Oriel College

Issue 26 2024

floreat
















1985

Oriel's First Women

Lessons in conflicts | Professor Lyndal Roper | American novelists and Trump | Origins of Oxford

From the Provost

I am pleased to introduce you to this packed issue of *Floreat*, formerly *Oriel News*, celebrating four decades since the arrival of the first cohort of women at Oriel. Of course, women have been a part of Oriel's history since long before 1985. Oriel's first buildings and estate were granted by Eleanor of Castile to James of Spain, who subsequently gifted them to Adam de Brome. Many female benefactors followed Queen Eleanor over the centuries.

The decision to admit women stands as one of the most significant in Oriel's nearly 700-year history. I was a Geography student here a few years before the decision and recall the discussions at women's and men's colleges well.

In this issue, you can also read about Yalda Hakim, our Sky World News friend and benefactor, and James Hill, an Orielensis and Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist for *The New York Times*.

Oriel has changed a great deal from when I was student. There is a much larger graduate and academic research community, greater diversity at all levels and better financial support for students. Nearly 40 per cent of alumni who matriculated after 1985 are women.

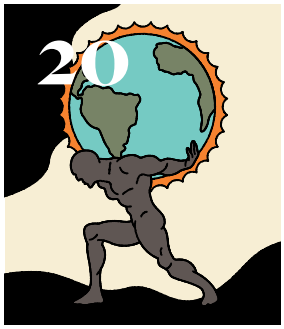
In other ways College is unchanged. When I arrived back forty years later, one of the first things that struck home was a chorus of students belting out "Or-i-e-l" in the square at midnight — only now the chorus included women's voices. Perhaps we are all determined by our buildings, environment and heritage — the link that unites us, whatever our experience here. It feels the same place that I recall first coming to for interviews on a dark, rainy Autumn evening in 1977.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their continued engagement and support of Oriel. As you read through the pages of this magazine I hope you feel, as I do, a deep sense of pride in the accomplishments and spirit of our community, our people and our place.

Floreat Oriel!

Lord Mendoza CBE

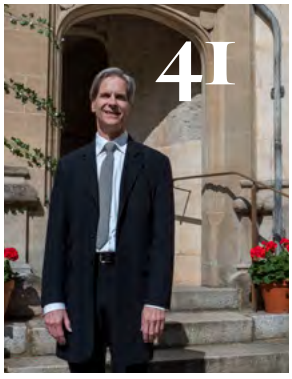
Contents



Cover story

Features

Research



College

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Cover
Oriel College admitted female students for the first time in 1985, *page 26*. In 2024, the first cohort were invited back to Oriel to have their photographs taken. A collage of the portraits is on the front cover of this issue.

Afghanistan

Graduate scholarships offered amid education crisis under the Taliban

The photographs in this section were taken by Modern History graduate James Hill (1985) in 2001. Hill is a photojournalist for *The New York Times*. Read about his experience capturing the US-led war on terror in Afghanistan on page 8.

On page 11, read about Renata Dwan's (1993) thoughts on the current situation in Afghanistan. A former advisor to women students at Oriel, Dwan had an active role in international peace operations in the country during the first half of the 2010s.

BROADCAST JOURNALIST Yalda Hakim partnered with Oriel College in March 2021 to establish a scholarship scheme offering Afghan women the opportunity to study for a one-year master's course at Oxford. Nearly two decades had passed since the Taliban were routed from power. Afghanistan remained one of the worst places in the world for girls to attend school and university but the number of girls in education was on the rise and literacy rates across women of all ages had almost doubled.

Then came August, when the Taliban swept into Kabul and formed a de facto administration. A month later the Ministry of Education issued a statement declaring that schools across the country were to reopen. Only this made no mention of girls, who were told separately not to attend classes. The ban was temporary, Taliban officials insisted. But it has now been over 1,000 days since girls aged 12 or over in the country could receive a formal education. Today, Afghanistan is the only country on the planet where women and girls are banned from receiving an education beyond primary level.

There was a bout of hope in March 2022 when girls' secondary schools were preparing to reopen. But it was short-lived. The same morning that schools were supposed to begin teaching, the Taliban reneged on its promise, and the schools remained closed.

Other restrictions have mounted. Afghan women are barred from public spaces. They are not allowed to travel more than 72 kilometres unaccompanied by a close male relative (or "mahram"). Speaking in public is banned. Singing or reading aloud is banned altogether — even in private. Women must completely veil their bodies.

In December 2022, the Taliban ordered an indefinite ban on Afghan women attending university, blocking even female students with places to study abroad from taking up their offers. Some women and girls have succeeded at enrolling at a university in another country by feigning to be travelling there on a visit. But many have arrived at the airport, student visas in hand, only to be prevented from flying, their hopes and dreams firmly grounded for the foreseeable future.

A young Afghan girl waiting for food to be distributed at a refugee camp in Khoja Bahawuddin. October 2001

Scholarships for Afghan women

The scholarships for female Afghan graduate students at Oriel College are the only scholarships at Oxford where preference is given to Afghan candidates at the selection stage. They are awarded on the basis of academic merit and offer full funding, including a stipend. In the latest admissions cycle eligibility was also broadened for the first time to all female students who are refugees or have lived experience of displacement.

The scholarships were among the first established by the Yalda Hakim Foundation, whose eponymous founder is an Afghan-born, Australian broadcast journalist who has reported from some the most dangerous conflict zones around the world.

Since 2023, Hakim has been the Lead World News Presenter at Sky News. She first received global acclaim when, after the Taliban had captured Kabul, she answered a call live on air from a spokesman for the regime as a presenter for BBC World News. To date, her foundation has supported over 200 displaced Afghans. It was also central to efforts to evacuate at-risk Afghans in the aftermath of the fall of the government in 2021.

"We are excited to be able to offer this once in a lifetime opportunity to a talented woman who had been deprived of this kind of education as a result of the devastation in her country," Hakim said on hearing news of the conferral of Oriel's scholarship in 2024.

She added: "At the same time that we mark this happy milestone for our scholarship recipient, we must remember that millions of young people and especially women and girls continue to be denied an education in Afghanistan." Hadia Azizi, Oriel's current recipient of the Yalda Hakim Scholarship, started a master's degree in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies in October.

Oriel's Provost, Lord Mendoza CBE, said the scholarships "mean brilliant female students who have faced adversity can benefit from the opportunities that study at Oxford provides. My thanks go to Yalda and the inspiring work of the Yalda Hakim Foundation for their tireless work to help those whose futures have been put at risk by the brutality of the Taliban regime." ⏩

Gender apartheid

In the past, Afghan women had relative freedom to study, work and travel, and even run for public office. From the mid-1970s nearly to the close of the last century, women could vote and had equal rights before the law. Women not only attended university but taught as faculty and carried out research. The minimum age of marriage for girls had been raised to 16. Wearing a veil had long since been made voluntary.

In theory, women could choose their careers, how to dress and who to marry. The reality, though, was more complicated. Reforms were strongly resisted by communities in rural areas of Afghanistan where gender segregation and patriarchal customs were engrained parts of local culture. There was a divide between the lives of women in Kabul and the lives of women elsewhere in the country.

The Taliban's first de facto rule began in 1996, after the end of the Second Afghan Civil War. The restrictions on women and girls were severe. Women were banned from working and basically forced to stay at home, and girls could only be educated up to age eight. In public, women could not speak loudly. They also had to be accompanied by a mahram, regardless of how far they were travelling, and wear a veil. Punishments of women and girls who were accused of disobedience were regularly violent.

Women's rights were mostly restored by the new government after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. Conservative attitudes remained prevalent, especially in rural areas, complicating efforts at amelioration. But the number of girls across the country receiving an education was increasing. From 2001 to 2018, according to a review by UNESCO, the number of girls in higher education increased by around 1,700 per cent. By 2021, girls made up four out of 10 primary school pupils.

When they returned to power in 2021, the Taliban offered assurances that girls would be able to learn and women work without fearing for their safety. However, these assurances have been repeatedly contradicted as restrictions have been incrementally reintroduced. Fractures allegedly exist among the Taliban. But there is not much sign of change.

There have been concerted efforts by the Taliban to silence Afghan women's voices in global forums and concerns have been raised about boys and young men adopting the regime's dangerous and regressive ideology. Women in Afghanistan frequently report feelings of helplessness and, according to survey published by the UN, increasing numbers report worsening feelings of anxiety and depression.

Pupils at an elementary school in Khwaja Bahauddin

James Hill (1985)

Shots of war

In 2001, James Hill (1985) accepted an assignment to photograph the early stages of the US-led war on terror in Afghanistan. For his work capturing the conflict he won a Pulitzer Prize, together with fellow photojournalist at *The New York Times* (NYT) Tyler Hick.

Hill's career as a photojournalist began in 1991 in Kyiv, Ukraine, a country that was "about to exist in a different way". Then in 1995 he signed a contract with NYT and began working from their Moscow bureau, covering the conflicts across eastern Europe in the aftermath the Soviet Union's collapse.

When he first arrived into northern Afghanistan from Tajikistan, Hill recalls there being lots of journalists but not much news. "Everyone had come to cover 'the war', except there wasn't really anything happening."

