News in brief

The most important thing she had learned at Oxford was a respect for the best in human civilisation, Aung San Suu Kyi said in an address to Encaenia on 20 June. Her address, available at http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk, came at the end of the ceremony in which she, together with seven leading figures from the worlds of science, the arts, intelligence and business, received honorary degrees (see p5). Daw Suu had been awarded the honorary doctorate in civil law in April 1993, but had been unable to receive it in person until now.

More than 14,000 prospective students, parents and teachers visited Oxford for the Undergraduate Open Days on 27 and 28 June. A range of talks and drop-in sessions were offered at colleges and departments, events were hosted by the libraries and museums, and venues including the Oxford Union and the Oxford Playhouse opened their doors to visitors, while the Examination Schools acted as a central information point. Hundreds of staff and student volunteers helped support the event, from welcoming visitors at the station to offering advice on admissions tests, finance and visas.

Oxford ASPIRE – a consortium of the four University Museums and Oxfordshire County Museums Service – has been awarded £4.5m over three years by Arts Council England as a Renaissance Major Partner Museum. This funding will allow the museums to continue delivery of their education and access programmes, which last year engaged 80,000 UK school students, 20,000 children in family activities, and 2.5 million visitors. New Renaissance-funded work will seek to provide leadership to the museums sector through new collaborations and skills-sharing projects.

A new building for the Jericho health centre has opened in the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. Known as New Radcliffe House and accessible from Walton Street, the building accommodates three GP surgeries – those of Dr Bogdanor and Partners, Dr Chiwers and Partners, and Dr Kearley and Partners. The surgeries will be supported by services including training and education, visiting consultants, nursing services and approved complimentary health services. For details, together with a video of the latest developments on the ROQ site, visit www.ox.ac.uk/roq.

Would you like to volunteer at this year’s Oxford Open Doors, which takes place on 8 and 9 September? Oxford Open Doors is the country’s largest heritage open days event. Last year 60,000 visits were recorded to 185 venues and activities, is the country’s largest heritage open days event. Last year which takes place on 8 and 9 September? Oxford Open Doors

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The biggest philanthropic gift for undergraduate financial support in European history will underpin a major new scholarship programme at Oxford starting this autumn.

A £75m commitment from Christ Church alumnus Michael Moritz and his wife Harriet Heyman will ultimately generate an unprecedented total of £300m to support Oxford undergraduates from lower-income backgrounds, if the collegiate University and its friends and benefactors rise to the ‘funding challenge’.

Under the programme, UK students from households with incomes below £16,000 will receive financial support totalling £11,000 per year as Moritz–Heyman Scholars. In conjunction with the government grant for this income group, this will mean zero living costs during the whole degree, and a government-backed loan of just £3,500 a year for tuition charges – the same as before the national funding changes. Moritz–Heyman Scholars will also undertake both career-enhancing paid internships and voluntary access work.

100 such scholarships will be available in October 2012, with others covered by Oxford’s generous standard support. Eventually it is hoped everyone in this income band – currently comprising just under a thousand Oxford undergraduates – will be covered by a Moritz–Heyman Scholarship or similar enhanced support.

The £75m commitment will be released in three tranches, predicated on matched funding from the University itself plus a further challenge to the collegiate University to raise equivalent philanthropic funding for similar schemes. More information at www.ox.ac.uk/media.

Images of Oxford: the University’s new picture library is featured on p13

With the summer holidays now upon us, why not book your children onto a holiday play scheme? The Oxford Montessori Schools ‘Create Holiday Club’ offers an arts-based programme for 3 to 15 year-olds, with a 5% discount for children of University staff. Oxford Active offers discounted rates for its Cherwell Camp in Summertown, with activities ranging from arts and crafts to ten-pin bowling, while Mini Media offers art and adventure day workshops at St Michael’s School, Oxford, for 6 to 12 year-olds. Details at www.admin.ox.ac.uk/childcare/playscheme.
Research round-up

A new way of analysing the social networks connecting individual animals has been tested on wild great tits by Oxford researchers. Revealing these networks is a challenge when fieldwork data often consists of a stream of automated observations of the times and locations of individuals. The new approach automatically identifies periods of social activity within a large number of observations. ‘If you think of the data about you in Facebook it records things like who you are friends with, where you’ve been, and what you share with others,’ says Ioannis Psorakis of the Department of Engineering Science, who led the research. ‘What we have shown is that we can analyse data about individual animals, in this case great tits, to construct a “Facebook for animals” revealing who affiliates with who, who are members of the same group, and which birds are regularly going to the same gatherings or “events”.’

‘Tudor’ was hardly used in the 16th century and the term’s frequent use by historians and writers gives a misleading impression of the period, an Oxford historian has found. Cliff Davies of the History Faculty and Wadham College scoured official papers, chronicles, poems, plays and pamphlets for the ‘Tudor’ name but found it hardly used as a designation of the monarchy until the last years of Elizabeth’s reign. Davies says that terms like ‘Tudor England’ and ‘Tudor monarchy’ used in books, films and on TV give a false impression of glamour and unity to the period from Henry VII to Elizabeth I: ‘What makes the concept of the “Tudor period” so seductive is that we believe it to have been current at the time. This was not the case. We need to revise our concepts.’

The London Olympics are on track to be the most costly Olympics ever, and more over-budget than the Games held in the past decade, according to a study conducted by the Saïd Business School. Researchers Professor Bent Flyvbjerg and Allison Stewart say that the total London 2012 sports-related budget has doubled from £4.2bn in the 2005 bid to £8.4bn in real terms, an overrun of 101%. This is significantly more than the average overruns for Games during the past decade. However, on average, total sports-related costs of the Games of the past 50 years have had final costs that in real terms are 179% greater than the bid budgets. The study suggests a greater pooling of knowledge between the host cities.

