry of volcanic plumes, including the effects of emissions of mercury and other gases on the environment, and was one of the pioneers of the concept of hot volcanic vents as ‘reaction crucibles’ that create environmentally-important chemical compounds when air mixes with volcanic gases.

Ben McFarlane (Faculty of Law) is recognised for his progress in ‘providing a unified conception of property law’. The Leverhulme Trust praised his book, *The Structure of Property Law*, in which he explains how property law answers

fundamental questions about the use and ownership of property. His research aims to make clear the principles underlying common law and to show that England’s common law system is ‘one of our greatest intellectual achievements’.

Dr Radek Erban (Mathematical Institute) is praised for his work in Mathematical Biology where he has made major contributions towards the understanding of how cell-level decision-making translates into population-level behaviour. He specialises in the development and analysis of mathematical and computational methods for a range of biological, chemical and physical problems, and their application.

Dr Nicolai Meinshausen (Department of Statistics) is recognised for the originality of his work in statistics and climate research. He finds statistical algorithms to extract the most interesting but hidden information from the wealth of scientific data now available, and has shown how re-sampling techniques can be used to assess the importance of variables when there are more variables than samples.

What’s on

Talks and seminars

Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell: Astronomy and Poetry
Tuesday 1 February, 7pm
Museum of the History of Science
www.mhs.ox.ac.uk

A professional astronomer with an interest in poetry looks at how poets have engaged with the sciences; illustrated with readings of selected poems. Professor Bell Burnell is famous for her 1967 discovery of pulsars.

Shelley’s Ghost
4, 10, 16, 22 and 28 February, 1–1.30pm
Convocation House, Bodleian Library
www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley/about/exhibitions/forthcoming_events

A series of lunchtime lectures by various speakers, to accompany the Bodleian’s major exhibition (until 27 March) on one of the most renowned literary families in Britain: Percy Bysshe Shelley, his wife Mary Shelley, and Mary’s parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft (<http://shelleysghost.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>). Exhibition items include Shelley’s notebooks, a letter of John Keats, William Godwin’s diary and the original manuscripts of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.

Science and citizens: help and hindrance from new media

Friday 18 February, 5pm
Doctorow Hall, St Edmund Hall
www.seh.ox.ac.uk
Dr Philip Campbell, Editor-in-Chief of *Nature*, will deliver the Philip Geddes Memorial Lecture.

Sounds of Africa: an illustrated talk on African musical instruments

Saturday 19 February, 2.30pm
Pitt Rivers Museum
www.prm.ox.ac.uk/spotlights.html



Buzzing vulture quills, rasping voice disguisers and bubbling mbiras made from umbrella spokes will feature in this gallery talk illustrated with sound examples. Noel Lobley will explore the modern and ancient uses of some of the African instruments in the Pitt Rivers collections.

Angela Eagle MP: Pride and politics

Wednesday 23 February, 7.30pm
Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square
www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/
The 2nd annual Oxford University lecture for LGBT History Month is by Angela Eagle MP, the first openly gay woman in Parliament.

Exhibitions

Lucien Pissarro in England: The Eragny Press 1895–1914
Until 13 March
Ashmolean Museum



www.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/exhibitions

A celebration of the work of painter, engraver and printmaker Lucien Pissarro, with the first comprehensive display of his Eragny Press, including the 32 books printed by Lucien and his wife Esther at their home in London, along with his preparatory drawings, and paintings by his father, Camille Pissarro, who assisted him. Includes photos and letters from the family archive.

Al-Mizan: Sciences and the Arts in the Islamic World

Until 20 March
Museum of the History of Science
www.mhs.ox.ac.uk



An exploration of the world of early Islamic scientific instrument makers and their quest to balance function and beauty, marking the 25th anniversary of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. ‘Al-Mizan’ is the Arabic word for ‘balance’.