The closest Taliban positions were around an hour away, and Hill would get a jeep there, crossing a "raging torrent of a river" on donkey-back, before catching another jeep to the front on the other side. But for weeks, nothing moved. "There was a bunch of Northern Alliance guys sitting in the same place they'd been sitting for some time, and Taliban guys were in the hills above."

Two women crossing the front to territory controlled by the Northern Alliance to avoid heavy bombing by American planes. November 2001

> “A lot of journalists died when I was there — because they were unlucky. They went down the wrong road at the wrong time”

Then suddenly, there was an attack, coordinated by the US and the Northern Alliance. And the front moved. Hill describes this as having been a “very strange experience”, saying: “You looked at the skies, you saw these F-18s flying around, and you just saw the sort of extraordinarily basic conditions in which most Afghans were living.”

The war in Afghanistan was the first conflict in which Hill had used a digital camera. Processing film would have been practically impossible in the conditions. But digital technology requires electricity, and in rural Afghanistan at the time, the infrastructure was still very rudimentary. He and another journalist hired someone with a pick-up truck outfitted with a petrol generator and travelled with translators and basic provisions.

The security risks were considerable. “You’re travelling by yourself. You’re not armed, obviously. Often you drive down a road, you have no idea who controls that road,” Hill recounts. “And a lot of journalists died when I was there — because they were unlucky. They went down the wrong road at the wrong time.”

He needed his wife to help him understand it, but around 2005 Hill realised he was becoming “more affected” by the scenes that he was photographing and “less able to cope”. His wife had said to him that she felt as though a stranger had walked into the house and he remembers thinking: “OK, I’m obviously not dealing with this in a very good way.” The time had come to step back from war photography.

Having a family also shaped Hill’s decision to stop covering conflicts. His children were too young at the time to ask him why he was going, he says, but adds: “I was asking myself for them, and I often wasn’t coming up with very good reasons.”

The moments which come back to haunt Hill are not the most violent, but rather the moments where the illusion of distance from the events was shattered and he ended up getting closer to the people involved than he’d have liked. ⏩

Hill recalls walking with refugees who were crossing mountains to get into Georgia from Abkhazia in 1993. The temperatures were cold, the route treacherous. He and three other young men came across a man sat beside the road.

Unable to go on, the man asked the group to carry him, and they said no. "He's the guy that comes back to me in the middle of the night. I see that face and hear that man asking us his question. It was a man asking us to save his life."

Hill states that it is a "daily battle" for every photojournalist to "try to keep some grasp on what they are doing" and be objective. "You're representing the truth or what you see as truth," he continues, "the reality that you see in front of you. But in terms of the big picture, of course, it's a very particular reality that you're seeing."

There are also several ethical questions which arise. Hill gives the example of asking, how close is too close? "If you're thrusting your camera in the face of a grieving mother, is that really the right thing to be doing?"

To be with his wife, Hill moved back to Moscow from Rome in 2003. They lived there until 2020, when they moved to Paris. He still has a contract with the NYT and has covered all of the last six Olympics, including the most recent. He also teaches courses on the history of photojournalism at France's prestigious Sciences Po university.

> "You're representing the truth or what you see as truth, the reality that you see in front of you. But in terms of the big picture, of course, it's a very particular reality that you're seeing"

Currently, Hill is organising his archive of 30 years of photographic material — around 4,000 films, 4,000 contact sheets as well as press cards, diaries, books and newspaper clippings — for cataloguing by the Bodleian Libraries. Recollecting his time spent studying on the top floor of the Radcliffe Camera, the former history undergraduate says it's "a real honour" to have his life's work go to the library.

Once the cataloguing side of the project is complete, the Bodleian will curate a selection of the material for research. Hill believes much of the material could be of academic value, saying: "Not many people have a body of work covering Russia, going from the breakup of the Soviet Union to the early '20s and the rise of Putin."

Above: Outside Hazrat Ali Mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. November 2001

Renata Dwan (1993)

Lessons in conflicts

A refugee camp on the outskirts of Mazar-i Sharif in northern Afghanistan as the first snow of the winter falls. December 2001

The current Taliban rule is echoing the first on women's rights but, according to Dr Renata Dwan (1993), Afghanistan's future "must be decided by Afghans".

A former adviser to women students at Oriel College, Dwan had an active role in international peace operations in Afghanistan during the first half of the 2010s. She directed the development coherence unit of the UN's Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, before going on to head the UN's desk on Afghanistan in New York. She has also been the deputy director of Chatham House.

Dwan says there is "no shortage of lessons" from the international community's two decades of intervention in Afghanistan, beginning in 2001 and concluding when the Taliban returned to power after the withdrawal of US troops in 2021.

First, she argues that there was a lack of clarity on the strategic goals of western intervention — whether external actors were supposed to be engaging in a counterterrorism, counterinsurgency or statebuilding project — and not enough thought regarding how different goals interacted.

In some cases, Dwan claims, goals were at "profound odds". The US military presence relied on local warlords, in part to minimise troop presence and reduce costs in light of the parallel intervention in Iraq. Many of these militia leaders had been recipients of US financial and political support for resisting Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. But after the Taliban were routed from power in 2001, they competed for power and resources, emboldened by American support, complicating efforts to establish a stable political order and a functioning state.

Dwan also argues that the emphasis on establishing a centralised state, according to the Constitution of Afghanistan that was adopted in 2004, may have intensified rivalries among local elites. Afghanistan is a tapestry of ethnic groups with distinct cultures. Breaking from the existing social order, Dwan says, and expecting those diverse groups to rally around central institutions in the span of a few years reflected a "fundamental misunderstanding" of Afghan society.

The motivation for strong central institutions reflected efforts to overcome Afghanistan's legacy of regional tensions and fragmented politics. But in practice the tactic had the opposite effect. Dwan continues: "It made the political prize at the centre the ultimate goal, thereby upping the ante for competition over central state control." ⏩

The first day of liberation of the town of Taloqan in north-eastern Afghanistan by the Northern Alliance

For Dwan, who is now a special advisor to the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology at UN Headquarters in New York, a sustainable political resolution in Afghanistan needs to be "driven, accepted and legitimised" by a majority of Afghans. Afghan society is deeply conservative but the Taliban regime is not necessarily representative of Afghans as a whole and many are fearful of expressing opposition. Most are focused on survival.

A political order that is legitimised by a majority of Afghans is unlikely to resemble a western liberal democracy, Dwan says, but adds that it would be inappropriate for external actors to interfere: "It's extremely patronising and fairly undemocratic for us to advocate for certain countries not to have the choice to make sovereign decisions."

This is not say that external actors should not attempt to have any constructive role at all in Afghanistan for Dwan. While many Western governments continue to rule out official recognition of the Taliban or formal engagement, she argues for a pragmatic approach whereby external actors engage with the regime on specific issues depending on certain, negotiated, conditions being met. She says that short term solutions are "not realistic".

"We need to shift focus away from refusing to deal with the regime, which pushes an aid-dependent society into further destitution," she explains, "to thinking about how to incentivise the regime toward more inclusive and rights-respecting governance.

"Such an approach would say, we're prepared to engage with you and we're prepared to look at the provision of development assistance or releasing some of the reserves of your central bank in return for progress on a set of agreed benchmarks."

The Taliban are not homogeneous, and nor are they are cohesive on every issue. Noting that the issue of women's rights has become a "symbol of sovereignty" for the Taliban and that "the more the West seems to push the issue, the more the Taliban seem to push back," Dwan advocates for "more pragmatic and creative" rhetoric around gender.

She suggests, for example, "doubling down" on the economic argument for women and girls studying and working. Achieving economic sustainability and self-sufficiency is a key priority for the Taliban. Insofar as that is the case, they cannot afford to bar half the population from contributing on the basis of gender. "Practically," Dwan says, "the sustainability of the social order envisaged by the Taliban requires women doctors and educators."

Professor Lyndal Roper

Things have changed but the last part of change is the hardest

Professor Lyndal Roper is the first woman to hold the Regius Chair in History at the University of Oxford. What follows is an edited transcript of a speech she delivered at an event organised by the Faculty of History and Oriel College to celebrate the Chair's 300th anniversary.

My first encounter with the University of Oxford came when I was interviewed for a junior research fellowship in the middle of a snowstorm. I opened the door and entered a room of what seemed like 40 men, though I now know it can could only have been about 25.

Even stranger was the interview itself. I was writing my doctorate on women and the Reformation in Augsburg, but the interviewer asked only about the family, and about the precise composition of the cloth woven in Augsburg. The word "women" was never mentioned, still less the word gender. Though I didn't understand it at the time, he was trying to help me. "Women," I soon learnt, was not a polite word. It was safer to write about the family; that was at least a serious subject.

Things have certainly changed a good deal since then. Now at least half the Faculty list gender amongst their research interests, and women feature in just about every course. Even the guaranteed exam question, "Were things better or worse for women in this period?" is giving way to questions that are no longer predictable and are difficult to answer.

I am the first and so far the only woman Regius Professor of History in this country, and when I took up the post I was also the only woman Statutory Chair in our Faculty. Now, of our 13 Statutory Chairs, six are women.

When I was a JRF at Oxford in the mid-1980s there were some outstanding women historians — Gillian Sutherland, Janet Howarth, Menna Prestwich, Felicity Heal, Jose Harris, Joanna Innes, to name a few — but the Women's History Seminar was founded and run by postgraduates. Women historians, famous and remarkable as they were, were a minority and they were literally mostly around the edges of the university, in the women's colleges.