Cutting the amount we drink to just over half a unit a day could save 4,600 lives a year in England, according to a modelling study by Oxford researchers. Half a unit of alcohol is as little as a quarter of a glass of wine or a quarter of a pint of beer. The researchers set out to find the optimum daily amount of alcohol that would see fewest deaths across England from a whole range of diseases connected to drink. Dr Melanie Nichols of the BHF Health Promotion Research Group in the Department of Public Health, lead author of the BMJ Open report, says: ‘Although there is good evidence that moderate alcohol consumption protects against heart disease, when all of the chronic disease risks are balanced against each other, the optimal consumption level is much lower than many people believe.’

Large differences in the performance of spring traps used to kill mice, rats and moles indicate considerable scope for improving the humaneness of such traps. A new Oxford study tested the mechanical performance of break-back traps for mice and rats, and mole traps, and found that some traps ‘snap’ with an impact momentum eight times weaker than others designed for the same species, and grip with a clamping force over five times weaker than the strongest. ‘Whilst we were looking purely at the mechanical performance of these traps, and there were no animals involved in our tests, some of the rat traps are weak enough not to damage accidentally-caught fingers whilst others, intended to kill the same species, would most likely break them,’ says Dr Sandra Baker of the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, who co-led the research. ‘Most people would probably assume that traps on sale in this country had to meet certain welfare standards. However, without government regulation, there are no rules to make sure that any of these traps are up to the job of humanely killing the species they are intended for.’

For more University news, visit www.ox.ac.uk/news and www.ox.ac.uk/staffnews
People & prizes

Constantin Coussios, Professor of Biomedical Engineering, has won the 2012 Frederic Lizzi Early Career Award of the International Society for Therapeutic Ultrasound.

Peter Edwards, Professor and Head of Inorganic Chemistry, has been elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Professor Luciano Floridi, fellow of St Cross, has been appointed chairman of The Onlife Initiative, an EU think tank on Society.

Simon Hay, Professor of Epidemiology, has received the Back Award of the Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers) for his policy-relevant research on the geography of malaria and public health.

Jeremy Thomas, Professor of Ecology and a fellow of New College, is the new President of the Royal Entomological Society.

Richard Todd, Professor of Materials, has been awarded the 2012 Verulam Medal and Prize of the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining in recognition of his distinguished contributions to ceramics.

Stefan Vogenauer, Professor of Comparative Law, has been given a Humboldt Research Award, conferred in recognition of his lifetime achievements in research and bringing with it an invitation to carry out research projects of his own choice in cooperation with specialist colleagues in Germany.

Professor Katherine Blundell, Director of the Oxford Centre for Research into Parenting and Children, as well as University Professor in Social Work at Balliol House and Fellow of St Hilda’s College, is honoured for her contribution to social science research. Professor Buchanan’s research focuses on promoting wellbeing in children, especially children at risk of social exclusion.

OII wins Wikimedia award

The Oxford Internet Institute (OII) has been recognised as Educational Institution of the Year at the ‘UK Wikimedian of the Year’ awards. The annual awards are given by Wikimedia UK to thank those who have helped the UK Wikimedia movement, honouring volunteers and institutions who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help bring open knowledge to all.

The award was made largely in recognition of the work by OII Research Fellow Dr Mark Graham (pictured above), in particular his efforts to map and visualise Wikipedia data, as well as his work focusing on Africa, a high priority for Wikimedia UK in completing their mission to share the world’s information.

Dr Graham said: ‘Wikipedia is good at telling us what it knows, but not great at telling us what it doesn’t: some events and places are well represented, some highly contested, and some not represented at all. What we are trying to do at the OII is make some of these biases and gaps more apparent.’

Birthday Honours

Lorna Casselton, Emeritus Professor of Fungal Genetics in the Department of Plant Sciences and Honorary Fellow of St Hilda’s College, has been awarded a CBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours list for her services to research, and for her role as Vice-President of the Royal Society. Professor Casselton researches sexual development in fungi, and is distinguished for her genetic and molecular analysis of the mushroom Coprinus cinereus. She was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1999 and became Foreign Secretary and Vice-President in 2006.

Ann Buchanan, Director for the Oxford Centre for Research into Parenting and Children, as well as University Professor in Social Work at Balliol House and Fellow of St Hilda’s College, is honoured for her contribution to social science research. Professor Buchanan’s research focuses on promoting wellbeing in children, especially children at risk of social exclusion.

Institute of Physics prizes

A number of Oxford physicists have been recognised in the 2012 Institute of Physics Awards.

Professor Graham Ross (top left) has been awarded the Dirac Medal ‘for his theoretical work in developing both the Standard Model of fundamental particles and forces and theories beyond the Standard Model that have led to many new insights into the origins and nature of the universe’.

Professor Katherine Blundell (top right) has won the Bragg Medal ‘for promoting engagement in and learning of physics, both by carrying research in astronomy into schools in developing countries and by helping graduate students and postdocs in the UK to talk to schoolchildren about their science’.

Dr Henry Snaith has won the Patterson Medal ‘for his important contributions to the field of excitonic solar cells’.

In addition, Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell has been elected as an Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Physics.

Dr Mark Graham (top right) has won the Bragg Medal ‘for promoting engagement in and learning of physics, both by carrying research in astronomy into schools in developing countries and by helping graduate students and postdocs in the UK to talk to schoolchildren about their science’.

