The Government’s response to the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance chaired by Lord Browne was published on 3 November. The central proposition of Lord Browne’s report – which must be considered in conjunction with the Government’s Comprehensive Spending Review – is that the bulk of the teaching grant currently distributed to universities via HEFCE should be replaced by the spending power placed in the hands of undergraduates. They will borrow the money to pay for their university education and repay it as graduates when their annual income exceeds £21,000. In its response, the Government proposes that any university will be able to charge students up to £6,000 per annum and, ‘in exceptional circumstances’, up to £9,000. Universities charging above £6,000 will be subject to ‘much tougher conditions on widening participation and fair access’. There will be debates in both Houses of Parliament and a vote on the Government’s proposal before Christmas.

Planning permission has been granted for the redevelopment of the Iffley Road sports complex. Under the plans, the existing sports centre will be redeveloped to provide new facilities catering for the University’s 84 sports clubs. The existing grandstand will be demolished and a new lower grandstand constructed to meet the growing needs of cricket and projectile sports. The University is now working towards raising the £39m required for the project.

The Bodleian has embarked on the biggest book move in its history, with 6.5 million items being moved over the next year. Over 300,000 books were moved into the new Book Storage Facility in South Marston in the first two weeks of operation and the daily rate is now approximately 38,000 books. You can follow the progress via the Bodleian weekly tweet at #bodleianbsf. While items are in transit, they will be temporarily unavailable. For further information, visit www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/about/projects/book-moves.

Shakespeare’s First Folio of 36 plays is now available to download free via the University’s iTunes U site (http://itunes.ox.ac.uk). Alongside hundreds of free audio and video podcasts, a range of historic and rare texts have been added to the site in ePub form, including works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Over five million items of audio and video material have been downloaded from Oxford’s iTunes U site since its launch two years ago.

A new website designed to support researchers with their research data management activities is available at www.admin.ox.ac.uk/rdm. The web portal provides an online entry point to a range of information about research data management, including research funder requirements, guidance on how to produce a data management plan, services within the University to assist researchers, and sources of further advice and guidance. The site has been developed jointly by Research Services and OUCS, with financial support from JISC.

The University has teamed up with the UK’s largest car-share network to provide a car-share scheme for members of staff. The scheme matches you with other scheme members in and around Oxfordshire to share car journeys, as well as walking and cycling journeys. The Journeyshare scheme is free to use and is currently available to staff with a University of Oxford or affiliated email address. For further information and to register, visit www.admin.ox.ac.uk/estates/travel/carsharing.shtml, where there are also details of eligibility for car-share parking permits.

Oxford Thinking, the University’s fundraising campaign, has reached the milestone of £1bn. Fundraising began six years ago and the official launch of the Campaign took place in May 2008, at which time £575m had already been raised. Despite the global economic downturn, the Campaign is now well on its way to achieving its initial goal of £1.25bn.

The impact of Oxford Thinking is already transforming life across the collegiate University. This academic year saw the arrival of the first Indigenous Australian students at Oxford thanks to scholarships from the Charlie Perkins Trust, supported by the Australian and British governments, Rio Tinto and Qantas. October saw the launch of two new centres, both supported by generous gifts: the Oxford Centre for Asian Archaeology, Art and Culture and the Calleva Research Centre for Evolution and Human Science (the latter made possible by a £3m donation from a Magdalen alumnus and his wife – the largest single donation in the College’s 552-year history).

Looking to the future, a £10m donation from the Hong Kong based philanthropist Dickson Poon to St Hugh’s College is helping the University realise its goal of creating a dedicated building for China-related study. And Pembroke has recently launched its ‘Bridging Centuries’ fundraising campaign to enable it to build two new quads and accommodation, with the new buildings joined to the existing site by a bridge arching across an Oxford street.

A celebration of Advent – University and college doors
Melanomas and other tumours trick our bodies into allowing their development, but new research is showing how we might turn their tricks against them. Neutrophils are powerful cells that help fight disease, but to prevent them damaging our own tissue in the process, our body can send out a messenger – a protein called serum amyloid A (SAA) – which shouts ‘stop this friendly fire’ and halts the neutrophils’ work. Melanomas evade the immune system by sending their own SAA protein messengers, telling the immune system to stop its attack. Research by Professor Vincenzo Cerundolo, Director of Oxford’s MRC Human Immunology Unit, has found that the SAA protein has a second effect: it also jumpstarts another type of immune cell, called an iNKT cell, which activates antibody production. This is usually a lesser effect, but using drugs to amplify iNKT cells could allow the immune system to fight back by responding strongly with these antibodies exactly where the tumours – and their misleading SAA protein – occur.

‘Local’ poetry – written about the poet’s home area – started in the 18th century with Wordsworth and Burns, points out Professor Fiona Stafford of the English Faculty in her new book, Local Attachments. Wordsworth and Burns are among the British poets who have achieved greatness by simply writing about their surroundings. Earlier writers concentrated on princes, politicians and great cities, but Wordsworth and Burns chose to feature everyday life in their own environment, encouraging people to appreciate what is around them. ‘It is remarkable that Wordsworth could write about little-known Grasmere and that Burns could write about Ayrshire villages in a dialect unfamiliar to those from further afield, and yet achieve such widespread acclaim so quickly,’ says Professor Stafford. Such ‘local’ work is still loved today, and seen in contemporary poetry such as that by Seamus Heaney.