In 2011 there were hardly any women on our major academic committees, and I along with our academic administrators often found ourselves as the only women in the room. There was not a single picture of a woman in the Faculty; now there are several and our common room is named after Joan Thirsk, who did so much to establish agrarian history, while we have a seminar room named after Merze Tate, the first African American woman to win a degree from the University of Oxford. Women are no longer unusual: we make up about 40 per cent of the current permanent staff. This is a really quite remarkable transformation in a very short period of time.

And it is extraordinary. I could not have applied to be an undergraduate or even a postgraduate at the college where I later worked as a tutor and I could not have been a postgraduate at Oriel.

The sexually segregated world of Oxford shaped the formation of most of the academics who taught History, and it shaped their expectations of women too, for both men and for women themselves. Only now is the last of that generation leaving, and soon it will be hard to remember what it was like; even I have trouble believing that it really can have been as bad as I remember. Was it really true that all the Senior Common Room notices in my college were in the male toilets? (Yes, they were.) ⏩

Barbara Savage has recently told the story of Merze Tate's intellectual life, a woman who became a leading expert on international relations and who travelled incessantly, remarkable for her curiosity and for her ability to conceptualise entire fields. Yet I found it hard to read about her experience in the Oxford of the 1930s.

Barbara presents it positively, but I could not help reading it as a story of how Oxford tutors tried to reduce that powerful ambition and get her to tackle "more manageable" subjects. Though some claim she got the intellectual skills and tools she needed from Oxford, she seems to me to have been formed more by the black scholarly community of universities like Howard and by her own powerful intellect and sense of self, which survived a real battering at Oxford. The terms on which women and people of colour get admitted to elite institutions can damage their creativity, it seems to me, unless they are very determined.

When a male institution admits women, it usually goes through three stages. First, it lets in one or two women. Those women, young and junior, can feel very isolated, and they are treated as honorary men. It's hard to hang onto your intellectual creativity in situations like that. Then comes a second period when more women arrive, until there is a group of you, perhaps a quarter to a third, and some get pregnant and have children. Special arrangements have to be made.

Now the institution feels it has reached "gender parity," and that the women question has been solved; if women are still not equal, that's because they choose not to do committee work, decide they don't want promotion, do not focus on publishing and choose to put energy into their families. Inequalities, the institution says, will be overcome just as these women move through the system and over time, the good ones gain promotion.

This is the state it is most difficult to move forward from, because it seems that the institution has improved, as indeed it has. But this is the point from which change is most difficult, and where what is wrong is hard to articulate. I'd like to identify three things, among many, that still feel problematic.

First, the job of being a tutor at Oxford is one of the most rewarding there is: you see truly remarkable young people change and grow and you can work with them as individuals, witnessing those moments when they suddenly have a new idea, or discover a strength they didn't realise they had. Many of them keep in touch with you for years after; I'm still in touch with students I taught twenty years ago.

But it can also be absolutely knackering. I notice that many of my former students are leaving academia altogether. The advent of women has perhaps meant that expectations about the kind of emotional and intellectual support that a tutor can offer have massively increased.

Tutors are super self-critical, and we no longer wear the job lightly in the way that some in a previous generation did, or appeared able to do. It's really hard to combine caring responsibilities with being a fellow and tutor; hard not to work at weekends, difficult to get to seminars, hard to regain a sense of intellectual creativity after the loss of self that often comes with caring for others.

If you are not a carer, it is just as hard to defend a space that is yours for fun, or for thinking. We've been good at providing maternity leave, parental leave, support for those returning to work after a period of care leave. I think we need to look hard at what the job involves, how it can be made less overwhelming, and more manageable.

Outgoing Chancellor of the University of Oxford Lord Patten and Regius Professor in History Lyndal Roper
Photo by Jared Smith/Oriel College

Professor Henrike Lähnemann calling guests to dinner
Photo by Jared Smith/Oriel College

Second, the arrival of women must also change the kind of history we teach and do. This doesn't mean that women don't do political history, history of war, intellectual history or economic history — of course they do, and our Faculty includes many wonderful examples of people who are producing outstanding work in these fields.

But we need to represent a wider array of kinds of history too, and this includes history of race, history of the environment, material culture and much more; and these subjects need to be taken just as seriously as more traditional kinds.

And this is linked to what we teach. Is it really right to train historians to present powerful incisive argument even at the expense of evidence? Do we really want to value trenchant interpretation over balanced weighing of opinion?

Why do nearly all my women students, and many men, say that they suffer from imposter syndrome? Or what another called 'self-dulling'?

Not just women but men too might be liberated if we could step back from this — and I include myself here, because I often feel that as a tutor, what I'm really good at is teaching women how to think more like men.

Thirdly, gender itself, along with race and social class, needs to be taken seriously as a subject for thinking about. It's more than just adding on women or people of colour or queer people.

This may mean expanding gender, and not assuming that it must be a binary category, as so many of my generation, and I myself, believed.

All sides need to be part of these discussions, including those who think gender is a binary category and those who want to include women's distinct physical and social experiences in the history we write; I hope very much that we will be able to do that with everyone respecting each other.

Serious discussions can bring pain, for issues people care passionately about are often upsetting. They are conversations I temperamentally want to avoid, and yet I know they are essential if we are to connect with what young people of all genders care about, and with the disruptive, unsettling power of ideas, which is why I so much enjoy being part of this Faculty.

The last part of change is always the hardest. But I am confident that this Faculty, which I have seen transform itself utterly since that day I first saw a room full of men, can do it.

And I know that it was the collective determination of all those, men and women, who have made up the Faculty over the last century since women were admitted, which started that transformation.

Despite all the challenges we face now as historians, that determination will bring us a history faculty that is truly and richly diverse, both in who it comprises and what subjects it includes, in teaching and research.

Photo by Natilyn Photography on Unsplash

Fact and fiction

Why did American novelists write so much about Trump?

DR NICHOLAS GASKILL, TUTORIAL FELLOW IN ENGLISH

"Reality in America, Redux: On Trump Panic Fiction," by Dr Nicholas Gaskill, has been published in American Literary History

On Wednesday 9 November 2016, America and the world awoke to news of the election of President Donald Trump. Many liberal Americans expressed disbelief. As did some Republicans who had voted for Trump not believing it would amount to anything. American reality splintered and cracked. A new reality had come knocking.

Deliberate or not, promulgating disinformation and "alternative facts," Trump dealt in fictions more than most politicians during his campaign. In a conversation about his current research, Tutorial Fellow in English Dr Nicholas Gaskill noted that caused concern among novelists. When the problem with politics is a surfeit of fictions, surely the remedy was more and better facts. But where did that leave fiction writers?

Gaskill, who joined Oriel College in 2018, observed how, in the aftermath of Trump's 2016 election, many novelists were grappling with questions around the fractured nature of US reality and the political effects of fictions by explicitly staging Trump's election in their work. His research attempts to understand this literary phenomenon.

According to the Tutorial Fellow, while American novelists are no strangers to worrying about their dealings with American reality, the wave of novels depicting the accession of Trump to the presidency stands apart from what had come before.

Before, American novelists had worried about American reality because it seemed to throw up fantastical narratives beyond their imaginations. The worry was in effect a technical one about how they could possibly conjure up fictions as interesting as American reality is anyway.

Gaskill stipulated that Trump's election heightened this worry, but also, because of Trump's loose grasp of truth, compounded it with a further concern about American reality getting lost altogether.

"Something about the blatant lies propagated by the Trump administration pushed novelists to want to ground readers in reality and be absolutely clear on distinguishing fiction from fact," he said. "And yet that desire ran against the actual workings of novels, which rely on fictionality and the indirections of art."

Gaskill's view is that the novels staging Trump's election should be read as attempts to comprehend the events of 2016 by taking the realities of Republican voters seriously, in order to figure out what makes them feel so valid.

One of the five novels he is focusing on is *Homeland Elegies*, by Ayad Akhtar. "The key Trump voter in the novel is the narrator's father, who is a Pakistani immigrant, somebody you wouldn't expect to vote for Trump," Gaskill explained. "A lot of the novel is his son asking, 'Why did you vote for Trump?' and trying to make sense of that action in the broader context of American politics."

By reacting to Trump's election through their work, American novelists were effectively cashing in on their knowledge of what gives fictions a sense of reality to give an insight into why Americans bought into Trump's edifice of alternative facts, Gaskill argued.

For the Tutorial Fellow, the novels also highlight some of the shortcomings of thinking about 2016 solely in terms of facts and how they get distorted. "That way of thinking suggests that the way to engage Republican voters is to say, 'Let's show you the real facts,' but that didn't work," he said.

"I think the approach of instead asking, 'What are the conditions that make your position feel so real and live?' is more promising, because it might give us some practical orientation as to what is happening when something that is objectively false, objectively untrue, feels very real for some."

Gaskill's optimism about the latter approach reflects his sympathy with the convictions of American pragmatists like William James, who see literature and the arts as effective ways of clarifying elements of human experience which elude other, scientific modes of analysis.

Gaskill's research on the literary reaction to the election of Trump forms a part of a bigger project about the ideas of reality and aesthetic construction which have shaped American fiction over the last century. His first book, *Chromographia*, looks at the ways that US writers imagined colour experience between 1880 and 1930.