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



A new era for University sport

*Matt Pickles takes a look
at the changes afoot at
the Iffley Road sports complex*

Above: Artist's impression of the planned sports complex. Redevelopment will open up public viewpoints from the Iffley Road

The University's plans to redevelop the Iffley Road sports complex were approved by Oxford City Council's Planning Committee in November, ushering in a new era for University sport. The venue – where Roger Bannister became the first person to break the four-minute mile – should soon provide state-of-the-art indoor facilities for students, staff and their families, and Oxford residents.

The redevelopment is deemed essential because of unprecedented demand for sport at Oxford and the changes in facility quality and scope that sport today requires. Three-quarters of Oxford students play sport or do some form of exercise alongside their studies. Many belong to one of the 84 University-affiliated sports clubs, around half of which compete against other University teams from around the country – an impressive commitment given the rigorous academic demands of Oxford's eight-week terms.

'What is remarkable about sport at Oxford is that we try to ensure that it doesn't compromise academic performance,' says Jon Roycroft, the University's Director of Sport. 'Relatively recent changes in the way inter-university sport is organised and, in particular, Oxford's participation levels mean that most matches against other universities are on Wednesdays, and most inter-college rugby and football matches are played on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays to lessen the load on the grounds and, importantly, ensure the supply of qualified referees. We don't expect students to be automatically given time off from tutorials, labs or any academic commitments – in fact if we were asked, we would say that students should never compromise their work for a sporting event. Most students I come across are exceptionally talented, motivated, supremely well-organised people who are able to manage their time in discussion with tutors to play sport for their club, college and, in some instances, country.'

There is a long history of the sporting scholar at Oxford and Sir Roger Bannister, who followed his athletic triumphs by becoming a renowned neurologist and Master of Pembroke College, is a classic example. Oxonians have won 136 Olympic medals and, although the demands and changes to modern competitive sport mean that Oxford inevitably produces fewer Olympians today, the University will be capitalising on this remarkable heritage as London 2012 approaches.

What is clear is that University sports clubs still punch well above their weight. Jon Roycroft, who has headed University sport since 1996, says: 'Our sports teams consistently come in the top eight of all universities who play in the

inter-university BUCS competition, outperforming many universities who put on sports courses and are more flexible with academic requirements for sportsmen and women, and Oxford is winning 60–65% of all Varsity matches played across the spectrum of sports and levels.'

He believes Oxford's success can be attributed to students' ability to manage and organise their time, the historical importance and 'drive' of the Blue, and the support structure of the Sports Federation, which was set up in 2000 and consists of a student-elected sabbatical officer who, along with full-time professionally appointed staff, helps administer University sports clubs. He adds: 'The Sports Federation is important because it endeavours to put teams in a better organisational position by lessening the burden of administrative work for the clubs. Rather than students having to arrange all fixtures, travel arrangements and insurance themselves, trained staff can do this for them, allowing them to focus on their studies and the more traditional aspects of their sport.'

The Iffley Road redevelopment will transform the provision of indoor sport at the University. The current 'semi-redundant' grandstand will be replaced by a longer building, which will host an indoor cricket school, a projectiles range, changing rooms, club areas and viewing space. The main sports centre building will be completely revamped to contain one double- and one single-sized sports hall, two-storey gym facilities, Dojo, a Fencing Salle, a café/restaurant, dance studios and meeting rooms. By removing the solid timber fence and installing railings and viewpoints along Iffley Road, views onto the site and the new buildings will be opened up to the public. 'The extra indoor space is crucial,' Jon Roycroft explains. 'Although



Cycling to success: the GB Women's Volleyball Team (including ex-Oxford Volleyball captain Nicky Osborne) cycled a lap of the Iffley track to raise funds for the 2012 Olympic bid

we generally have very good facilities for outdoor sports, our indoor facilities haven't fundamentally changed since 1966, in which time the student population has quadrupled and the sporting landscape has changed beyond recognition. The planned expansion will treble the amount of indoor court space, which will greatly benefit student sports clubs and other more casual users who want to play sports like basketball and badminton, and truly multi-use activity rooms will open up thousands of hours of new sporting opportunities.'