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A very special Encaenia

Encaenia attracted worldwide attention this year when Aung San Suu Kyi, Chairman of the Burmese National League for Democracy and member of the Burmese parliament, received an honorary doctorate in civil law. She was awarded the degree by the University in April 1993 but had been unable to receive it in person, being in detention as a result of her campaign to bring democracy to Burma. Daw Suu read PPE at St Hugh’s College from 1964 to 1967. She is an honorary fellow of St Hugh’s College and of St Antony’s College and patron of the International Gender Studies Centre at Lady Margaret Hall.

Seven other leading figures also received honorary degrees. The degree of Doctor of Civil Law was awarded to:

Baroness (Elizabeth Lydia) Manningham-Buller, the former Director General of MI5, the British internal Security Service, where she specialised in counter-terrorism. She is an honorary fellow of Lady Margaret Hall, where she read English.

The degree of Doctor of Letters was awarded to:

David John Moore Cornwell (who writes as John le Carré), whose intricate espionage and political novels such as Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy and The Spy Who Came in from the Cold were drawn in part from his own experiences working for MI5 and MI6. He is an honorary fellow of Lincoln College, where he read modern languages.

Professor Drew Gilpin Faust, the first female president of Harvard University, who is a historian of the Civil War and the American South, and was the founding Dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard.

Sir Howard Stringer, Chairman, President and Chief Executive of the Sony Corporation since 2009 and a distinguished journalist, producer and media executive. As President of CBS from 1988 to 1995, he was responsible for all the broadcast activities of the company. He is an honorary fellow of Merton College, where he read history.

Professor Charles Margrave Taylor, philosopher and emeritus professor at McGill University, whose writings have covered subjects including artificial intelligence, language, social behaviour, morality and multiculturalism. He is an honorary fellow of Balliol College, where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar, and of Blackfriars, and has been a Quondam Fellow of All Souls College since 1981.

The degree of Doctor of Science was awarded to:

Dr Henry Joseph Macaulay Barnett, a neurologist whose work on stroke pioneered the use of aspirin for stroke prevention. Formerly Chairman of the Department of Clinical Neurological Sciences at The University of Western Ontario, he co-founded the Robarts Research Institute in 1986 and was named its first scientific director.

Professor William Daniel Phillips, Fellow of the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and professor of physics at the University of Maryland, College Park. In 1997 he shared the Nobel Prize for Physics with Steven Chu and Claude Cohen-Tannoudji for his contributions to laser cooling. He was George Eastman Visiting Professor at Balliol College from 2002 to 2003.

Academy of Medical Sciences elects new Fellows

Six Oxford professors have been elected as Fellows of the Academy of Medical Sciences.

Tipu Aziz, Professor of Neurosurgery, focuses on the alleviation of movement disorders and pain via investigations into the neural signatures of pain and movement disorders, including deep brain stimulation, brain imaging and clinical neurophysiology. He has a long-standing interest in primate models of movement disorders and was central to establishing surgical targets to alleviate Parkinson’s Disease. He has also helped establish functional neurosurgery in many centres abroad and holds professorships in Porto and Aarhus.

Professor Rury Holman, director of the Diabetes Trials Unit, divides his time between clinical care of patients, teaching and research. He has designed and run many multicentre studies that focus primarily on prevention, appropriate treatment and cardiovascular risk reduction in type 2 diabetes, and is one of the most cited authors in diabetes.

Professor Stephen MacMahon is principal director for the George Institute for Global Health worldwide and co-director of the new George Centre for Healthcare Innovation at the University. He holds professorial appointments in medicine at Oxford (as a James Martin Professorial Fellow) and Sydney. He is an authority on the causes, prevention and treatment of common cardiovascular diseases, and has a special interest in the management of chronic and complex conditions in resource-poor settings, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

Gero Miesenböck is Waynflete Professor of Physiology and the principal architect of the emerging field of ‘optogenetics’, which develops genetic strategies for observing and controlling the function of brain circuits with light. He uses this approach to read and change the minds of fruit flies to understand how the brain controls behaviour. His current research focuses on the structure and dynamics of the brain circuits involved in sensory processing, memory and action selection.

Anant Parekh, Professor of Physiology, studies the role of calcium ion channels in cell function. Calcium channels play an essential role in the body, controlling processes as diverse as the heartbeat, neurotransmission, metabolism and gene expression, and his discoveries are highly relevant to the understanding of and treatment of allergies including asthma.

Professor Chris Ponting, deputy director of the MRC Functional Genomics Unit, has made significant contributions across protein science, evolutionary biology, genetics and genomics. He has discovered many important protein domain families and provided leadership in international genome-sequencing projects (including those for human and mouse), and his studies have helped force the extent and importance of noncoding DNA in the human genome to be reconsidered.
Arrivals board

Professor of Primary Care Health Sciences

Richard McManus, Professor of Primary Care Cardiovascular Disease in the Department of Primary Care Clinical Sciences at the University of Birmingham, General Practitioner at the Greenidge Surgery, Birmingham, and Honorary Consultant in Primary Care, South Birmingham Primary Care Trust, took up this post in the Department of Primary Care Health Sciences on 1 April. He also became a fellow of Green Templeton College.

Richard McManus trained at St Mary’s Hospital Medical School in London and the University of Birmingham. His research interests lie mainly in cardiovascular disease and include the management of hypertension in primary care, particularly with respect to blood pressure monitoring, as well as stroke management in primary care. Professor McManus chairs the Blood Pressure Monitoring Working Party of the British Hypertension Society and the SRN Primary Care Clinical Studies Group, and provides expert advice to NICE, the Department of Health and the European Society of Cardiology.

Numata Professor of Buddhist Studies

Stefano Zacchetti, tenured lecturer in the Department of Asian and North African Studies at Ca’Foscari University of Venice, Italy, took up this post in the Faculty of Oriental Studies on 1 July. He is also a fellow of Balliol College.