Illustration by
Dowon Jung (2021)

Extraterritorial obligations

A human rights angle to climate litigation

LARA IBRAHIM (2022), DPHIL BAME LAW SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

The world's wealthiest countries are disproportionately to blame for climate change but less developed countries are generally the ones being devastated by its worst effects.

There are increasingly calls for richer nations whose economic security was largely founded on burning fossil fuels to compensate those who are most vulnerable to the consequences.

The argument goes: those who contributed the most to the climate crisis should incur the costs of any damages caused by it, even when they occur in other countries.

A related but different argument then claims that rich polluter countries have obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions because of the security risks foisted on other countries by rising global temperatures.

But a challenge is, how can these obligations be enforced, and what are they exactly, and how can states be held accountable when they fail to meet climate goals?

Lara Ibrahim (2022), a doctoral student in Law at Oriel College, argues that human rights law offers one possible route to clarifying the extraterritorial obligations of states in regards to climate change mitigation.

International courts and tribunals are starting to recognise that climate change "actively violates" human rights, the legal scholar says. However, there is so far very little precedent for cases about the obligations of states in regards to the transboundary damages of climate change.

A couple of decisions by courts have recognised such extraterritorial obligations. But in one of the largest cases to link climate change to human rights yet, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) refused to back them.

In the case, six young Portuguese nationals claimed that their rights had been infringed due to the effects of climate change, not least wildfires and extreme heat.

The top human rights court accepted that climate is a "global phenomenon" but rejected a proposal by the applicants to revise its standard interpretation of extraterritorial jurisdiction, and the case was dismissed.

The ECtHR's ruling was a slight blow to climate litigation hopefuls, but there are other ways to clarify the obligations states have to one another, Ibrahim says.

Advisory opinions, despite not being legally binding, can exert pressure on states failing to adhere to agreements and treaties, while providing guidance for governments with the right intentions.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), the judicial organ of the United Nations, has been requested to form an advisory opinion on the obligations of states in respect of climate change.

The scope of the opinion is unprecedentedly broad, covering not only the obligations of states to protect current and future generations from the effects of climate change, but also the legal consequences faced by states that cause environmental harm, either by action or failure to act.

Ibrahim, who was a Judicial Fellow at the UN court for the 10 months to June 2024, and was directly involved in reviewing submissions and carrying out relevant legal research, states that the breadth of the opinion is both a positive and a negative.

"It is positive," she says, "as it means we can hope for a final opinion that clarifies states' obligations with respect to climate change more broadly.

"But this broadness is also a negative, as it means the court may not engage deeply with obligations under international human rights law, for example."

Ibrahim adds that she hopes the ICJ will engage fully with these obligations and recognise that "climate change is a human rights issue".

"This will bring us a step closer to achieving climate justice for countries disproportionately affected by climate change," she explains.

For the advisory opinion, the ICJ has received 91 submissions from states and organisations. This is the highest number of written statements ever to be filed in advisory proceedings before the court.

Moreover, a number of submissions are from low-lying island states, such as Kiribati and the Solomon Islands, whose populations are among the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, particularly rising sea levels.

Many of these low-lying island states are accessing the Court for the first time, says Ibrahim, adding that their "ability to participate and be heard at a forum such as the ICJ is significant in and of itself."

Ibrahim was a Judicial Fellow at the ICJ during an extraordinarily busy year, when the number of requests for provisional measures, which are classed as urgent by the Court, was the highest it has ever been.

A particularly salient request that Ibrahim worked on was made by South Africa as part of its case against Israel. The post-apartheid nation accused Israel of violating the Genocide Convention during the war in Gaza and asked the court to order measures to prevent further abuses.

Delivering its ruling, the ICJ called for Israel to comply with international law and desist from acts of genocide targeted toward Palestinians, but rejected South Africa's request to order an immediate suspension of military operations.

Historically, the UN's judicial organ has mainly focused on resolving territorial boundary disputes. However, when Ibrahim was a Judicial Fellow at the Court, no such disputes were brought forth.

The legal scholar explains how her time at the ICJ left her with "a renewed sense of hope for the future of the Court in settling international disputes, but also a realistic outlook of its role within the current international legal system".

"It provided me with a unique insight into the work of the Court which is, surprisingly, a small organisation that not many people get to experience the inner workings of."

Gender gaps in health and STEM

DR LINA HACKER, AGAINST BREAST CANCER JUNIOR RESEARCH FELLOW

Illustration by Dowon Jung (2021)

THE GENDER HEALTH gap exists but, according to Dr Lina Hacker, a Junior Research Fellow funded by Against Breast Cancer, progress is starting to be made to close it.

Certain health conditions primarily or uniquely affect women. These conditions can be debilitating, says Hacker, who was a delegate at the UN's 2024 session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). But despite their prevalence, very little is known about them.

Examples range from reproductive health disorders, such as endometriosis or polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), to certain autoimmune diseases, mental health disorders and cancer types — breast cancer among them.

In recent years, more funding has been funnelled into research to understand gender-specific health issues and develop effective treatments, Hacker says. Some in the field claim still not enough. Much remains unknown, although there are signs that the aetiology of some conditions is starting to come into focus.

The gender health gap also emerges when the findings of clinical trials involving predominantly men are generalised to women, Hacker explains.

When women's unique pathologies for diseases are not fully understood by clinicians, the likelihood of misdiagnosis increases — sometimes leading to delayed or incorrect treatment.

Also, when women are not represented in clinical trials, the specific ways by which they metabolise and respond to certain drugs can be missed, possibly resulting in women receiving suboptimal treatment compared to their male counterparts.

The gender bias in health data is now widely acknowledged. The women's health plan introduced by the UK government in 2022, for example, recognises the existence of a data gap for how conditions that affect both men and women impact women differently.

However, even if women are properly represented in clinical trials, countering decades of research that has assumed the male body to be the default will take a considerable amount of time.

At the 2024 CSW session Hacker also attended workshops about a second gender gap: the proportional underrepresentation of women and girls in STEM disciplines.

In 2023 women accounted for just 35 per cent of graduate students in STEM-related fields worldwide, according to the UN. The higher up the ladder of seniority in STEM fields one looks, the fewer women.

Hacker suggests that stereotypes and societal norms can deter women and girls from studying STEM subjects at university, or progressing into careers in STEM fields.

"I think it's important to have role models," she adds, explaining the influence her doctoral supervisor at Cambridge, Professor Sarah Bohndiek, had on her confidence. "I always saw her dealing with things very calmly and confidently, and I would think, 'I want to be like that'."

Challenges remain, Hacker says, but continued efforts to recognise and address gaps in healthcare and STEM are "essential steps" toward creating a future where women's needs are fully understood and addressed.

Hacker joined Oriel from the Cancer Research UK institute in Cambridge where she was a physics doctoral student. She is developing new imaging methods to measure oxygenation in breast tumours.

Breast cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in women in the UK. Though it can also occur in men.

One imaging technology that Hacker is helping develop called photoacoustic imaging can enable scientists to measure oxygenation and vessel structure without contrast agents.

All tumours are slightly hypoxic, meaning they have lower oxygen levels than would be expected of healthy tissue. So by detecting anomalies in oxygenation, Hacker says, clinicians might be able to use the technology to detect cancer in "very early stages".

Specifically, the technology can be used to measure variations in oxygenation. For a long time, it was assumed that tumours have constant and uniform levels of hypoxia.

But recent research has found that it is a dynamic phenomenon, with oxygenation changing both over time and also spatially in different parts of the same tumour.

More variation in oxygenation within a tumour over time has also been linked to greater resistance to specific treatments, Hacker states, explaining how this means photoacoustic imaging, which allows doctors to "see" hypoxia in tissues, could be used to predict the responses of tumours to different clinical strategies.

Hacker says she feels "very grateful" to receive funding from Against Breast Cancer to carry out her research. "I have a lot of amazing collaborators, without whom the progress we have made so far wouldn't have happened," she adds.

Illustration by Dowon Jung (2021)

Climate adaptation and mitigation

A disability lens

PATRICIA MATIVO (2023)

AROUND 16 PER CENT of the global population have some form of disability. They are disproportionately affected by climate change, according to evidence given by the United Nations, and four times more at risk of death than their counterparts. Additionally, an estimated 80 per cent of persons with disabilities live in developing countries. Many of these countries are among the worst affected by rising temperatures, severe floods, droughts and other extreme weather events.

A recent graduate, Patricia Mativo (2023), who completed a master's course in Environmental Change and Management, studies the topic of climate change adaptation and mitigation through a disability lens.

Not enough is being done to involve persons with disabilities in conversations about climate change, states Mativo, who was the first scholar to join Oriel College with full funding from the Africa Oxford Initiative. She is set to be followed by three more scholars by 2026.

Persons with disabilities are among those most vulnerable to climate change, but so often governments fail to deliver adaptative and mitigative strategies that heed accessibility outcomes, Mativo says.

Also, solutions to climate change that do not involve persons with disabilities risk obstructing their ability to meet critical needs during climate disasters.

Without alternative provisions, for example, banning cars from city centres to minimise air pollution can near exclude individuals with mobility challenges from certain areas.