But sport at Oxford isn't just for students. Many staff also engage in sport and other forms of exercise. 'At present we are full to the brim with University sports clubs, but whenever clubs are not using the Iffley facilities, staff and members of the community are very welcome,' says Jon Roycroft. 'Staff membership is at a very reasonable rate – using the gym costs £70 a year, which

is great value compared to commercial gyms, and use of the pool costs £110 a year. Hopefully the new facilities will allow many more members of staff to use the indoor spaces too.'

And use of the facilities is not limited to members of the University. Jon Roycroft explains: 'Over the years, we have made sure that all our new facilities have a large community aspect to them. Our gym, hockey pitch and swimming pool are all open to the public, and the Iffley redevelopment will open up opportunities to fill a gap in the local market by offering space to judo and fencing clubs and, in certain instances, to children's groups.'

A fundraising campaign is now underway for the Iffley Road development, and a few years from now Oxford staff and students will be able to exercise in 21st-century facilities. It's time to wipe the dust from your squash racket.

Alex Cheesman

MSc Biodiversity, Conservation and Management student, three-time rugby union Blue



'I matriculated at Oxford in 2007, as an undergraduate reading Geography, and am now enjoying the challenges of a Master's course. Since joining Oxford, I have been fortunate enough to have gained three Blues, played for Sale Sharks and recently rejoined London Wasps.

The constant time management required has been demanding, but I believe that many sportsmen have the dedication and focus to successfully organise their time so as to excel in multiple fields. At times difficult decisions have to be made during the course of a term, and an academic athlete must be adept at communicating with his or her tutors as well as his or her coaches in order to satisfy the two parties. I've found that any tutor would just prefer to be talked to honestly by their students, and if an athlete has an issue with the time of a class or tutorial then the best action has always been to communicate, and do so early.'

Martina Harley

PA to Head of University Council Secretariat



'I'm a keen swimmer and use the Rosenblatt Swimming Pool at Iffley Road. The facilities are excellent, with lanes for all levels of competence. A knee operation persuaded me to take up swimming again about three years ago.

I aim to go swimming three or four times a week during my lunch break. Admittedly, it's not easy as I cycle to the pool, swim about half a mile and then cycle back to the office, but the improvements to my overall health and wellbeing have been enormous, not to mention keeping my doctor happier!'

For more information visit www.sport.ox.ac.uk and www.campaign.ox.ac.uk/sport

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A considerable acreage of open ground, relieved here and there by clumps of trees,' said the 1928 edition of the Ward Lock *Illustrated Guide to Oxford*, describing the University Parks. This less than complimentary comment is short and to the point, but rather ignores the Parks' long history and does scant justice to the wide views, fine trees and delightful hidden corners that they possess.

The University Parks lie on the west bank of the River Cherwell and are today embraced by Norham Gardens, Parks Road and South Parks Road. They comprise various components, acquired over the years. The Domesday Book of 1086 mentions 'thirty acres of meadow near the wall and a mill, that is Holywell Mill' – the Superintendent of the Parks is still the Miller of Holywell – and during the Civil War, the Parks became an exercise ground for the Royalist troops. In 1853 the University bought part of the land from Merton College and in following years acquired 91 acres of the 'old' and 'new' Parks (hence always referred to in the plural). Further land accrued in the 20th century.

The present Superintendent of the Parks – and only the seventh since the post was established in 1866 – is Walter Sawyer, who came from Wolfson College in 1991. In his 20 years in charge, he has seen many changes and instigated plenty of others. According to Walter, one difference between present-day usage of the Parks and that of 20 years ago is a general lack of respect for rules. In his view, it's not a major problem, but can cause concern. Recently it was decided that, for a trial period, cyclists would be allowed to wheel their bikes through the Parks; the experiment was discontinued when it led to widespread cycling. A second change is the advent of large picnic groups with portable barbecues. 'The gardeners now collect four or five times more litter than 20 years ago,' says Walter.