Stefano Zacchetti was educated at the Ca’Foscari University of Venice and had been a tenured lecturer there since 2005, teaching subjects such as classical, medieval and modern Chinese, and Buddhist literature and thought. He has also studied modern Chinese and Chinese philosophy at Sichuan University and researched early Chinese Buddhist translations at Leiden University. Before taking up his post at Ca’Foscari, he was associate professor of Sino–Indian Buddhist Philology at Soka University in Tokyo.

Herbert Smith Professor of English Private Law

Robert Stevens, Professor of Commercial Law, University College London, will take up this post in the Faculty of Law on 1 August. He will also become a fellow of Lady Margaret Hall.

Robert Stevens read Law at Oxford, where he also achieved a Bachelor of Civil Law degree before being called to the Bar in 1992. He has held academic posts in Nijmegen, Leiden, Florida and Auckland, and was a lecturer in Law at Oxford and fellow and tutor at Lady Margaret Hall for 13 years before moving to UCL in 2007.

His research interests cover a wide range of topics within commercial law and private law, and he has published books and articles on contract law, insolvency, private international law, torts and trust law. He has also provided academic consultancy work for a number of firms.

Laudian Professor of Arabic

Julia Bray, Professor of Medieval Arabic Literature, Université Paris 8 – Saint Denis, France, takes up this post in the Faculty of Oriental Studies on 1 September. She will also become a fellow of St John’s College.

Following a BA in Arabic and Persian at St Hilda’s College, Oxford, Julia Bray (then Julia Ashtiany) worked as an archivist for the British Academy Oriental Documents Committee. She returned to Oxford (St Cross) to take her DPhil and has subsequently held academic posts at the Universities of Manchester, Edinburgh and St Andrews. A specialist in medieval Arabic texts and poetry, she joined Université Paris 8 in 2003 and is currently Head of the Department of Arabic Studies. She is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society and of the American Oriental Society.

Savilian Professor of Astronomy

Steven Balbus, Professeur des Universités, Classe Exceptionnelle, Department of Physics, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Paris, and Institut universitaire de France, will take up this post in the

Sub-department of Astrophysics from 1 September. He will be a fellow of New College.

Steven Balbus was educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of California, Berkeley, and has held academic posts at MIT, Princeton University and the University of Virginia.

His research focuses on problems in astrophysical gas dynamics including the interstellar medium, accretion disks, the intracluster medium, stellar interiors and, most recently, the interior rotation pattern of the Sun as revealed by helioseismology. His research was recognised in 2004 by the award of a Chaire d’Excellence by the French government and he has been a Spitzer Lecturer at Princeton University (2011) and a Visiting Miller Professor at Berkeley (2012).

Alastair Buchan Professor of International Relations

Dominic Johnson, Professor of Biopolitics at the University of Edinburgh, will take up this post in the Department of International Relations on 1 September. He will also become a fellow of St Antony’s College.

Dominic Johnson holds a DPhil from Oxford in evolutionary biology and a PhD from Geneva University in political science. He draws on both disciplines to investigate how new research on evolution, biology and human nature is challenging theories of international relations, conflict and cooperation, with particular emphasis on the role of evolutionary dynamics, evolutionary psychology, and religion. His book Failing to Win: Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics (Harvard University Press, 2006, with Dominic Tierney), was named Best Book in International Studies by the International Studies Association.

For the academic year 2012–13 he is co-leader of an interdisciplinary research team of theologians and scientists at the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, NJ, in residence to explore the role of biology and human nature in the evolution of religion.
Noticeboard

Professor Paul Jeffreys became Director of IT Risk Management on 1 May, with overall responsibility for IT risk management, IT compliance, and disaster recovery. Reporting to the Chief Information Officer, Professor Jeffreys will work across IT Services to lead the development of a shared culture around security and risk management across the collegiate University, raising awareness and ensuring compliance with standards and the law.

IT Services comprises the three central IT departments – BSP, ICTST and OUCS – which will come together in a single integrated department from 1 August.

Margaret Ounsley will become the University’s new Head of Government & Community Affairs, based in the Public Affairs Directorate, on 20 August. She joins the University from WWF-UK, where she is Head of Public Affairs.

As Head of Government & Community Relations, she will be responsible for developing and implementing a programme of engagement and outreach with stakeholders and opinion-formers at local, national and international level.

Lisa Seddon has been appointed Head of Events, based in the Public Affairs Directorate, and will take up her post on 23 August. She joins the University from Oxfam, where she is Sponsored Events Manager.

As Head of Events, she will be responsible for the planning and delivery of a programme of high-profile events across the University, from Encaenia to visits by heads of state.

What’s on

Exhibitions

Ghost Forest
Until 31 July 2012
Oxford University Museum of Natural History
www.ghostforest.org
The huge primary rainforest tree stumps on the lawn in front of the Museum near the end of their visit. Thanks to coverage in Oxford Today, the ‘Ghost Forest’ project by artist Angela Palmer – highlighting the impact of worldwide deforestation on the earth’s climate, biodiversity and the livelihood of indigenous populations – is finding a new permanent home at the National Botanic Garden of Wales, where alumna Dr Rosetta Plummer is Director.

Salvador Dali’s illustrations for Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland
Until 22 October
Christ Church Picture Gallery
www.chch.ox.ac.uk/gallery/exhibitions/forthcoming-current

The English Prize: The Capture of the Westmorland
Until 27 August
Ashmolean Museum
Tickets £9/E7
www.ashmolean.org
A vivid recreation of the story of the capture of the Westmorland – an armed merchant ship sailing from Livorno to London in January 1779 – through 140 objects.