Input from persons with disabilities in decision making can ensure that solutions to climate change are fully inclusive, argues Mativo.

And the converse also holds true, she says: a lack of diversity in decision making can lead to outcomes that exclude certain groups from accessing resources or services.

Focusing on Nairobi, Kenya, Mativo has conducted interviews and held focus groups to explore how persons with disabilities in developing countries have been involved in climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, as well as what persons with disabilities can bring to these conversations, and how existing strategies are working for them.

"Nairobi is very much exposed to these strategies, so if there's going to be a place where I'm going to critique whether they are working or not, it's going to be Nairobi," she says.

The research is meant to highlight the importance of inclusive voices in climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts through sharing the personal experiences of individuals with disabilities.

Regularly, conferences about climate change do not give persons with disabilities the same opportunities to contribute as other vulnerable demographics, such as women and indigenous populations, according to Mativo.

And when persons with disabilities are included, she adds, this is often "not in the right way". For example, conferences may forget to consider accessibility needs or reasonable adjustments.

Among the social groups Mativo spoke to for her research were persons with mobility challenges, visual impairments and hearing impairments, and the carers of individuals with especially profound disabilities, who may be unable to self-advocate.

The recent graduate also interviewed persons with disabilities who work for the government of Kenya, including in sectors indirectly affected by climate change, such as employment, research and innovation, and sexual and reproductive health.

The majority of participants "echoed how neglected and excluded" they have been from conversations about climate change. Many also reported being denied access to critical relief, including food, healthcare, and essential services, after disasters.

Even persons with disabilities in government roles, Mativo has found, have a hard time dealing with stigma and ensuring their accessibility needs are met, detracting from their ability to have their voices heard.

Eddington Medal

Cold dark matter

PROFESSOR PEDRO FERREIRA, EMERITUS FELLOW

Professor Pedro Ferreira has been awarded the Eddington Medal by the Royal Astronomical Society for his investigations "of outstanding merit" into the Lambda Cold Dark Matter model of the universe.

The Lambda Cold Dark Matter model is based on Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, and the laws of physics, and accounts for a large number of cosmological observations.

It proposes that the universe contains two key ingredients other than ordinary matter: cold dark matter, an invisible glue theorised to be responsible for holding galaxies together, giving the universe its structure, and dark energy, driving the acceleration of the expansion of the universe.

By studying cosmic microwave background radiation, which contains information about the very early universe and the Big Bang, Ferreira helped to establish the Lambda Cold Dark Matter model as the standard cosmological model which it is today.

Now an Emeritus Fellow Ferreira was a Tutorial Fellow in Physics at Oriel College for the 16 years to 2016. He is a leading figure among astrophysics, recognised for his pioneering work on the Big Bang and the large-scale structure of the universe.

His most recent work has focused on constructing possible models of dark matter and dark energy which can be formulated as hypotheses and tested.

While cosmologists are nearly unanimous in their acceptance of the Lambda Cold Dark Matter model, there is uncertainty, and disagreement, as to what exactly dark matter and dark energy are.

Investigating the dark universe has led Ferreira in recent years to question whether our confidence in certain core assumptions about the universe might be misplaced.

The Royal Astronomical Society stated in its official announcement of the conferment of the Eddington Medal that, alongside his research, Ferreira "has made major contributions to theoretical cosmology as a discipline, mentoring an extraordinary number of new leaders in the field."

Ferreira said that he feels he was "unbelievably lucky to land at Oxford" in his early 30s.

"The quality and creativity of my colleagues and the excellence of students and young researchers were and are such that I feel that I have been riding a wave for the last 25 years," he added.

Photo by Valentin Bolder on Unsplash

Elections and AI

Legal tools to redress harms of deepfakes

HAYDEN GOLDBERG (2023), MSC SOCIAL SCIENCE OF THE INTERNET

Illustration by Dowon Jung (2021)

OVER 2024, half of the world's population in more than 70 countries will have had the opportunity to vote in elections as many have touted it as the as the biggest global election year in history.

Hayden Goldberg (2023) was following the elections more than most. During the year he was completing a master's degree at the Oxford Internet Institute — a research department established the same year as Wikipedia to investigate the societal opportunities and challenges created by internet technologies — studying the use of deepfakes in electoral contexts.

Goldberg long ago anticipated that deepfakes could degrade democratic processes. "The central fear," he said, "is that they will be used as a form of disinformation to change people's opinion, especially at the last minute of an election when there isn't time for the media or candidates to fact check or otherwise rebut what's been fabricated."

Most US election cycles this century, new challenges have arisen out of emerging technologies, Goldberg added. "Social media campaigning first emerged in 2008 and in 2016 there was foreign interference. Then outright disinformation became a major problem in 2020." He predicted that deepfakes would be the main technological challenge during the 2024 US election cycle.

In his master's thesis, Goldberg studied regulatory solutions to the possible harms of deepfakes. He believes that existing legal tools and laws are insufficient to address all of the harms, necessitating the need for new legislation.

"This global year of elections is providing numerous case studies for the harms deepfakes can cause as well as information about how best to regulate them," he said.

Albeit less apocalyptic about AI than some, Goldberg is concerned about subtler dangers posed by the technology relating to electoral administration, such as those regarding signature verification and matching.

He said: "Young people do not have a regular, defined signature, so when signatures get validated with AI models, young people are flagged at higher rates than other age brackets.

"Along with the challenges posed by Voter ID laws, this is one of the foremost ways young people can become disenfranchised."

Overall though, Goldberg is sanguine about AI technology. He sees AI being used to bring people into the democratic space who would otherwise not be a part of it, he said. And anyway, research suggests political microtargeting using large language models is less effective than was once thought.

What about current attempts to regulate AI? The EU's Artificial Intelligence Act which it passed in 2023 is a promising start to regulating the technology, said Goldberg. In regards to deepfakes specifically, the new legislation mandates developers to disclose to users if the content is artificial, along with how it has been generated.

Goldberg said he is hopeful that this will mitigate people taking information at face value. However, he added that he worries that with deepfakes still unfamiliar and startling startlingly accurate to most, the scope for them to spread disinformation is still very high.

Goldberg now plans to attend law school, before going on to work in some combination of AI, privacy and cybersecurity law and election law. His ambitions are cross-cutting and he explained how he envisions public policy, economic interests and government as three points interconnecting points of a triangle.

"Law is critical to all three points, and I'd like to be somewhere in the middle of the triangle, serving as a translator and convener, bringing people together and helping to inform discussions and debates," he added.

Cover story

Oriel's First Women





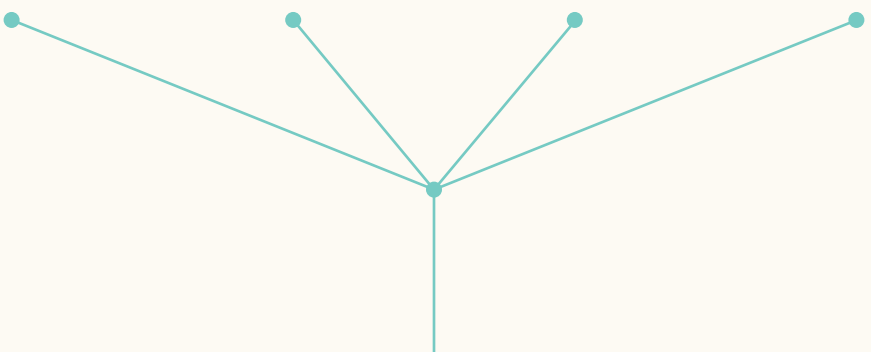










On 23 May 1984, the Governing Body of Oriel College voted to admit women. Historically all-male colleges had been progressing in the direction of co-education already for two decades, the first admitting women a decade earlier. Sir Zelman Cowen, then Oriel's Provost, described the vote as "clear and decisive".

By 1985, Oriel was home to 24 female students. By most accounts, the year that began with the arrival of the first cohort of female students was all but remarkable. The fabric of the College was broadened but essentially the same.

Before the end of the decade, both the JCR and MCR had elected female presidents. The first women were elected as Fellows in the early 1990s. In 2013, Moira Wallace OBE became the first female, and 51st, Provost.

Today, Oriel has about as many male students as it does female students. Of the 45 Governing Body Fellows, 33 per cent are women. This is lower than it ought to be, but a very notable improvement on two and a half decades earlier.

1329

First woman remembered as a benefactor

Before her death in 1290, Queen Eleanor of Castile granted a tenement — "la Oriole" — to her nephew James of Spain. Then, in 1329, James gave the property to Adam de Brome's new college. As a token of gratitude, de Brome and the first Fellows agreed to remember James and his aunt in their prayers as benefactors.

Both also received fraternity of the College. Had Eleanor been alive at the time, this would have conferred similar privileges to an Honorary Fellowship. The late historian Jeremy Catto claims, accordingly, that Eleanor can be considered the first woman ever to be admitted to an Oxford college.

1658

First named female staff member

Although women worked at Oriel from at least 1409, they are unnamed in the records until 1658, when Widow Cuckoo is credited for cleaning the chapel with her husband Hugh.