Bird extinction rates are the best measure of the overall rate of biodiversity loss in a particular region, Clive Hambler of the Department of Zoology and colleagues have shown. Measuring species loss across a range of organisms and comparing the rates showed that many types of obscure organism in Britain are going extinct at the same rate as birds. Data from elsewhere suggest the pattern applies outside Britain too. Since birds are easily visible and therefore easy to study, monitoring bird extinction rates is an ideal measure for monitoring the extinction rates of a whole range of organisms. They also provide an early warning system, since people can detect declines in bird populations long before they notice losses of more obscure things like slime moulds or mosses. The study also found that Britain is losing species ten times faster than previously thought, with extinctions in England alone exceeding one species every two weeks.

An innovative way of measuring poverty has been adopted in the 2010 Human Development Report, launched this month by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which complements income-based poverty measures, was designed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative with support from UNDP. The MPI assesses a range of critical factors or ‘deprivations’ at the household level, from education to health outcomes to assets and services. Taken together these factors complement income poverty measures by providing a fuller portrait of the different deprivations that people face. The Human Development Reports are independent publications commissioned by the UNDP that present data and analysis to inform policy addressing the challenges of development.

Neanderthals were probably more promiscuous than most human populations today, research has shown. Previous studies by Dr Susanne Shultz of the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology and colleagues have found that the ratio of the index finger to the ring finger is low in promiscuous ape and hominid species (the ring finger is longer) but high in monogamous species (the fingers’ lengths are similar). High levels of androgens, such as testosterone, increase the ring finger length in comparison to the index finger and are also associated with competitiveness and promiscuity. It is thought that prenatal androgens during development in the womb affect both finger length and later adult behaviour. A new study by the same team measured the fossilised finger bones of some of the first humans. They found that finger ratios from Neanderthal bones were low, suggesting they were more promiscuous than humans today. The evidence remains limited, however, and the researchers stress that they need more fossils to confirm their findings. Dr Shultz said: ‘Developing novel approaches, such as finger ratios, can help inform the current debate surrounding the social systems of the earliest human ancestors.’
People & prizes

Dr Margaret Bent, emeritus fellow of All Souls College and member of the Music Faculty, has been honoured by the Université de Montréal, Canada, with the award of its first ever honorary doctorate in musicology.

Dr Alan Bogg of the Law Faculty is the first prizewinner of the Peter Birks Prize for Outstanding Legal Scholarship, awarded by the Society of Legal Scholars, for his book *The Democratic Aspects of Trade Union Recognition*. The book examines the influence of theories of politics on the changing legal relationship between trade unions, employers and the State.

Dr Brandon Dotson, British Academy postdoctoral fellow in the Faculty of Oriental Studies, has been awarded a 2010 Sofja Kovalevskaja Award by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. The €1.65m awards are presented to talented young researchers as venture capital to allow them to set up research groups at German universities and work there for five years. The award is financed by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

Alan Grafen, Professor of Theoretical Biology, has won the 2011 Medal of the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour for his contributions to the science of animal behaviour.

Christopher Hood, Gladstone Professor of Government, has been elected a fellow of the US National Academy of Public Administration.

Bill Morton, former Professor of Numerical Analysis, has been awarded the De Morgan Medal, the premier award of the London Mathematical Society, for contributions to mathematics. Professor Morton’s work concerns understanding the flow of liquids and his results have influenced fields ranging from weather forecasting to the design of power stations and from the development of aircraft engines to the growth of scientific computing. A special symposium was held recently to mark his 80th birthday.

Dr Rahul Roy of the Rudolf Peierls Centre for Theoretical Physics has shared (with Liang Fu of Harvard University) the 2010 McMillan award, presented by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for outstanding contributions by a young condensed matter physicist. The award recognises the prediction of three-dimensional topological insulators.

Marcus du Sautoy, Charles Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science and Professor of Mathematics, is to receive an honorary DSc from the University of Bath in December.

Professor Neil Shephard, Director of the Oxford–Man Institute of Quantitative Finance, has accepted an honorary Professorship of the University of Aarhus.

Anthony Watts, Professor of Biochemistry, has been elected a fellow of the Biophysical Society, only the second non-US scientist to be awarded such an honour. The fellowship recognises his significant contribution to the understanding of membrane structure and dynamics as well as his international activities in the field.

Top medical prize for Weatherall

Sir David Weatherall, emeritus professor of medicine, has been awarded a Lasker Award, the most significant US prize for medical research. He is the only person outside the US to win the award this year.

The $250,000 prize recognises his research on genetic diseases of the blood and his leadership in improving clinical care for thousands of children with thalassaemia throughout the developing world. The 2010 Lasker-Koshland Special Achievement Award goes to Sir David for ‘50 years of international statesmanship in biomedical science’.

Sir David’s research over the last 50 years has greatly advanced understanding of thalassaemia, a set of inherited blood disorders that affect the body’s ability to create red blood cells and can lead to anaemia of different severities. As well as using a range of approaches to determine the molecular and genetic causes of thalassaemia, he has been able to improve clinical treatment of the disease and change its care for the better worldwide, particularly in the developing world where he pioneered the building of research partnerships long before global health issues became a priority.

In 1989 he established an Institute of Molecular Medicine at Oxford; it was renamed the Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine when he retired in 2000.