We Bury Our Own
Until 3 January 2013
Long Gallery, Pitt Rivers Museum
www.prm.ox.ac.uk/christianthompson.html
Contemporary Aboriginal artist Christian Thompson presents eight large photographic self-portraits and a video installation, made in response to the Pitt Rivers’ historic photograph collection from Australia. Thompson is one of the first two Aboriginal students to study at Oxford, thanks to the Charlie Perkins Scholarship programme.

Made for Trade
Until 27 January 2013
Pitt Rivers Museum
www.prm.ox.ac.uk
Indian silk textiles, a solar-powered prayer wheel, Maasai jewellery, a brick made of tea, parrot feather ornaments, moccasins with red ‘Stroud’ cloth, lustrous glass beads from Venice… Insights into the world of trade through the museum’s remarkable collections, including a contemporary coffin built for a shop owner alongside a documentary on the trend for themed coffins in Ghana that relate to the deceased’s trade or pastime.

Conferences

UAS Conference 2012
Tuesday 18 September
Examination Schools
www.ox.ac.uk/uas_conference
Information and training event for University and college administrative staff.

Internet, Politics and Policy: Big Data, Big Challenges?
20–21 September
St Anne’s College
www.oii.ox.ac.uk
How to exploit Big Data to inform policy debates and advance social science.

Events

Oxford Open Doors 2012
8–9 September
www.oxfordopendoors.org.uk
One of the country’s largest heritage events allows you to explore venues across Oxford, from University buildings to college gardens.

Family friendly

Olympic Adventure Trial
21 July – 3 September
Oxford University Museum of Natural History and Pitt Rivers Museum
www.oum.ox.ac.uk/visiting/whatson.htm
Will you win bronze, silver, or even gold? Gain points and earn your place on the winner’s podium. All children must be accompanied by an adult.

For more events, visit www.ox.ac.uk/staff/events
Global health: a fair exchange

Georgina Ferry meets Oxford researchers who are working side by side with colleagues overseas to tackle the health problems of the developing world.

In the 19th century, tropical medicine followed much the same pattern as the trade practices of colonial powers such as Britain and France. Intrepid doctors would venture to overseas regions, collect samples, study patients, and bear away with them a new understanding of disease. The French physician Alphonse Laveran discovered the malaria parasite in Algeria, and in India the British military doctor Ronald Ross subsequently proved that it was transmitted via mosquito bites. Today, says Kevin Marsh, Director of the KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme in Kenya and chairman of the Oxford Tropical Network, that model is no longer sustainable. ‘The key to success is the long-term embedding of researchers in overseas units that are set up on the basis of equal collaboration with local institutions,’ he says.

Many are surprised to discover that Oxford began this process of embedding as long ago as 1979. Today it has hundreds of researchers permanently based in a network of institutions across Africa and Asia. Many more, working not only in tropical medicine but in epidemiology, clinical trials, psychiatry, and non-clinical specialities such as health economics and evidence-based social work, are engaged in long-term collaborations with colleagues in under-resourced countries, which are not only creating new knowledge but building the capacity of those countries to tackle their own health problems. They have brought much-needed research funding from sources such as the Wellcome Trust, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Li Ka Shing Foundation, the Kadoorie Foundation and many others.

Many of the less developed countries face real challenges in coping with problems of ill health that impose severe humanitarian and economic burdens on their populations, and hinder their developmental progress. Oxford first tackled the politically sensitive issue of supporting scientists in developing countries to undertake excellent research when Professor David Warrell, who had lived and worked in Africa, came to the University in the mid-1970s. ‘I thought you couldn’t hope to do anything useful in the way of research unless you were prepared to commit to long-term residence in a country where tropical diseases are endemic,’ he says. He found a kindred spirit in David Weatherall, who had recently been appointed Nuffield Professor of Medicine, and whose own research on the inherited blood disorders known as thalassaemias had begun in South-East Asia. They persuaded the Wellcome Trust to fund a small unit at Mahidol University in Bangkok, and Professor Warrell and his wife Mary, herself a doctor, moved there in 1979.

From those small beginnings has grown a network including large programmes based in Thailand, Kenya and Vietnam, with smaller units in Laos, Indonesia and Nepal, and important collaborations across both continents. Their focus...
is mainly on understanding and treating tropical infectious disease: malaria still kills many young children, but dengue, typhoid and influenza are all topics of concern. One major success for the network has been its demonstration that the family of drugs called the artemisinins, originally purified from a Chinese herbal remedy, offer the most efficacious treatment for severe malaria. These studies, led by Professor Nick White, who for many years headed the Bangkok unit and still works there, have changed prescribing guidelines worldwide.

From the outset, the network has been committed to recruiting and training local staff. There is no lack of able candidates. To take the Kenya programme alone: in 2006 Dr Alexis Nzila, who then headed the molecular parasitology group, won the inaugural Royal Society Pfizer prize for young African scientists. Last year it went to Dr Julie Makani for her work on sickle cell disease in Tanzania. Dr George Warimwe, a Kenyan veterinary surgeon, saw a PhD studentship advertised at the programme and jumped at the chance. ‘I spent five years at Kilifi, where I developed valuable skills in human infectious disease research in a multidisciplinary environment,’ he says. ‘It meant I could look at my veterinary career from a different perspective.’ He is now at Oxford’s Jenner Institute developing a vaccine for African Rift Valley Fever programme that can be used in both humans and livestock.