1838

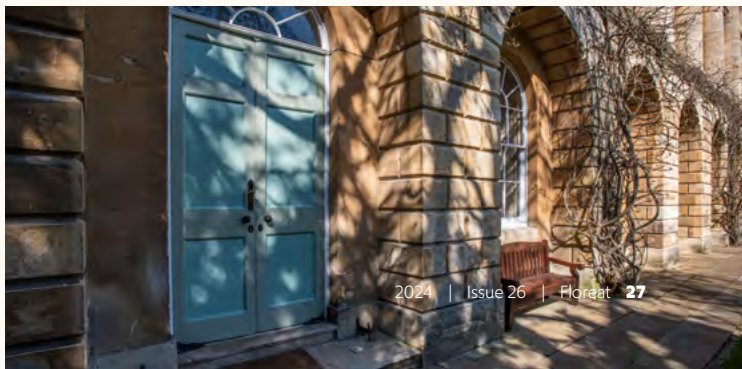
First Visitor who was a woman

As the first female British monarch after 1726, Queen Victoria was the first female official Visitor of Oriel College.

In the original statutes of 21 January 1326, the Crown is described as Oriel's official Visitor. However, new statues sealed months later, on 23 May 1326, transferred this power to the Bishop of Lincoln.

The Bishop of Lincoln retained the Visitorship until 1726, when, amid infighting between Fellows and the Provost, the role was restored, by court ruling, to King George I (and thereafter to his successors). »

> "Eleanor can be considered the first woman ever to be admitted to an Oxford college"



Laura Spindler, Tina Jackson, Sarah Phillippo, Beth Harrison
Vicky Levy, Victoria Connolly, Claire Murphy, Karen Lock
Karin Mochan, Michele Hare, Laura Ashley-Timms, Sara Snell, Bernadette Anderko
Deborah Smith, Helen Powell, Maryanne Harvey, Nell Butler

1915

First female student residents

The First World War erupted across Europe and Somerville Hall, a women's college, was turned by the War Office into a hospital, leaving students there without residence. Meanwhile a majority of students from Oriel College (three-quarters of them) enlisted to join the military.

An agreement was reached between the two colleges. Students from Somerville Hall were provided accommodation in St Mary Hall Quad, now Third Quad, becoming Oriel's first female student residents. A brick wall was constructed obstructing entry to the rest of the College.

In spring 1919, a coalition of students from Oriel resolved to break through the wall, to pay court to their female guests. The night after the incident, the Provost of Oriel College, Lancelot Ridley-Phelps, and the Principal of Somerville Hall, Emily Penrose, sat guarding the wall, defenders of the divide.

Oriel's guests headed home in July 1919. They discovered, on arrival, a notice in their dining hall: "Officers are requested not to throw custard at the walls".

1976

First reigning monarch to visit

Despite the role's title, being the Visitor of a college doesn't always mean visiting. Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, though, visited Oriel five times during her 70-year reign. She is the first reigning monarch to have visited on record.

Her Late Majesty being introduced to the Regius Professor in History, Lyndal Roper, by Provost Sir Derek Morris, 2013

Her Late Majesty also visited once before acceding to the throne, in 1948, when she met Mr Testudo, the eminent tortoise-mascot. A photograph of the encounter was printed by newspapers worldwide. Stood ahead of Provost Norman Clark, a 22-year old Princess Elizabeth looks down at Mr Testudo, smiling.

Queen Elizabeth II last visited Oriel in 2013. Today, the Visitor is His Majesty King Charles III.

1985

First cohort of female students

The 1984 vote to admit women triggered a change to statues and the first cohort of female students arrived at Oriel in October 1985. They were 24 in total: 21 undergraduates, two graduates and one PGCE student.

All Oxford colleges now admitted women, when less than a century earlier they could not be conferred degrees at all. But despite the historical significance of the milestone, the arrival of women at Oriel was not extremely disruptive. For a long time the University had already been combining teaching for men and women at the faculty level.

Vanessa Bailey (left) and Victoria Wiggins (right), two members of Oriel's first cohort of women, have sadly passed away

The portraits of the first cohort of female students will be unveiled in autumn 2025. Photo by Jared Smith/Oriel College

In 2024, the first cohort of female students were welcomed back to Oriel to have their photographs taken. A collage of the portraits is on the front cover of this issue and there will be an official unveiling followed by an exhibition in autumn 2025 as part of the celebrations for 40 years since the admission of women.

1986

First Oriel woman to receive a Full Blue

In 1986, Laura Ashley-Timms (1985), née Goldsmith, made history as the first woman at Oriel College to be awarded a full blue.

Ashley-Timms earned an extraordinary Full Blue for her outstanding performance in table tennis, twice emerging from the annual varsity match against Cambridge undefeated. She also ran the vibrant college leagues, organising matches between different college teams and arranging training for the University.

In 1987, Bernadette Anderko, née Thomas, became the second woman to be awarded a full blue, for competing in the Lightweight Women's Boat Race.

1987

First women's crew to win blades

Staggeringly, three quarters of the first cohort of women joined the Boat Club in their first year, forming two crews of eight with reserves.

In 1987, bolstered by another two cohorts, the first cohort of women entered intercollegiate rowing for the first time — and had tremendous success. First was Torpids, at which the women's first eight had a strong performance. Then in Trinity term came Summer Eights and blades. The women's first eight bumped six times, while a second eight at their sporting debut bumped three times.

1988

First year with women in all four undergraduate years

The academic year that began in October 1988 saw women in all four undergraduate years for the first time in Oriel College's history. About 37 per cent of students were now women — aligning already with the average across other mixed colleges.

The Adviser to Women Students and Women's Officer, new positions to offer "counsel and assistance" to women members, had established an informal Women's Group. Self-defence classes, funded by the College, were also provided to all female students once every week during Michaelmas and Hilary terms, in the JCR Annexe.

1988

First woman JCR president

Laura Hawksworth (1986), a member of the second cohort of female undergraduates, became the female president of the Junior Common Room in 1988. Asked about her decision to run for the role, she said: "It was about time we had a female JCR President.

"I had plenty of support from male friends. I didn't expect to win but thought someone should stand. I didn't stand on any particular platform, but had a commitment to Oriel, my fellow students and demonstrating that a woman was at least as competent."

Today, Hawksworth is a member of Oriel's alumni advisory committee and returns to the College regularly. She said she is "very supportive" of efforts to ensure better representation of historically excluded groups and added: "It's great to see the first year of women given special recognition and I look forward to seeing more images of women around the College."

1989

First woman MCR president

Leanne Piggott (1988) became the first woman to be elected president of the Middle Common Room in 1989. Five years after the decision to admit women and both student common rooms had had female presidents.

A female MCR president is now "unremarkable", Piggott said, but added that when she was elected it was seen as "the fall of yet another traditional male bastion".

Today, Piggott is Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean of Students at Macquarie University. She said that gender is "no longer a significant determinant of graduate experience" and that students are "all in the same boat, facing challenges that did not exist in the 1980s".

She described studying at Oriel College as a "great privilege". "The friendships I formed continue to enrich and sustain me," she added.

1989

First woman elected as an Honorary Fellow

The first woman who was elected as an Honorary Fellow was Lady Norma Dalrymple-Champneys, who had previously been a librarian and research Fellow at Somerville College.

Lady Dalrymple-Champneys' late husband, Sir Weldon Dalrymple-Champneys, was very fond of Oriel, and after his passing, she left several bequests in his memory.

Each year, the Lady Norma Dalrymple-Champneys Prize is awarded to a student in a Humanities subject whose academic performance over the whole of their second year has been "especially meritorious". ⏩

1991

First woman elected as a Fellow

Dr Sarah Coakley made history as the first female Fellow of Oriel College in 1991, when she was elected as the new Fellow in Theology and Philosophy of Religion. Previously, the post had been combined with the chaplaincy.

Professor Sarah Coakley on the day of the conferral of her Honorary Fellowship
Photo by John Cairns/Oriel College

Coakley admitted that it "wasn't terribly easy to be the first woman Fellow". But she added: "it was probably not difficult in the same way that it was difficult for the students".

There were "major issues that had to be sorted out", Coakley said, recalling her first year in the role. "I took a very firm line, insisting on my rights to be treated as an intellectual equal," she stated, "and that was the right thing to do."

Among other things, Coakley found it challenging to make friends with some of the other Fellows. She said: "While many were hugely supportive from the start, others were seemingly disapproving. But perhaps their fear of being accused of anything inappropriate led them to being distant."

Having secured a permanent academic position at the University of Lancaster aged 24, Coakley had few personal doubts about her competence when she arrived at Oriel more than a decade later. "I was much more concerned that my students flourished than about being an imposter," she said and added: "I just wanted to make sure I proved my worth."

Certainly Coakley did do that. During the two years that she taught Oriel's Theology and Joint School undergraduates, they achieved a record number of first-class degrees.

After two years at Oriel, Coakley vacated her post to join Harvard Divinity School as a full professor. Today, she looks back on her time at Oriel "very fondly". "I learned an enormous amount, both intellectually and professionally, and am still drawing on that wisdom," she added.

Coakley visits Oriel whenever she can. "I find the atmosphere extremely relaxed these days and I couldn't have been more honoured when I received an Honorary Fellowship in 2018."

By the end of 1996, Dr Sarah Randolph, Dr Annette Volfing, Dr Alison Noble and Dr Lynne Cox had all been elected as Fellows. Four of the first five female Fellows are members of Oriel today. A medievalist who was promoted to a full professor in 2008, Professor Volfing is the second most senior Fellow at Oriel, and Cox is Oriel's George Moody Fellow.