Oxford economists sweep the board

Oxford economists won three of the leading prizes awarded at the Economic History Association annual conference, held recently in Evanstan, Illinois. Dr James Fenske, university lecturer in economic history, won the Gerschenkron Prize for the best (non-North American) doctoral dissertation. Dr Rui Esteves, university lecturer in economics, won the Cole Prize for the best article in the *Journal of Economic History*, and Bob Allen (above), Professor of Economic History, won the Explorations prize for the best article in *Explorations in Economic History*.

Elected to EMBO

Five Oxford academics are among the 49 new members of the European Molecular Biology Organisation, elected this year for their outstanding research contributions. They are Judith Armitage, Professor of Biochemistry; Ian Davis, Professor of Cell Biology; Keith Gull, Professor of Molecular Biology and Principal of St Edmund Hall; Carol Robinson (left), Royal Society Research Professor and Dr Lee’s Professor of Chemistry; and Milton Tsiantis, Professor of Plant Development Genetics.
‘Number one’ in computing science

**Ian Horrocks.** Professor of Computer Science, has been ranked as the number one author in the World Wide Web research domain by Microsoft Academic Search, a public search engine for academic papers and literature in the field of computer science.

In Microsoft Academic Search, objects in the search results are sorted based on two factors: their relevance to the query and their global importance. The relevance score of an object is computed by its attributes; and the importance score of an object is calculated by its relationships with other objects. Professor Horrocks, whose work focuses on knowledge representation, particularly ontology languages, description logics and optimised reasoning algorithms, is listed as top author in the World Wide Web field with (at the time of the announcement) 302 publications and 9,479 citations.

Excellent teachers

Sixty-six members of staff received an Oxford University Teaching Award last month from the Vice-Chancellor.

The scheme, which is coordinated by the Oxford Learning Institute, recognises excellence in college and university teaching, with winners being selected by their divisions or faculties. In addition to academic staff, the winners included a number of administrative and support staff, including library staff, who were recognised for their contributions to the success of university courses. Twelve of the award winners received grants to support educational projects aimed at improving teaching.

Arrivals board

**Tasso Leventis Professor of Biodiversity**

**Katherine Willis.** Professorial Research Fellow (RISV) in the School of Geography and the Environment, professorial fellow at Jesus College, University of Oxford, and Professor II at the Biological Institute of the University of Bergen, Norway, took up this post on 1 October. She also became a professorial fellow of Merton College.

The main focus of Professor Willis’s research is on biodiversity responses to environmental change and the dynamic processes of species and their interactions with their environment over a range of timescales. She established the Oxford Long-Term Ecology Laboratory in 2001 to create a hub of facilities and researchers in Oxford using long-term ecological datasets to examine biodiversity changes through time, and has recently been developing an ecological footprinting tool to incorporate ecological and evolutionary processes into conservation planning.

**News International Visiting Professor of Media**

**Matthew Engel.** Currently a columnist for the Financial Times, has been announced as the News International Visiting Professor of Media for 2010–11, hosted by the Faculty of English Language and Literature.

In 25 years on The Guardian, Professor Engel covered 70 different sports, from Olympics and World Cups to tiddlywinks and underwater hockey. The four lectures he will give as visiting professor in January and February will explore sport and the media.

He has also edited 12 editions of the Wisden Cricketers’ Almanack and in addition covered the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first Gulf War, the death of Princess Diana, 9/11 and eight general elections.

**Director, Planning and Resource Allocation**

**Helen Watson** has been appointed as Director of the University’s Planning and Resource Allocation Section (PRAS) from 1 January 2011. She is currently Director of Planning at City University, London.

She holds a BA in Music from Exeter College, Oxford, and an MA in higher and professional education from the University of London.

**Anglo-Japanese collaboration award**

Research teams led by **Dr Oliver Pybus** in the Department of Zoology and Dr Yutaka Takebe of Japan’s National Institute of Infectious Diseases (pictured together, left) have won a 2010 Daiwa Adrian prize. These prestigious prizes are awarded every three years and recognise significant research collaboration between UK and Japanese teams, both in terms of scientific excellence and as a long-term contribution to UK–Japan relations.

The £10,000 prize was awarded following assessment by a panel of fellows of The Royal Society and trustees of the Daiwa Anglo–Japanese Foundation. Six prizes were awarded this year and will be presented at the Royal Society in December. The research teams led by Dr Pybus and Dr Takebe are working on the evolutionary and spatial dynamics of human viral pathogens – investigating the spread of human viruses, why outbreaks begin at certain times and in certain locations, and why viruses follow particular routes when they disseminate internationally. Their work focuses particularly on HIV and hepatitis C.
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Some people use the term ‘data flood’ to describe being inundated by such swelling rivers of information that it is nigh impossible to fish out the useful answers submerged deep within. But Dr Arfon Smith, who worked on the pioneering Galaxy Zoo project (see Blueprint Dec 2007, p10) and is now the technical lead for the Zooniverse family of citizen science projects, prefers the more positive ‘data bonanza’. The Zooniverse team’s experience has shown that needing to ask for help is no bad thing; indeed, having to think laterally about new ways to process data can bring all kinds of unexpected benefits for both academics and the wider community.

Galaxy Zoo was set up in 2007 to help Oxford astrophysicists with a specific task – classifying a million images of distant galaxies. Galaxy classification is something that humans can do far better than computers because computers are not very good at recognising shapes. Over 250,000 people of all ages and backgrounds, all over the world, became involved. Some found it a diverting way to spend their lunch hour while others took it far more seriously and made significant scientific discoveries. All learnt more about our universe and scientists’ quest to understand it better. Zooniverse has built on the success of Galaxy Zoo through projects that involve people in other aspects of astronomical research, such as tracking solar storms or identifying supernovae (bright exploding stars).