Countries with thinly stretched economic resources have not been able to fund their own modern research laboratories. In the early days the units relied heavily on scientific back-up from laboratories in Oxford. However, with support from the Wellcome Trust and other sources, that position is now changing. ‘We strive to bring local partners to a level where they can independently set their own research agendas and compete for the funding to execute them,’ says Dr Kevin Baird, who directs the Eijkman–Oxford Clinical Research Unit in Jakarta, Indonesia. ‘This includes actively recruiting research students, as well as buying relatively sophisticated equipment that supports competitive biomedical research, and that we aim to put effectively to work in the labs of our local partners.’

The range of skills under development extends well beyond laboratory techniques or therapeutic strategies for infectious diseases. Since the early 1980s, the Clinical Trial Service Unit, led by Sir Richard Peto and Sir Rory Collins, has been pioneering very large scale epidemiological studies and clinical trials in China, focusing primarily on chronic and non-communicable diseases such as cancer, heart disease and stroke. In 1987 they recruited a young PhD student, Zhengming Chen, to work on a project related to blood cholesterol. Today he is himself an Oxford professor and directs the CTSU’s China programme. He also leads the China Kadoorie Biobank, which has recruited over half a million Chinese participants, collected lifestyle data, physical measurements and biological samples from each, and is following them via their health records to learn more about the causes of disease.

‘Until recently China’s own research funding mostly went to basic research,’ says Professor Chen. ‘Through international collaboration, China can also develop its strategies for effective control of chronic disease and build up research capacity in population health.’ The CTSU has a base in Beijing, the China Oxford Centre for International Health Research at Fuwai Hospital, where 50 staff will soon be moving into a new building. In June this year, 50 Chinese doctors came to Oxford for an intensive course in research methods, part of a continuing programme of training that the CTSU delivers annually in support of its projects. Independently the Diabetes Trials Unit, headed by Professor Rory Holman, is also running very large scale clinical trials in China, trains local doctors, and has its own offices in Beijing (opened by the Vice-Chancellor in May this year).

One of the most innovative tools for supporting more and better research in global health has been the ‘virtual science park’ set up by Dr Trudie Lang in the Nuffield Department of Clinical Medicine. The Global Health Network (www.TheGlobalHealthNetwork.org), provides a space online to build collaborations and open forums for sharing knowledge and methods as well as to set up project groups to work on joint activities and develop research tools’, says Dr Lang. Health workers and researchers around the world both learn from others and share their own experience. The original focus was to support more and better clinical trials in global health, but the network now has 14 linked sites on subjects ranging from bioethics to microbiology, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Oxford Tropical Network. They were launched without much fanfare, but immediately began to attract participants at every level, from students to principal investigators, and including both clinical and research workers.

One of the sites is on bioethics, and has been established by the Ethox Centre in Oxford’s Department of Public Health. Its director, Professor Michael Parker, runs two major global projects. One is the ethics programme of the Malaria Genomic Epidemiology Network (MalariaGen), headed by Professor Dominic Kwiatkowski at Oxford’s Centre for Genomics and Global Health.

‘MalariaGen has been a model of how you build ethical considerations into a scientific collaboration,’ says Professor Parker.

Impressed by MalariaGen’s innovative approach to issues such as data sharing and the export of biological samples, the Wellcome Trust has just made a Strategic Award to Professor Parker jointly with the directors of all five of its Major Overseas Programmes (MOPs) – three of whom are Oxford professors. ‘We are helping to build the capacity of the centres by awarding bursaries and studentships to local staff to investigate practical ethical issues relevant to the MOPs,’ he says, ‘but it’s not just a matter of us teaching them: we are building our own capacity too. Together we are learning how to achieve locally responsive solutions to problems that can arise in large-scale international collaborations.’

More at www.tropicalmedicine.ox.ac.uk and www.ndm.ox.ac.uk/china
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Humans have a natural preoccupation with the future. Indeed, the ability to reason about what’s to come – from short-term implications of our actions to long-term contemplation of future civilisations – is one of the traits that set us apart from our cousins in the animal kingdom.

But while future-gazing is inevitable, Professor Nick Bostrom, director of the University’s Future of Humanity Institute, warns that it shouldn’t be taken lightly. ‘The future is often used as a screen onto which we can project our hopes and fears, our ideological affiliations,’ he explains, ‘but we can no longer just make up things that sound exciting – we actually have to do some serious thinking about the strategic options for humanity.’

Bostrom has always looked to the future. As a teenager, he reckoned that humans would eventually make themselves more intelligent, through cognitive advancement or development of machine intelligence. As he saw it, that meant many of the eternal academic questions – establishing the true nature of reality, say, or figuring out what the ancient Greeks really thought about tragedy – might be better postponed until we’re more able. Accordingly, the young Bostrom resolved to focus on the problem of how to increase the probability that humanity would make it through intact to such an enhanced condition.

Such ambition saw him learn with scant regard for conventional subject boundaries. ‘I actually got kicked out of the Psychology department’s office, and he told me that he’d found out I’d been studying mathematics, physics and philosophy alongside psychology. He computed that it was psychologically impossible to cope with such a heavy course load – so I was asked to leave!’

Fortunately Gothenburg and Stockholm universities proved more sympathetic, and his undergraduate performance set a national record. The multi-pronged approach continues to define his work.

During a PhD at the London School of Economics, strictly speaking in the philosophy of science, Bostrom developed his theory of observation selection effect: a mathematical treatise describing how we should reason when evidence contains indexical elements, such as self-locating beliefs about time, place, or identity. It sounds abstract, but it has found applications in areas as diverse as cosmology, evolutionary theory, and the foundations of quantum physics. A move to Yale saw the theory combined with other analytic methods, in order that it could be used to explain the technological futures of civilisations – concepts which have gone on to permeate the philosophical community.