'Mesopotamia' is now managed as a conservation wildlife resource and a genetic garden demonstrates evolutionary plant processes

On a happier note, there is more informal exercise and sport taking place than ever before (alongside official sports such as University cricket and college rugby), together with a range of public events such as sponsored fun runs. There is more Sunday sport and a cycle track running alongside the Parks from Marston was created in 1996.

The planting policy has also undergone change. Walter admits that, when he arrived in 1991, the Parks consisted of 'trees and a smattering of plants'. He set out to inject more interest, with year-round plant displays and beds of particular interest near the various entrance gates. This in turn has had a positive knock-on effect for wildlife – particularly for the variety of birds to be seen, helped by the 1996 enlargement and landscaping of the pond.

Mesopotamia, the area in the south-east corner of the Parks where the River Cherwell divides into two (thus Mesopotamia), is now managed as a conservation wildlife resource. There is also a 'genetic' garden, demonstrating evolutionary plant processes and continuing the long link between a recreational space and ongoing University research.

Above all, the Parks means trees. There are over 300 varieties and pretty well every sort of tree that will grow on dry, alkaline soil. There are several Wellingtonias, many species of thorns (there's a thorn walk with over 30 varieties of hawthorn), Tulip and Indian Bean trees and many others. Much new planting has been carried out under Walter's direction. His own favourite tree is a weeping beech near South Lodge that looks in winter, when covered in snow or frost, rather like an angel.

Even the winter is a time that can be put to good use to reduce the workload in spring, Walter suggests. Mulch can be produced, the soil improved and ivy cut out of hedges ('Oxford is an amazing place for free-growing ivy'). But whatever the season, there's work to be done by the Superintendent and his small team of staff as the Parks continue to evolve.



Behind the scenes

A place for all seasons

Alistair Lack considers the changing face of the University Parks



Languages à la carte

Fancy learning Latvian, brushing up your Burmese or keeping your Kurdish up to scratch? The University Language Centre can help, as *Sally Croft* discovers

Above: The Language Centre's library – 'the jewel in our crown', says Director Robert Vanderplank

Around 40% of the University's academic staff and a third of its students are citizens of foreign countries. In such an environment, it's not surprising that the ability to communicate in different languages is highly prized. Add to that the University's longstanding belief that the best way to study academic sources is in their original language, rather than in translation, and it becomes obvious why the University Language Centre at 12 Woodstock Road is such a hive of activity. Around 3,000 students and staff study at the Centre each year.

'Our main aim is to provide facilities and courses for all members of the University and colleges – both staff and students – who need to learn foreign languages for study, research or for personal or professional development,' says Dr Robert Vanderplank, Director of the Centre. 'We facilitate scholarship in original languages and of course we're also here for people who want to learn a language because they're going to research or study abroad.'

The Language Centre offers a number of taught language programmes plus facilities for independent learning. 'Our biggest programme is LASR – Languages for Study and Research – which currently has 53 classes a week in 10 languages: French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Portuguese, Modern Greek, Welsh, Georgian and Chinese,' says Dr Vanderplank. 'The emphasis is on general communication and people with proven academic need are given priority.'

OPAL, the Oxford Programme in Languages, is the Centre's rapidly expanding flagship programme, supported by the colleges. It offers fast-paced courses for the highly motivated, with early-evening classes in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Italian, Russian and Spanish. The Centre also provides classes for departments and faculties, especially within the MPLS Division, where French, German and Spanish are valued as part of undergraduate courses.

Many enthusiastic language learners are students and staff for whom English is not their first language – Chinese students, for instance, are often keen to learn French or German – and the Centre also runs an 'English for Academic Studies' programme for those who want some English language support for their life at Oxford. It attracts around 500 students a year, mostly postgrads. 'These are not remedial classes, but cover things like top-end academic writing and speaking – how to give papers and presentations – as well as how to conduct small talk at college dinners,' stresses Dr Vanderplank.