Dr Smith has just launched a new Zooniverse project called Old Weather. Funded by a Developing Community Content grant from JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee), it is the team’s first venture into other subject areas, namely climate science and history. Old Weather is recruiting ‘virtual sailors’ to help identify the potentially very useful information about past weather conditions contained in the logbooks of 280 Royal Navy ships around the time of World War I. Thousands of pages of these large, heavy, handwritten volumes have already been digitised. The task now is to extract the data about weather conditions that were noted down without fail every four hours – even under enemy fire – and record it in a form that will make it useful to climate scientists.

Dr Peter Stott, Head of Climate Monitoring and Attribution at the Met Office, explains: ‘Historical weather data is vital because it allows us to test our models of the Earth’s climate: if we can correctly account for what the weather was doing in the past, then we can have more confidence in our predictions of the future. Unfortunately, the historical record is full of gaps, particularly from before 1920 and at sea, so this project is invaluable.’

Old Weather is not just about the scientific observations, however. In columns alongside the regular barometer and thermometer readings are detailed notes about life on board, from mundane deck-swabbing to entries – often scribbled in haste – about military engagement, for example during the Battle of the Falkland Islands of 1914. Participants are noting down the most interesting historical information, to contribute to a collaboration with Naval-History.net.

As with all Zooniverse projects, people will join in because they are keen to help with genuinely useful research. But the website is also fun and engaging: participants can follow the voyages of particular ships around the globe as the logs are gradually deciphered, and rise in rank from cadet to captain, depending on the amount of work they do. Video tutorials help the virtual sailors to get their sea-legs, and there is already an online community where people assist each other with issues such as hard-to-read handwriting in certain logs.

For more information, see www.zooniverse.org and www.oldweather.org

The Zooniverse team is always looking for new ideas for research projects in any subject area that might benefit from the approach they have developed. Please contact: arfon.smith@astro.ox.ac.uk
Where science and industry meet

The University’s Begbroke Science Park provides space for academic research and a nurturing environment for young businesses, as Sally Croft reports.

It is perhaps surprising that it was a growing need for researchers to look at structures on an atomic scale that led to the purchase of the 300-acre site that now plays a central role in the University’s strategy to take research results into a commercial environment.

In 1998, the University’s Department of Materials needed somewhere to put the state-of-the-art electron microscopes proving essential in the rapidly evolving fields of materials characterisation and nanotechnology. Central Oxford, with its heavy traffic noise and ground vibrations, was no place for such sensitive equipment. The University purchased land at Begbroke, five miles north of Oxford and the former home of the Cookson Group’s technology centre. Materials researchers and their microscopes moved in and were soon joined by a number of new venture companies seeking access to the fruits of University research.

That initial mix of young businesses working in proximity to researchers, sharing facilities and knowledge, remains a key feature of what has become the University’s science park. Today the Begbroke site is home to around 400 people. About half of them work for companies (many of them University spin-outs) and the remainder are members of University staff – not just researchers but also people providing support services to academics and businesses alike, in areas ranging from reception skills through IT to catering.

A free minibus service connects the site to central Oxford and many academics work from both the science park and their departmental homes.

For researchers, Begbroke offers both generous working space and proximity to the facilities they need. The site is home to Begbroke Nano, one of the best materials characterisation services in the UK, whose expertise and fast turn-round time is a huge attraction for both University researchers and small companies which could not possibly afford their own instruments. Dr Nicole Grobert of the Department of Materials and her research group are working on the synthesis, processing and characterisation of new carbon- and non-carbon-based nanomaterials. Understanding and modifying the atomic structure of these novel materials makes it possible to manipulate their properties and the way they behave, leading, for example, to stronger, lighter, composite materials for building aircraft, or to nanoparticles with biocompatible surfaces that could be used for drug delivery. ‘I really enjoy working in such an applications-led environment,’ she says. ‘It makes our research feel really useful and there’s a great spirit of cooperation here, with the different research groups and companies’
often sharing equipment and lab space.’

At present, most of the University researchers on site hail from the physical sciences, but there is plenty of scope for collaboration in other areas. Dr Helen Townley of the Department of Engineering Science is working with medics and colleagues from the Institute of Biomedical Engineering to try to find a better way of imaging the lymph nodes in order to investigate the spread of gynaecological cancers. Instead of surgeons needing to inject dye into a tumour, anaesthetising the patient immediately and then peeling away layers of fat to examine the lymph nodes, the researchers are aiming to encapsulate suitable dyes into nanoparticles which can be injected and monitored via special laparoscopes being developed to provide both brightfield and near-infrared images for study. ‘It’s a huge advantage that we can both make the nanoparticles and characterise them on this site,’ she says.

Begbroke’s country location makes it ideal for research that needs plenty of space. Dr Paul Newman and his Mobile Robotics Group are building robots which use lasers and vision to perceive their environment. High on Dr Newman’s wishlist is a car that can drive itself. ‘We spend too much of our lives behind a steering wheel,’ he says. ‘We don’t have to be a slave to traffic jams. We will see cars getting smarter, using lasers, cameras and computers to drive us around while we get on with doing our email or watching a video.’ Such cars need to be able to understand their surroundings, assess the risks – including weather conditions – and take appropriate action. This autumn, the Group has been teaching a Bowler Wildcat car to drive itself. Designed and built by BAE Systems for the Paris–Dakar Race, the £2m Wildcat is loaded with a computer, sensors and high-end cameras. In addition to the attention it receives in a laboratory in Begbroke’s Institute for Advanced Technology (IAT), the vehicle has been taught and tested on the private roads around the site. It now knows where it is to an accuracy of 5–10cm – ‘but we can do much better than that!’ Dr Newman says.