Bostrom arrived in Oxford as a British Academy postdoctoral fellow in 2003 and has become increasingly involved in the ethics of how future technologies will be used to enhance human capacities. Such research echoes the teenage Bostrom’s thinking, focusing on how technology will change not just the world around us, but human nature itself. His work in the area has shaped the field of bioethics, in the process shepherding the study of technology’s impact into the academic limelight.

When the Future of Humanity Institute opened in 2006, Bostrom was a natural fit as director. While many would find themselves drowned in administration, his research has flourished. He’s currently writing a book which seeks to understand how machine intelligence will intersect humanity’s future. ‘People are doing many things to try to improve the future of the world,’ he explains, ‘but these efforts rely on hidden assumptions about what is possible and desirable. To arrive at an informed view even about which direction we should be going in, one needs to think through a tangle of deep and thorny questions.’

Fundamentally, Bostrom wants to understand how we can reduce existential risk and ensure that the human story won’t come to a premature end. ‘These questions are perhaps impossible to answer with certainty – but that doesn’t mean that any answer is as good as any other, or that we should give up trying,’ he explains. ‘There is too much on the line. We need whatever light we can get as we stumble into the great unknown.’

More at www.fhi.ox.ac.uk and www.nickbostrom.com
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If you ask a member of the public what they know about Oxford, the chances are that their response will be inspired by some of the iconic images of the University – the colleges, students on bikes, the Bodleian, and of course the Radcliffe Camera. Thanks to the news media and programmes like Morse, these images have been broadcast around the world and are instantly recognisable to millions.

The Public Affairs Directorate has maintained an archive of photos of the collegiate University going back over many years, but hard copy photos in filing cabinets take time to search every time a publication is designed or an external request comes in. To make the most of this rich archive – and provide a better service – an online image library has been launched within the collegiate University and will be revealed to the rest of the world in the autumn. A joint venture between the Public Affairs Directorate and the Alumni and Development Offices, it has been an impressive logistical feat to select, upload and tag (adding key words to each photo to make them easily searchable) more than 1,500 images.

Chris Floyd in the Development Office has been part of the project team. ‘The library is a one-stop shop for the most striking and informative images of Oxford and the vast range of its academic work, its iconic buildings and its people,’ he says. ‘It provides easy and cost-efficient access to this unique treasure trove of images to everyone across the collegiate University.’ The online library is easy and quick to search – whether you’re looking for a particular building or event, or a photo of students. All the images have the necessary consents and licence agreements, so can be downloaded safe in the knowledge that you have the right to use them.

Members of the collegiate University can download images at a reduced rate – 50% lower than the commercial rate, with the price depending on the size of image and how it will be used. (The cost will be greater if it is intended for the front cover of a high-circulation brochure than if it is to accompany an online news article.)

Departments, faculties and colleges are invited to add their images to the library. They will receive 60% of any revenue from the images, with 40% contributing to the costs of running the library. The software for the library is hosted by a company called 20/20, which also supports the image libraries of the V&A, the Tate and the British Museum, so there will be ongoing costs to host the online image library website and shoot more photos to add to the collection. Any images submitted for inclusion need to be of a good quality and be accompanied by the necessary copyright information and consent of people in the photos. They also need to have a clear focus of interest and be well composed.

‘We are currently busy enlarging the collection and hope to have doubled the number of images available by the beginning of Michaelmas term,’ explains Anne Brunner-Ellis, Head of the Publications and Web Office. ‘There are some stunning images to choose from – all now available from your desktop.’ In the longer term, the library will also contain clips of videos. The Media Production Unit (MPU) within OUCS has a 25-year archive of video shot throughout the University, including high-profile visitors like Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi. The MPU is currently digitising this archive – a mammoth, but increasingly necessary task as old video formats like VHS deteriorate.

To find out more, visit www.universityofoxfordimages.co.uk or contact ouimages@admin.ox.ac.uk for an information pack if you want to submit photos to the library.

A small selection of images is still available free of charge from the Public Affairs image bank at www.ox.ac.uk/restricted_access/branding_toolkit/image_bank.

A treasure trove of images of the collegiate University is now available online, reports Carolyne Culver.

Above: A picture paints a thousand words. A rich archive of Oxford images is now available from your desktop.
It’s a Monday evening in June, and several tables in Temple Cowley’s Ark-T centre are loaded with trays of mixed animal bones and diagrams of vertebrates. Around them gather 20 eager workshop participants who are identifying the excavated bones, as part of the East Oxford Community Archaeology Project (Archeox). Based at the University’s Department for Continuing Education, the project is investigating the archaeological history of East Oxford through a network of community volunteers and University staff. Archeox was recently shortlisted for a British Archaeological Award for Best Community Archaeology Project – putting it amongst the top three projects of its kind in the country.

The participants at the animal bone workshop range from sixth-form students to pensioners – a testament to the project’s success in creating a network of participants from a community characterised by its diversity of social, educational and economic backgrounds. ‘East Oxford is a special part of the city,’ explains Dr David Griffiths, Reader in Archaeology at the Department for Continuing Education, and the project leader. ‘It has an identity within the city as “the other Oxford”.

This distinct identity made Griffiths and archaeologist Jane Harrison see East Oxford as an ideal candidate for a new kind of community archaeology project. ‘East Oxford has always been a place of migration, with waves of new arrivals from the Roman period through to today,’ notes Harrison. Part of the project’s narrative is about showing ‘how we’re all part of a longer story – everyone in East Oxford is some sort of immigrant based on some reason for arriving’. The University’s John Fell Fund provided a start-up grant, resulting in a successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a total funding package of just over half a million pounds, which runs until 2014.