Coakley and Noble are both Honorary Fellows. After leaving Harvard Divinity School, Coakley became the Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. In 2001, Noble became Oxford's first female statutory professor in Engineering, and in 2023 she was awarded a CBE.

1993

First JCR Women's Officer

The Junior Common Room at Oriel College elected the role of women's officer to its committee in 1993 after a successful request from Fiona Lovatt and Sarah Murphy, née Stafford, to the JCR Committee to hold a vote.

Sarah Stafford and Fiona Lovatt, recent graduates in Central Park, New York, 1997
Courtesy of Fiona Lovatt

At the time when the vote took place, the dialogue around women's issues had not developed much, Lovatt said, adding that the reasons why Stafford and she felt the new role was needed are "relatively simple and straightforward" by today's standards.

"It was about creating the role and saying, yes, women's views are important in our college, and so are spaces and events and opportunities for women to get together," she said. "They weren't small things at the time."

Lovatt has been impressed by how the role of women's officer has evolved over three decades — to accomplish things well beyond what she had imagined. Specifically, she highlighted the work by the recent women's officer, Eva Hogan, to ensure the provision of free period products at the college. She had not thought such initiatives would ever be on the cards when she was a student, she said.

Lovatt argued that greater diversity among students and staff today will only benefit the community. "A more diverse group is always better," she said. "There isn't just one way that is right. There are always different ways of thinking about things. You don't want just one group of people's experiences and values to prevail."

Alongside other alumni, Lovatt is part of the Oriel Women's Network steering group, which supports the network in fostering connections between current female students and alumnae, and helping the College to celebrate women's achievements.

The network is important, Lovatt stated, because Oriel has a 700-year history, but only a 40-year history of women. "Women need more opportunities to network, to meet good connections, to get great mentors, to help find people who can help them progress, and to share life experiences," she said.

2006

First woman's crew Head of the River

Climbing the divisions ever since the crew's debut in 1987, Oriel College's women's first eight finished Head of the River for the first time at Torpids in 2006. They bumped New College going through the gut on day one, before rowing over the remaining days.

In 2017, the women's first eight finished Head of the River at Torpids for a second time, retaining the title the following year.

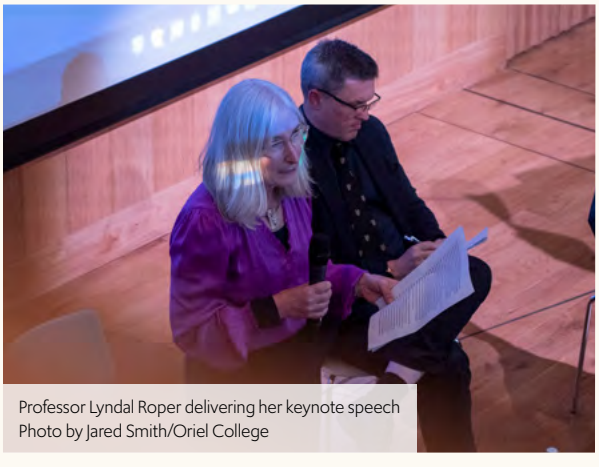
No racing could take place in 2024 but in 2023 they finished in third place (tailing University College and Pembroke College; being chased by Christ Church).

2011

First woman appointed to Regius Chair in History

Professor Lyndal Roper, whose research looks at sixteenth and seventeenth-century German history, gender history and the history of witchcraft, became Oxford's first woman Regius Professor in History when she was appointed to the role in 2011. The Regius Chair in History was established by King George I in 1724 but was not affiliated with any one college until 1866, when William Stubbs, on being appointed to the chair, became an ex officio Fellow of Oriel.

In June 2024, Roper hosted an afternoon of academic events and ceremony to celebrate 300 years since the prestigious chair was established. Oxford's Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey attended the afternoon. So did the Chancellor, Lord Patton, delivering one of his last speeches before his retirement.



Professor Lyndal Roper delivering her keynote speech
Photo by Jared Smith/Oriel College

During her keynote speech Roper, reflecting on her own personal experiences, spoke about the progress Oxford has made toward reaching gender parity, and the progress the University still has to make. "I am the first and so far the only woman Regius Professor of History in this country, and when I took up the post I was also the only woman statutory chair in our Faculty," she recalled. "Now, of our 13 statutory chairs, six are women."

Roper also said: "The last part of change is always the hardest. But I am confident that [the Faculty of History], which I have seen transform itself utterly since that day I first saw a room full of men, can do it."

2012

First mother and daughter both to attend as students

Michele Hare (1985) and her daughter became the first mother and daughter to both have studied at Oriel College in 2012. Hare studied for a bachelor's degree in Classics and is now a member of the Oriel Women's Network steering group. Her daughter, Ianthe Greenwood (2012), studied Modern Languages.

2013

First woman to be Provost

When Moira Wallace OBE became the 51st Provost of Oriel College in 2013, she also became its first female Provost. Wallace had just completed four years as the founding Permanent Secretary of the Department of Energy and Climate Change. Her civil service career began in the Treasury, then continued as Economic Affairs Private Secretary to John Major and Tony Blair at Downing Street. She went on to serve four years as Director of the Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Unit, then six years in policing and criminal justice delivery roles at the Home Office.

Discussing the admission of women at Oriel, Wallace, herself among the first intake of female undergraduates at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, remarked that institutional change does not happen suddenly, but over decades and years. "The decision to admit women to a previously all-male college leads to some changes that happen very quickly," she said, "but it doesn't mean everything transforms instantly.

"It takes a long time for women to be fully represented in the culture of the College. We've seen this gradually working through in Oriel over the decades since 1985, and in many other colleges too.

During Wallace's time as Provost, the University also appointed its first female Vice-Chancellor. Wallace and other senior women in Oxford marked this moment by organising the "Women of Achievement" lecture series, inviting inspiring female leaders to come to Oxford and talk to staff and students about their leadership journey. ▸▸

Moira Wallace OBE at an event for 30 years since the admission of women
Photo by John Cairns/Oriel College

The job of the Provost is hugely varied but, like most heads of house, what Wallace treasured most was the opportunity to engage with students from across the country and across the world. She said: "I was so happy to discover that Oriel had a tradition of organising Provost's collections as a one-to-one conversation. I really valued these occasions. It was such a great opportunity to hear direct from students, and to look up from the day-to-day and talk about longer-term achievements and aspirations."

Wallace said she is looking forward to seeing what "her" cohorts of student go on to do and to create. They started from a good place, having reached Oriel's highest ever position in the Norrington Table in 2016 "while also remaining brilliant at rowing and many other things".

Wallace has happy memories of helping to organise Oriel's celebrations for the 30th anniversary of the admission of women and added that she is looking forward to seeing "the wonderful things added by another decade of women's full participation in the life of Oriel" at the celebrations for 40 years.

> "The joy of teaching bright undergraduates in a tutorial setting is exactly as it always was"

2014

First woman to be Vice-Provost

Professor Annette Volfing become the first woman to be elected as the Vice-Provost of Oriel College in 2014. At the time, with Moira Wallace OBE in the lodgings, the College had women in both of the premier roles.

Volfing said that Oxford is "now much more diverse, with a more equal gender balance", than when she first became a Tutorial Fellow, in Modern Languages, in the early 1990s. Fundamentally though, she added, "very little has changed": "the joy of teaching bright undergraduates in a tutorial setting is exactly as it always was."

To challenge "lingering sexist assumptions" in academia and "strengthen the confidence of younger women within the collegiate university," it is important to "foreground appropriate examples of female achievement," said Volfing. While acknowledging that she may have been "unusually fortunate", she added that she has never experienced sexism or discrimination at any stage of her career.

A medievalist, Volfing has been Professor of Medieval German Literature at the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages since 2008. She has a specific interest in later medieval religious, mystical, philosophical or allegorical writing.

Volfing said that she finds the increasingly large and burdensome administrative side of being an academic "difficult and stressful", adding that it "impedes research". "I strongly believe that more should be done to protect both male and female academics from this administrative overload," she stated.

2015

First female Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture

Professor Hindy Najman, a scholar of the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation, reception, and contextualisation in the ancient Mediterranean world, became the first woman to be appointed the Oriel and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture in 2015. The chair was established in 1876.

Najman said: "The University of Oxford is leader in the fight against racism and sexism and I am proud to be a statutory professor here.

"There have been significant challenges as a female academic and as a Jewish academic across the three decades of my career. There are ongoing forms of sexism and antisemitism in the academy, but there are also great leaders who are working to make the academy an ethical and generative environment for all of our colleagues and students."

She added of Oriel College: "I cannot imagine a more supportive environment. This is exemplified by the leadership of our Provost, Lord Mendoza."

2020

First Oriel Women's Network event

First conceptualised in 2019, the Oriel Women's Network (OWN) held its first event in 2020. Imminently after the network was forced online by the covid pandemic.

A panel event organised by the Oriel Women's Network
Photo by Jared Smith/Oriel College

But far from petering out, it gained steam on Facebook and LinkedIn, with groups on each social media platform garnering over 200 members. Virtual events were held on goal setting, avoiding burnout and experiencing imposter syndrome.