The science park also houses the University’s Supercomputing Centre, though users are based all over the University. ‘The IAT building was an empty shell when we moved in, with the infrastructure in place, but plenty of scope for us to build whatever we wanted. We can pull a megawatt of power up here, which we certainly couldn’t do in town,’ says Dr Jon Lockley, manager of the Centre. He emphasises that supercomputer use today extends far beyond the sciences, with document processing a major application. ‘Our humanities and social sciences colleagues are brilliant at collecting data but sometimes they’re unsure how to process it,’ he says. ‘We’re here to help everyone: we can scope the size of the jobs you need doing, help you develop software and provide training courses.’

Flexibility in office and lab space is a very attractive factor for both University departments and growing businesses. The Begbroke Centre for Innovation and Enterprise is a ‘business incubator’, offering serviced accommodation to University spin-out companies in their early years. ‘We do our best to reflect companies’ needs,’ says Dr Caroline Griffiths, Begbroke’s Senior Administrator and Business Manager. ‘For example, we can offer leases that are short term, with short notice periods, so that businesses can grow and shrink as required.’ The Centre provides a portfolio of services such as building maintenance, a telephone system and IT support, plus catering. A shared coffee area for companies in the building and a central restaurant on the Begbroke site encourage communication between businesses and researchers. Company CEOs meet regularly over coffee to discuss ideas and equipment-sharing possibilities. ‘There’s a really nice feeling here,’ says Dr Jon–Paul Griffiths, whose company, Oxford Advanced Surfaces, spun out from the Chemistry Department in 2006 with the support of Isis Innovation, the University’s technology transfer arm. ‘In the early days there was just the two of us, but now we have over 20 staff and are looking to expand some more. Isis helped us with all the things like negotiating licence contracts and we went to some really helpful events at the Said Business School, but it was great to be able to set up at Begbroke. Having access to the knowledge and expertise at Begbroke Nano was a big attraction – there was no way we could afford those kind of facilities, especially if we were only going to use them occasionally.’ Professor Peter Dobson is Begbroke’s Academic Director. A key feature of the place, he says, is its emphasis on promoting knowledge transfer. Alongside training courses in nanotechnology and the many informal activities on site that encourage networking, the centre hosts short courses for young businesses and both leads and participates in various government programmes aimed at increasing the interaction and transfer of know-how between the academic and commercial worlds.

‘Like it or not, the next Research Excellence Framework will be putting a value on more engagement in creating businesses or societal benefit,’ he says. ‘We at Begbroke have spent a lot of time talking to industry about what it wants and trying to match those needs to the academic community. The government is keen to create new technology and innovation centres, but we’re amazingly lucky as a University because we’ve effectively already done that. We have a wealth of expertise here to help our colleagues throughout the University, and not only in the sciences – we’d welcome more interaction with the humanities and social sciences. We have all the building blocks in place for the next five years.’

Further information at www.begbroke.ox.ac.uk. For more information about taking space at the Begbroke Science Park, contact caroline.livingstone@begbroke.ox.ac.uk
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**The Canal at Jericho with St Barnabas Church**

from a water-colour painting by John Newberry

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At the far west end of Duke Humfrey's Library at the Bodleian is Selden End, built between 1632 and 1637. When finished, it gave the whole complex of Selden End, Duke Humfrey's Library and the Arts End the shape of the letter H, as Thomas Bodley had intended. It is lit by Gothic windows looking north, west and south, with panels of 15th-century stained glass as well as later painted glass. It is a wonderful place of learning, but where does its name originate?

John Selden (1584–1654) was a lawyer, a historian, a promoter of Hebrew and Arabic studies and much else besides. John Milton called him ‘chief of learned men’ and Ben Jonson wrote that he was ‘the monarch in letters’. Educated at Oxford, Selden matriculated from Hart Hall before entering the Inner Temple in 1604. He was a Member of Parliament for several years (latterly as the representative of the University of Oxford in the Long Parliament) and, above all, an avid collector of books and manuscripts. His library contained some 8,000 volumes and was one of the most important collections in Europe. He collected Caxtons and books on subjects as varied as medicine, science, theology, law and Hebrew literature and, on his death in 1654, the vast majority of them came to the Bodleian Library – hence ‘Selden End’.

A conference organised earlier this year by the University’s Centre for Early Modern Studies marked the 400th anniversary of Selden’s own first publication and the publication of a major new study, John Selden: A Life in Scholarship (OUP, 2009) by Professor GJ Toomer. Selden’s greatest interest was the history of law, across differing cultures, and he was the most important English legal historian before FW Maitland in the 19th century. But, as Thomas Roebuck, Lecturer in English at Christ Church and co-organiser of the conference, points out, Selden was also the greatest Christian historian of Jewish law in the 17th century: ‘Perhaps no-one has ever mastered both these fields, before or since,’ he says. Selden’s legal studies, however, caused much controversy. The History of Tithes, his most celebrated work, made use of legal documents to show that tithes were not universal throughout history – a sharp challenge to church power. The clerics attacked it viciously. Other tracts by Selden helped to establish a tradition of scholarly research into the law, aided by a mind free from many of the prejudices of the day.