Archeox’s total of registered volunteers will soon pass 500, many of whom have joined via its website. The project and its activities are open, welcoming and pluralistic – volunteers are involved in, and trained in, every aspect of the archaeological process, from research and cataloguing to digging test pits (often in volunteers’ own backyards) and geophysical processing. Research-based teaching workshops aim to build a sustainable future for archaeology in the area by providing training to high archaeological standards. Harrison and two other core staff organise and lead the training activities. The University’s Research Laboratory for Archaeology, and the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers Museums, are also involved in various ways. It is a new model of University engagement with the community: ‘It’s not the University going into community and preaching down to people,’ explains Griffiths. ‘The key is that the project is shared by the University and the community.’

The project’s results have been tangible, from tracing the origin of local place-names to an excavation at St Bartholomew’s Chapel (‘Bartlemas’) just off Cowley Road. This is the site of a medieval leper hospital and the volunteers uncovered 13 human skeletons and evidence of an earlier chapel beneath the existing structure. Just as important, perhaps, are some of the intangible results of the project. People come to understand the places they occupy in a new and different way, Harrison says, and the process of uncovering the history of the community’s shared physical space is deeply rewarding. As a result many local residents have come to see the University and its role differently – and more positively – as an engaged and inclusive part of the community.

Jenni Laird is one of the animal bone workshop volunteers who has been involved in Archeox from its inception. A historic re-enactment enthusiast, her interest in the project is practical, but the satisfaction, she says, comes from the shared investigative process, which has sparked her interest in the local history of an area often seen as merely the outskirts of an ancient university. ‘Getting the community involved is the best idea in the world’, she says. ‘There’s been so much going on here for millennia and we have no idea about so much of it – taking part in finding it out is fascinating.’

More information at www.archeox.net
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Why am I there?

Liz Jones
Volunteer Gamesmaker at the Olympic Games

Firstly, what’s your ‘day job’ at the University?
I work in Research Services. I’ve just covered a maternity leave as a Grants & Contracts Administrator and have now secured a post as a European Grants Officer, supporting the research grant process for EC funding and advising departments on the EC systems and protocols.

So what will you be doing at the Olympics?
I’m in the Events team – the largest group of volunteers in the Olympics and Paralympics. We are the ‘meet & greet’ group, always ready with a friendly smile and helpful advice – checking tickets, giving people directions, etc. I’m in the main Olympic Park.

How did that come about?
I applied online back in 2010, along with 250,000 other people. The organisers only needed 70,000 volunteers so I was lucky to be called for interview in November 2011. The people hosting the interviews were pumped up with enthusiasm, so we all felt fantastic and so privileged to be there. There were also copious supplies of chocolate as Cadbury’s is one of the sponsors of the volunteer training. In January I heard I was allocated to the Events Team.

What kind of training did volunteers get?
We were called to orientation training at Wembley arena in March. It was a fantastic experience, with 10,000 volunteers hosted by Jonathan Edwards with all the top brass from the Olympic organising committee, actors, former Olympic athletes… and, to top it all, Eddie Izzard (Mr Motivator)! We were generally introduced to the Olympics in London, what it would be like and (to keep us enthusiastic) how important our role was. I met a host of different people including a pharmacist from Norwich – delighted to be working as a pharmacist at the Games (100 posts for 1,000 applicants) – and a medic, who hadn’t quite made it and whose job was to help empty the refuse bins.

In early May we had role-specific training for all the Events team volunteers across all the Olympics venues. This was a more focused, low-key, serious training affair, held in Hackney. People had travelled from all over – one lady had jetted in from Guernsey, and the furthest from Milan. We learnt how to use two-way radios, scan tickets, greet visitors and about all safety aspects of the Games. We all earned a City & Guilds Level 2 certificate in Understanding Stewarding at Spectator events – a surprise! We were taught how to be bright and cheerful, and encouraged to be distinctive and show individual character, even at the end of a long shift.

What formal processes did you have to undergo?
Security is very tight at the Games, so accreditation is very important for allowing access to the area you’ll be working in. I had to travel to a huge warehouse in West Ham for this and join a long queue to have my passport checked, photos taken and details confirmed. The accreditation pass must be worn at all times. Even the Queen has her own accreditation! (Although she doesn’t actually have to wear hers – her lady in waiting can hold it for her.)

Tell us about your uniform
The distinctive ‘grape & scarlet’ design is based on the guards’ uniform with button detail and epaulettes. The system for picking it up was very slick. We initially queued for our trainers, which are actually very comfortable and made of recycled plastic cups – this is the Sustainable Olympic Games, after all. Next up was the uniform – two tops, two pairs of trousers and a jacket. We were shown to a changing area with no mirrors and helped by lovely assistants. The remaining kit – socks, bag, hat, watch, umbrella (this is the UK) – is all beautifully colour coordinated (and branded Adidas).

What are you most looking forward to? And least?
I can’t wait to go to the venue-specific training in a week’s time [mid-July] which will be in the Olympic Park at the Copper Box (Handball & Modern Pentathlon). We will finally be there, in the place where it’s all going to happen – so exciting! The organisation for this Olympics has been phenomenal – the catering alone is the largest peacetime operation this country has had to deal with. But the shifts are long: nine hours (typical shift 2pm to 11pm), and on consecutive days. Everybody volunteering has signed up for a minimum of 10 days (many have spent a whole year involved in the Games). So I’ve used up all my holiday for this year, but worth it.

How are you going to get back and forth to the Games?
Luckily my daughter’s student accommodation is in Mile End (one tube stop from Stratford) and her Master’s course doesn’t finish until September. I’m hoping to get the bed and not the floor.

Viewfinder

Let there be light – but where?
Answer on p6.