For those who don't want taught classes, the Lambda Project (the Oxford Language Maintenance and Development Project) in French and German is suitable for anyone who has previously studied the languages, even at just GCSE level, and is supported by email and occasional face-to-face contact with an advisor. For other languages, the Centre's library is well stocked with both learning materials and ways to keep language skills honed. As well as textbooks, dictionaries and reference materials, there are foreign-language films and books, newspapers and magazines, daily recorded news (in Arabic, English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish) plus satellite TV in 14 languages.

'We have over 140 languages in the library and about 20,000 multi-media materials,' says librarian Lucile Designéres. 'Every year I get a few new languages, when things are requested that we don't already have. I recently got Fijian for an anthropologist going to Fiji, and other recent additions include Tatar, a Turkic language of the Russian Federation; Kham, a Tibeto-Burman language; Macedonian; Ligala, which is spoken in the Congo countries; and Haitian Creole.' Many of the library resources are accessible via its website and Lucile also writes a library blog and posts on Twitter and Facebook.

The Centre also runs a 'Language Exchange'. 'We provide a noticeboard and people can put up a note asking for the kind of help they need and in which languages,' explains Christine Mitchell, the Centre's Administrator. 'They specify what they can offer in return – maybe help with grammar or conversation practice in particular languages – and then get together on an informal basis. So even though we don't teach, say, advanced Mandarin, you may well find a native speaker who's happy to help.'

Further information at www.lang.ox.ac.uk



Twirling the kaleidoscope

Peter Frankopan is fascinated by the Byzantine Empire, a melting pot of beliefs and cultures, he tells *Jenny Lunn*

The word 'Byzantine' is weighed down with meanings and associations. It evokes the glimmer of candlelight on golden mosaics that are as splendid today as when they were made, many centuries ago; the magnificent craftsmanship that inspired WB Yeats' meditation on ageing and eternity, *Sailing to Byzantium*. But it is also a synonym for 'too detailed and complicated' and a byword for devious, underhand politics.

Dr Peter Frankopan, Director of the new Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research and Senior Research Fellow at Worcester College, believes that these negative and reductive views reveal more about the ideological bias of western historians since the Crusades than about the Byzantine Empire itself. 'The pejorative use of the word Byzantine is completely unrecognisable to me,' he says. 'The Byzantines prided themselves on their love of order – and their empire did last for more than 1,000 years, so they were obviously doing something right.'

The Byzantine Empire was the eastern part of the Roman Empire from the reign of the Emperor Constantine in the 3rd century AD to the fall of Constantinople (modern Istanbul) to the Ottomans in 1453. Dr Frankopan's interest in the Byzantines grew out of his undergraduate studies at Cambridge, where he became fascinated by Russia: 'I wanted to know where Russia had

come from, and fell in love with Byzantium, this place where Islam and the West, Catholicism and Orthodoxy, Latin and Greek, the Slavic World and the Balkans, all met.'

Dr Frankopan's DPhil studies at Oxford focused on the life and times of the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I, who called the First Crusade in 1095. He became immersed in the Classical literature that exerted a profound influence on the writing of history in this era: 'These works are dripping with

'I fell in love with Byzantium, this place where Islam and the West, Catholicism and Orthodoxy, Latin and Greek, the Slavic World and the Balkans, all met'

allusions and one needs to understand what they are quoting – and misquoting.' His current research focus is an extraordinary biography of Alexios, called the *Alexiad* in deliberate imitation of Homer's epic, the *Iliad*. It was written c1148 by the Emperor's daughter, Anna Komnene, one of the world's first important female historians: 'It's been read as a report of record – or a feckless work by a woman who was in awe of her father. The truth is it's somewhere between the two.'