He was also an extraordinarily learned Hebrew specialist who wrote widely and deeply about the Hebrew state and its laws. Selden sought answers to practical questions: What were Hebrew marriage practices like? What kind of courts did Jews have? What were their laws about property and inheritance? He was also a great advocate of Arabic studies, providing patronage and even funding to scholars like the great 17th-century Arabist, Edward Pococke.

Professor David Norbrook, Director of the Centre for Early Modern Studies, admits that for all Selden’s impact, his books are challenging for today’s readers. But one book, Table Talk, has long been a favourite for its well-honed aphorisms, some jovial and some politically irreverent, such as ‘A king is a thing men have made for their own sakes, for quietness’ sake. Just as in a family one man is appointed to buy meat.’ And he could make forceful interventions as an MP who resisted absolutism and defended the liberties of Oxford University, urging that parliament ‘not destroy, rather than reform, one of the most famous and learned companies of men that was ever visible in the Christian world’.

The motto John Selden inscribed in his books was ‘Freedom above all things’, encapsulating his determination to assert a scholar’s independence and the right to freedom of thought and expression. As an MP, Selden was ready to defend this principle in action. The Selden conference highlighted his continuing relevance in exploring the relations between Western and Eastern cultures. Online publication of his correspondence is now being planned, moving Selden’s legacy from the shelves of the Bodleian to the World Wide Web.


‘Freedom above all things’

Alastair Lack looks at the life of polymath John Selden, who bequeathed much to the Bodleian and represented the University as its MP

Above: Defender of liberties – John Selden
What’s on

Exhibitions
Sacred Faces – Icons in Oxford
Until 22 December
Christ Church Picture Gallery
www.chch.ox.ac.uk/gallery/exhibitions/
forthcoming-current
Icons are used in the Eastern Orthodox Church to focus worshippers’ prayers. Their form and function have hardly changed over the last 15 centuries. This exhibition shows Greek and Russian icons from the Picture Gallery and the Ashmolean Museum which are normally not on view. Among them are St George and the Dragon from around 1500, which has just been cleaned and restored to its former splendour, and two Ashmolean fragments from a large Last Judgement, which are the most important Russian icons preserved in Oxford.

Wilfred Thesiger in Africa
Until 5 June 2011
Pitt Rivers Museum
www.prm.ox.ac.uk/new.html

Marking the centenary of the renowned British traveller and writer Sir Wilfred Thesiger’s birth, this major exhibition shows a wide selection of his photographs, many for the first time. They relate to his life and travels in Africa, and include images from Ethiopia, Sudan, Morocco, Tanzania and Kenya. Also on show is a selection of objects collected by Thesiger and later donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Special events
Geoffrey Hill: ‘How ill white hairs become a fool and jester’
Tuesday 30 November, 5.15pm
Examination Schools
The University’s new Professor of Poetry delivers his inaugural lecture.

Piano recital by Dame Mitsuko Uchida
Tuesday 11 January, 7pm
Sheldonian Theatre
www.ox.ac.uk/events
Beethoven’s Piano Sonata no 27 in E minor; Schumann’s Davidsbündlertänze Op 6; Chopin’s Prelude in C sharp minor Op 45 and Sonata no 3 in B minor Op 58.
At Dame Mitsuko’s request, all proceeds will go to support the Faculty of Music as part of the Oxford Thinking Campaign. Tickets from www.musicatxford.com or Oxford Playhouse, www.oxfordplayhouse.com/ticketsoxford.

Family fun
Christmas Light Night
Friday 26 November, 6–10pm
Oxford University Museum of Natural History and Pitt Rivers Museum
www.prm.ox.ac.uk/new.html

Explore the Natural History collections by lantern light, with live jazz, blues and choral music to welcome the festive season. Experience the Pitt Rivers by torchlight accompanied by sounds from around the world (timed tickets available on the night). Mask making and festive refreshments. All ages welcome, an adult must accompany children. Free entry. In association with Oxford City Christmas Light Night.

Polar Adventure Trail
Sat 11 December – Sun 2 January
Pitt Rivers Museum and Oxford University Museum of Natural History
www.prm.ox.ac.uk/new.html
Journey to the North Pole in search of Santa. What will you need on your adventure and what will you see?

Training & benefits

Discounted delights

As Christmas approaches, why not take advantage of the discounts available with your University Card for buying presents? The shops of the Bodleian, Ashmolean, Pitt Rivers and University Museum of Natural History offer University staff a 10% discount, as do the University of Oxford Shop and the OUP Bookshop. You can also benefit from some special promotions: on 2 December there is a 20% discount on full-price items (except artist originals) at the University of Oxford Shop, and on 26 November and 3 and 10 December there’s an extra 10% off all purchases (except books) at the Pitt Rivers and the University Museum of Natural History.

If you’re thinking of buying a new mobile phone, O2 Open offers University staff – as well as their family and friends – discounts on personal mobile phone contracts and purchases from O2. For more information, visit https://active.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oxonly/cgi-bin/o2redirect.pl. You will need your University single sign-on to access the site.

If you enjoy eating out in Oxford, you can also benefit from a range of discounts at local cafés and restaurants. Show your University Card to receive a 10% discount at The Vaults & Garden Café on Radcliffe Square, Café Coco at Park End Street and Café Rouge and G&D’s on Little Clarendon Street. In the run-up to Christmas, G&D’s is also running a half-price tea and coffee offer before 11am, Monday to Friday. Also on Little Clarendon Street is Strada, which is offering University staff a loyalty card that provides different offers throughout the week, from 2 for 1 meals to free drinks. Visit www.ox.ac.uk/staffnews for more information.

Over the next three months, University staff can also benefit from free membership of the Gourmet Society. From now until the end of February, take advantage of a free Gourmet Society dining card, which provides a range of offers in over 4,000 restaurants across the UK, 100 of which are in Oxfordshire. These range from major chains such as Loch Fyne and Café Rouge to independent restaurants such as Branca and The Big Bang. Offers vary by restaurant, from 2 for 1 meals to 25% off your bill. For more information and to apply for your free dining card, visit www.ox.ac.uk/staffnews.
The fact that a trilogy of books co-authored by Dr Diane Purkiss has recently been translated into French and Czech may not seem unusual for an Oxford academic specialising in English Literature and History – but these particular books are children's novels in which the main character is a monster, and her co-author is not a fellow don, but her son Michael (now age 16), who was eight when they wrote the first book.

'It all started during a summer holiday from school when I was struggling to find something with which to occupy Michael,' Dr Purkiss explains. 'He had been envious of another class who had been given a project to write a book, so we thought we'd give it a go. We'd often read Greek myths together and came to side more and more with the monsters, so we wrote from their point of view. The ideas and the stories were Michael's, I just typed it for him and guided his thoughts by asking him questions.'

Encouraging her son to combat boredom by writing a book is typical of Dr Purkiss' approach to study. 'TH White wrote that the only cure for being sad is to learn something, and that is my experience of academia,' she says. 'Once I set foot in the Bodleian and open a manuscript which I haven't looked at before, I immediately cheer up.'

But to describe Dr Purkiss as a lecturer in English does not reflect the diversity of her research fields. She is currently writing a book about the history of food (to be published by HarperCollins next year) and has produced some interesting findings. 'One thing which has become clear is that taste in itself doesn't really explain trends in the popularity of certain foods. There have been big changes in people's palates over the centuries. In Shakespeare's England, dark flavours experienced in bread, vinegar and strong herbs and spices were dominant. But by the mid-17th century these tastes were suddenly and inexplicably subordinated to fashionable creamy flavours.'

Dr Purkiss adds: 'There have also been shifts in the popularity of certain types of a given food. One of the questions I've looked into is why some varieties of apples are more popular than others. Granny Smiths, Pink Ladies and Spartan apples are in vogue today, but their ancestors are less popular. There is a big apple tree in New College's sports ground whose fruit would have been sought-after years ago, but these days no one ever picks the apples.'

Another long-term project is a study of the representation of the supernatural in Shakespeare's plays: witches, fairies and ghosts. 'Shakespeare didn't live in a more credulous time than ours,' she says, 'but in a time when all kinds of ideas were treated with new scepticism, an era when science and Protestantism jostled with a terror of Catholicism and a peak in executions for witchcraft. It's that conflict which interests me.'

Dr Purkiss is also studying Andrew Marvell's poetry and its survival in manuscripts. Is it difficult to juggle several quite distinctive pieces of research at one time? 'It's the way I've always worked, and it keeps things interesting.'

More information at www.keble.ox.ac.uk/academics/about/dr-d-purkiss
International travel forms part of the everyday fabric of University life. Each year, the University Insurance Office provides cover for approximately 7,000 trips, from academics attending international conferences to research staff and students undertaking field trips and research projects. However, while travel to far-flung destinations may be routine for many, there is still a need to be alert to the health risks associated with overseas travel and to minimise the risk by seeking specialist health advice and treatment before you go.

‘Accidents may be the most common cause of morbidity and mortality in travellers, but the health risks associated with travelling abroad, particularly to remote destinations, shouldn’t be underestimated,’ says Dr Chris Conlon, Consultant in Infectious Diseases at the Nuffield Department of Clinical Medicine. ‘Each year approximately 1,800 British travellers return home with malaria. Most of them catch it because they didn’t take any tablets or didn’t take the right ones for the areas they visited.’ Less serious, but far more common, is travellers’ diarrhoea (TD), which affects between 20% and 60% of overseas travellers. ‘TD is caused by drinking contaminated water or eating contaminated food, particularly food that hasn’t been heated thoroughly or that’s been left out at room temperature,’ explains Chris. ‘You can reduce your risk of TD substantially simply by following good food and water hygiene practices.’

Advice such as this, together with a wide range of travel vaccinations and antimalarials, is dispensed by Chris and his colleague Gillian Duthie at the University Travel Clinic. Based at 10 Parks Road, in the Occupational Health Service department, the clinic provides travel health advice and treatment to staff and eligible students travelling on University business, from clinical medical students undertaking placements abroad to researchers travelling to University field stations in Kenya, Thailand and Vietnam. ‘We assist with some amazing research trips,’ says Gillian, ‘from a research project to tag wild dogs in the Bale Mountains of Ethiopia to George McGavin’s travels to Papua New Guinea to film Lost Land of the Volcano.’