Oxford has long been at the forefront of Byzantine research, with many of the world's

most eminent scholars having studied and taught here. The new Centre for Byzantine Research is based at the Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies in St Giles', and chaired by Professor Dame Averil Cameron, former Warden of Keble. Its 60 founding members have wide-ranging geographical and historical interests, from Central Asia to North Africa, and from Late Antiquity to Ottoman times. Faculties represented are Classics, History, Theology, Oriental Studies, Medieval and Modern Languages, and the School of Archaeology. 'We need to celebrate what we do, and tie all these strands together,' says Dr Frankopan.

A busy programme of lectures and events is now underway. The Centre will use modern technologies such as podcasting to involve scholars living in countries that were once part of the Empire in its work. In the former Soviet Union, for example, there has been a burgeoning of interest in Byzantine history since the demise of communism, and for Turkey, now debating accession to the European Union, an historical perspective on the region's links to the West is of particular relevance.

'Studying the Byzantine Empire is one of those never-ending quests: it's a labyrinth on a bad day, a playground on a good one,' reflects Dr Frankopan. 'History is all about how you hold the kaleidoscope and twinkle the crystals inside.'

For more information, see www.ocbr.ox.ac.uk



Going global

The University is reinforcing its worldwide impact through podcasting and social media such as Facebook and Twitter – giving the public free access to Oxford thinking via the internet, explains *Carolyn Culver*

Above: Philosophy podcasts by Marianne Talbot (top) have topped the global iTunes U chart, while Oxford's iTunes U site recently featured (bottom) in a global advertising campaign for Apple's iPad

Over eight million people have downloaded more than 2,000 audio and video podcasts from the University's site on iTunes U over the past two years. These podcasts include lectures, interviews with researchers and information for potential applicants. They regularly feature in the global iTunes U top ten, and often top the chart.

'When I give a lecture perhaps there are 70 people there, but it's another thing altogether to have 50,000 downloads of your podcasts,' says Dr Simon Benjamin, a researcher in Material Sciences. 'These days there's a lot of encouragement from the funding agencies to do as much outreach as possible. Podcasting has helped me present my research to a wider audience.'

While podcasts on iTunes U are designed for private listening and viewing, the University is also making podcasts available for free, non-commercial reuse and redistribution. Around 600 open educational resources – including audio and video podcasts and ePublications – have been made available thanks to the OpenSpires project run by Oxford University Computing Services (OUCS). Contributors in areas ranging from Medical Sciences to Classics have received positive feedback from schools and colleges that have used the material in teaching. 'I'm really pleased to have made my lectures openly available,' says English lecturer Dr Emma Smith. 'It's also great to have released ePubs of related plays – both the plays of Shakespeare as published in the First Folio in 1623, and lesser-known works that can be difficult to access outside specialist libraries. I hope that this material will be enjoyed as widely as possible.'

Audio and video have been used particularly successfully in student recruitment. Video interviews with current students and admissions tutors, and audio discussions and animated films about the stages of the application process, are all providing potential applicants, their parents and teachers with an insight into the University. Last term video was used to create a 'Virtual Open Day' online to give potential graduate applicants – particularly those overseas – more information about the collegiate University.

By showing the diversity of the student body, video also helps to challenge the stereotypical image of Oxford often perpetuated by the media. The University website's Wall of 100 Faces, featuring interviews with Oxford students from diverse backgrounds, has been viewed more than 150,000 times since its publication 18 months ago.

While audio and video output is increasingly being made by departments themselves as technology becomes cheaper and easier to use, professional production expertise is available via the Online Media Producer in the University web team, the Media Production Unit (MPU) and OUCS (see websites below). OUCS also offers podcasting courses and has produced a practical guide on how to use IT tools to assist with outreach and public engagement. The MPU also provides a video conferencing service.

Facebook and Twitter are also being used by the University to publicise news stories, research findings, and stages of the admissions process. Rather than waiting for audiences to visit the University website, these platforms enable news to be 'pushed' as each message posted on these sites causes a surge of interest in the University webpage it promotes. The University's Facebook and Twitter pages currently have a combined following of 130,000 people.