The clinic is held each Monday afternoon but appointments need to be made in advance, preferably at least six weeks before the date of departure. ‘Some vaccines, such as rabies and Japanese Encephalitis, have to be given in several doses and so it takes several weeks to complete the immunisation schedule,’ advises Gillian. ‘Also, people’s immune response varies, depending on the vaccine, the number of doses required and whether you’ve previously been vaccinated against the disease – so you need to allow enough time for the vaccine to become effective.’ Each appointment includes an individual health risk assessment, which takes into account the destination, duration and purpose of the trip, the type of activity being undertaken, and the traveller’s health status. ‘It’s truly a bespoke service,’ says Chris. ‘There’s no such thing as a single immunisation schedule for travellers, even for a group travelling to the same destination.’

Chris has been providing travel health advice and treatment to members of the University for the past 20 years, having taken over responsibility for the clinic from Dr Bent Juel-Jensen, who retired as University Medical Officer and Clinical Lecturer on Communicable Diseases in 1990. ‘Oxford is one of the only universities in the UK to have its own travel clinic,’ he notes, ‘and for that we owe a huge debt of thanks to Dr Juel-Jensen. He was a keen traveller and took a special interest in safeguarding the health of University staff and students who went on overseas expeditions.’ Clearly, this passion for travel medicine is infectious as Chris derives considerable enjoyment from the work he undertakes at the clinic, even after two decades at the helm. ‘In my work at the hospital, I focus on HIV infection and tropical disease, whereas at the travel clinic I see healthy people and try to keep them that way. I really enjoy dealing with both aspects – prevention as well as treatment.’

For more information about the University Travel Clinic, visit www.admin.ox.ac.uk/uohs/at-work/travel

General travel health information is also available on the NHS Fit For Travel website: www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk
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Why am I here?

Terri Adams
Supervisor of the Chemistry Department’s Glass Design and Fabrication Facility

Tell us about your job

I’m based in the Inorganic Chemistry Lab and I’m the only remaining University glassblower – a lone worker.

I manufacture, modify and repair research glassware, and provide help and advice to academic, research and technical staff in the design and development of apparatus. I also give one-to-one instruction on specific glassblowing techniques to those who need this to facilitate their research. I do hot–working with a gas/ oxygen flame, mostly methane but sometimes propane because it has a higher calorific value. The glass is manipulated by hand – requiring a great deal of manual dexterity and patience – or turned using a glassblowing lathe. Most of my work is fabricating apparatus using borosilicate glass (also used for Pyrex ovenware) but I also work quartz and soda glass and a whole range of intermediate glasses to form graded seals. I can fuse glass to some ceramics, tungsten, carbon fibre, silicon, optical windows and some precious metals to create various furnace tubes, electrodes and cells. I also do cold–working; I have apparatus for machining glass and a range of diamond–impregnated drills and blades for cutting off, cutting holes and discs, slotting and grinding flats on glass. In addition, I do stock maintenance, accounts, quote preparation, in situ repair work, glass safety advice and consultations.

What’s the smallest and largest things you’ve ever worked on?
The smallest was producing a carbon–fibre microelectrode. The carbon fibre had to be encased in a glass capillary over a 30mm length, maintaining continuity, and the kind used (Magnatite, diameter 5μm) is made up from short fibres twisted into a thread. It’s susceptible to failing, so has to be handled very carefully. The seal was made whilst under vacuum but the real challenge was getting the carbon fibre into the capillary.

For the biggest and probably the most frightening job, I had to drill a series of 80mm diameter holes around the circumference of a 50 litre round-bottom flask. The flask was so large that it wouldn’t fit under the drill press so the holes were finally drilled ‘free hand’ with the aid of another brave – or equally mad – glassblower. It was quite a sight!

And your most exciting or challenging job?

An academic once asked me if I would be willing to make a wedding gift for him. The piece was to be a man and lady skiing downhill. In those days I didn’t have a home studio, so I was always up for an artistic opportunity and was very keen to accept. A little too keen as it turned out, for after agreeing to the task in front of my then three older gentleman colleagues, the academic added that the man and lady were only to be wearing ski hats, gloves and ski boots! Well, you can imagine what ensued: countless offers of models for the male anatomy along with comments on the effects of cold on the naked human body, etc, etc. Well, I did finish the piece and the recipients were apparently absolutely delighted. My status within the glass workshop also certainly improved – one can but speculate as to why.

Your childhood ambition? And what actually was your first job?

I always wanted to be a forensic scientist, long before programmes like CSI existed, but my first job was a 6am paper round, and later on a couple of afternoons and all day Saturday in a greengrocer’s shop to supplement my pitiful college grant.

So how did you get from there to here?

I first encountered scientific glassblowing at a Bristol University Chemistry Department Open Day. At the time I had an offer of a post as an Assistant Scientific Officer for the Home Office, but the placement was to be in Chorley in Lancashire and wouldn’t be available for 18 months. A short time after being captivated by the glassblowers at Bristol, I came across an advert in the local press for an apprentice scientific glassblower in that department. I decided to go for it, with my Home Office offer still open as a fallback position. I got the job and have never looked back. I have now been glassblowing for 24 years... and enjoy watching CSI!

Finally, what do you enjoy doing outside work?

Glassblowing! Glass fascinates me; its applications are seemingly endless and its contributions to the world are huge. I have a home studio/workshop where I undertake artistic commissions and sculptural work. I’m also an active member of the British Society of Scientific Glassblowers, currently holding the two key posts of Society Librarian and Qualifications Secretary. And I’m also a mum, so there is never a dull moment!