As Peter McDonald of St Hugh's neatly summarises: 'In the late 19th century Oxford was one of the pioneers of the university extension movement, which enabled audiences around the UK to hear what some of its lecturers had to say on a wide range of topics. Projects like OpenSpires are the 21st-century equivalent; though with the benefit of the web, the audiences are now global and even more diverse.'

Details of audio and video facilities plus professional production expertise available are at www.ox.ac.uk/audioandvideo.
The OUCS guide to IT tools for outreach activities is at www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/publicity/leaflets-guides/impactguide.xml

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Tony Brett

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In a nutshell, what's your job?

I lead the section that supports and coordinates all 650 IT staff across the collegiate University. I encourage them to act like one big group supporting one large University IT operation, rather than as small teams working in isolation and duplicating work. I also manage software licensing in the University and am responsible for OUCS's website and intranet as well as the Mobile Oxford project. The roles of IT staff are hugely varied and include user training and support; software and hardware advice and purchase; network procurement, installation and management; server provision and management; supporting those using central services like Nexus and Oracle Financials; and managing other staff. (Some of them say that anything with a plug is their responsibility!) My section, IT Support Staff Services (ITS3) provides training, career development advice, help to colleges and departments in defining job roles and recruiting staff, briefings on central services (and proposed changes), and two large annual events – a conference and a suppliers exhibition – plus technical advice and accredited training courses.

What was your childhood ambition?

I didn't really have a life plan, but I knew I enjoyed study so worked hard at school and at university (Corpus Christi, Oxford) where I completed a Chemistry degree. I remember in my teens doing a survey that was meant to suggest career paths and mine came out with midwife or brewer! Valuable as both of those roles are, I didn't really feel either was for me!

So what was your first job, and how did your career progress?

I did lots of part-time jobs as a teenager, including washing tractors and running a local farm shop, and I worked for Barclays Bank's London coin centre in my undergraduate vacations. My first full-time job was as IT Manager at the Institute of Molecular Medicine at the John Radcliffe Hospital. I then became IT Systems Manager at Corpus Christi until 2003 when, after seven months working half-time for Corpus and half-time covering a maternity leave for OUCS, I moved full-time to OUCS.

You're also involved with the University's LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people) group, aren't you? Tell us something about that.

I think it's really important that people feel they can be themselves in their workplace and not judged for who they are. We're fortunate that Oxford University takes diversity and equality extremely seriously. That said, I think it's important that we have an LGBT staff steering group providing a forum for discussion and mutual support and giving a formal line to University management, if required. I've hugely enjoyed helping organise University-wide LGBT events.

So what's it like being an openly gay man in the University?

Personally, I find it pretty easy. I don't think there's anyone I'm not out to at work and I've never encountered any problems or discrimination in the workplace, though I know not everyone is as fortunate. I'm a bit of an extrovert, so I'd find it very difficult to talk about what I'd been up to at weekends and on holidays if I couldn't mention my partner. We celebrated our civil partnership a few years back and it was great to receive congratulations and support from colleagues. It can be amusing when people don't quite know what terminology to use and I particularly remember one colleague congratulating me very sincerely on my 'change of status'.

What kind of issues does the University LGBT community face?

I think LGBT people who work in small colleges or departments, especially if they're a specialist such as an IT Officer, Librarian, Accountant, etc, can sometimes feel a bit isolated – not being 'out' can make it very hard to integrate into what is often a tight-knit community. The whole issue of coming out is also ongoing for LGBT folk every time they meet new people: it's not visible in the same way as is being a member of other minority groups (such as being black or minority ethnic). I've noticed a distinct lack of out lesbians in the over-35 age group in the University and I do wonder if a barrier to such women exists that we as a University have overlooked.

Things for LGBT people are generally becoming easier. The fact that the University sponsors Oxford Pride and has a stall at the event sends an extremely clear message of acceptance and support to us LGBT folk.

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Viewfinder

Where's this stunning spiral staircase? Answer on p5.



Ralph Williams