In 2023, emerging strong out of the pandemic, the OWN held its first International Women's Day event: a drinks reception hosted by Lady Mendoza in the Provost's Lodgings.

2021

First woman to be Treasurer

Margaret Jones, the first female Treasurer at Oriel, has now been in post for three years. Her initial priorities — to progress the East Range project and stabilise the Colleges operational financial position post-covid — are well underway.

Margaret Jones giving a tour of the East Range construction site
Photo by Jared Smith/Oriel College

Because of the heritage of Oriel's estate, the East Range project, which includes restoring several historic spaces, has been "extremely challenging", Jones said. There is the matter of obtaining the requisite planning permissions. But "just as important", the Treasurer claimed, is ensuring the work does not impact the experience of students.

The Senior Library has been used for dining for the past year. Therefore, "despite the construction, the ability of our community to continue to meet and eat together in beautiful surroundings has been protected," Jones said.

Oriel's operational financial position is improving, even against rising inflation. Careful budgeting and cost control have helped to achieve this, Jones stated. She also said that the re-establishment of the Oriel Summer Institute and the return of visiting students and conference customers have been key drivers of recovery.

Jones described Oriel's academic purpose as her north star. "Everything has to relate to advancing the College's academic goals," she said and added: "Decisions that might seem obvious in light of a specific short-term goal can wash out into long-term cultural impact if not carefully considered and discussed with a range of academic colleagues.

"Getting that right has been a learning process but I have the advantage of working on this with some of the best minds in the world."

2022

First all-women High Table

One of Eva Hogan's (2021) most significant achievements before she was succeeded as JCR Women's Officer after completing her bachelor's degree has been reviving the annual women's dinner. The first of the three dinners which have now been held featured Oriel College's first ever all-female High Table. After the dinner, Fiona Lovatt and Esther Agbolade, both alumnae, gave speeches.

Hogan described holding an all-female High Table as a "powerful act of unapologetically making space for women* who until the last 40 years could not take up any space in the college." "It's also a great way to platform and celebrate the successes of Oriel women," she explained.

Lovatt, who became the joint-first women's officer with Sarah Stafford in 1993, described the all-female High Table as one of Hogan's "biggest legacies", adding that it conveyed a "really important message about diversity and inclusion". "It's not just the space that you create for connection, it's the signal that you send," she also said.

During her tenure Hogan also drove through an initiative, which was accepted by Oriel's Governing Body, to ensure the provision of free period products to all people who menstruate. The former women's officer said she is looking forward to seeing the provision "rolled out in full" by her successor, Milly Gibson. The role of women's officer is essential so that the legacies of her predecessors are not forgotten, she added.

2023

First woman to chair OAAC

Claire Toogood KC (1991) is not only the first woman chair of the Oriel Alumni Advisory Committee (OAAC) but also the first woman to cox the men's first boat. She has been making waves ever since. A barrister and part-time judge, Toogood is a member of the Campaign Board and a very dedicated alumna.

College

Hannah Robertson presenting the book at the Oxford Conservation Consortium Photo by Jared Smith/Oriel College

Senior Library

John Donne, rediscovered

The rediscovery in the Oriel Senior Library of a legal commentary annotated by English poet John Donne is a promising prelude to a cataloguing project which is set to begin in 2026.

Written by Antonius Clarus Sylvius and published in 1603, the book — *Commentarius ad Leges tam Regias* — is identifiable as Donne's by his signature on the title page and the annotations throughout.

Donne studied in Oxford for about three years from 1583 but could not obtain a degree on account of his Catholicism (it being illegal to practice in England at the time). Then, in 1592, after a preliminary year of study at Thavies Inn (and possibly also after studying for a short time at Cambridge), he was admitted to Lincoln's Inn, where records suggest he studied English law for around two years.

Oriel College's Librarian Hannah Robertson said the rediscovery of the book, unidentifiable as Donne's by the exterior alone, is "promising in terms of what may be revealed by cataloguing the collection held in the Senior Library."

"Our plan is to scrupulously examine the books and manuscripts comprising the collection for markings such as marginalia and inscriptions — anything that could help develop our understanding of the College's nearly 700-year history," she added.

Dr David Maw — who, in addition to his role as Director of Music, was appointed Fellow Librarian in 2023 — said that the project was "crucial in defining the College as it enters its eighth century."

He added: "Donne's book is just one of the treasures in the Senior Library collection. The interest that it attracts serves to remind us of the importance of this collection both to us and to the scholarly community beyond."

A refurbishment project at the Senior Library building where Donne's book has been discovered is set to begin in 2025.

In 2023, specialist conservators were brought in to stabilise the library's valuable collection, which comprises of about 25,000 items in total. A full inventory was also completed.

The collection includes Captain Sir John Franklin's personal copy of his *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea* as well as a first editions of Henry Purcell's musical scores and a first edition of *The Anatomy of the Horse* by George Stubbs.

Work to catalogue the total contents of the library will begin after all of the planned infrastructural changes to the building have been completed. This is expected to be in 2026.

The plan is for the contents to be listed on the University of Oxford's library catalogue, SOLO, making them discoverable to researchers from all around the world.

Reckoning

New Catto Fellow succeeds Professor Forrest

Dr Tom Johnson has succeeded Professor Ian Forrest as the Catto Fellow in Medieval History at Oriel College.

The historian currently has a fellowship from the British Academy and is finalising a non-fiction book, *The Reckoners*, which is under contract with publisher Allen Lane.

The book is "microhistory" recreating "everyday life" in Walberswick, a fishing village on the Suffolk coast, near to where Johnson grew up in Ipswich.

Specifically, the book explores "reckoning", which was a quasi-legal practice of exchanging goods and services when there was a shortage of coins in the 15th century.

Johnson gave an example of reckoning: "If you and I were neighbours, and I borrowed your cow for the summer, you might say, OK, that's five shillings. But not many people had money. So instead, the next time I ask you for a service, I'll say, OK, that's worth two shillings. Then I only owe you three shillings.

"If I know you and we are both living in this village for a long time and I trust you, then this relationship can go on indefinitely without money ever actually changing hands."

Johnson joins Oriel from the University of York. He published his first book, a history of how ordinary people thought about the law and used legal ideas in 15th century England, in 2019. ⏩

There was "common legal culture" in the century after the Black Death despite the surfeit of law courts at the time, Johnson argues in the book.

There was also a sustained increase in law being spoken about in the vernacular and a "proliferation" of legal recordkeeping (made possible by paper being imported in greater qualities at lower costs and higher literacy rates).

Johnson's work mainly focuses on how ordinary people lived in early modern Britain, and he has written on a broad range of topics for the *London Review of Books*, including the laws of shipwreck ("Sleeves Full of Raisins"), occult magic ("I adjure you, egg") and historical counting systems ("Big Data for the Leviathan").

Forrest, Johnson's predecessor, left Oriel in 2023 to take up the senior role of Head of Humanities at the University of Glasgow.

Excavations outside the Bodleian Library, 1899
Courtesy of Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society (OAHS)

Archaeology

Origins of Oxford

Archaeologists have discovered the location of the original eastern defensive line of the late Saxon town of Oxford at Oriel College, where construction work is currently ongoing.

The discovery confirms a hypothesis which had gone unresolved since excavations outside the Bodleian Library 125 years ago revealed a section of wall that is thought to be the north-eastern corner of the original town.

The whereabouts of the defences gives credibility to theories that the early fortified Oxford was significantly smaller than the later medieval town and had a square perimeter — built by the Anglo-Saxons according to the model of walled Roman towns such as Winchester.

The Oxford City Council Archaeologist David Radford described the discovery as a "significant breakthrough" for understanding Oxford's "emergence and evolution on the boundary between the kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia in the context of the Viking threat from the north in the ninth and 10th centuries AD."

Ben Ford, a senior project manager at Oxford Archaeology, said the discovery is "extremely exciting as it provides the first evidence since 1899 for the line of the original defensive circuit on the east side of Oxford".

He added: "Using specialist equipment to extract cores of earth from deep below the existing ground level we have identified the profile of a large infilled ditch which is over three metres deep, about 20 metres wide and running north to south.

"There is no sign of these defences now because over time the ditch had filled up with deposits and then been built over. Scientific dates from fragments of charred plants in the ditch show that it was probably constructed during the late-Saxon period, around 880 to 950 AD, which exactly aligns with the time Oxford is thought to have been founded."

The defences have been located beneath the buildings on the east side of First Quad where Oriel's kitchen is being rebuilt and the interiors of other spaces refurbished as part of the East Range Project.

"The ongoing project to rebuild the College's kitchens and refurbish our bar provided a rare opportunity to excavate an area that has never been excavated before," Oriel's Master of Works, Colin Bailey, said. "It is fantastic to see this resolve a century-old debate."

Bailey added: "I find it extraordinary that, despite nearly 700 years of continuous existence at the same site, Oriel College continues to surprise us with new discoveries about the ground on which it is built."

"I find it extraordinary that, despite nearly 700 years of continuous existence at the same site, Oriel College continues to surprise us with new discoveries about the ground on which it is built"

Cheryl Frances-Hoad

Visiting musician

An anthem for 40 years

The Governing Body of Oriel College has elected Cheryl Frances-Hoad as the new Visiting Fellow in Music. She succeeds keyboard player Tamar Halperin and countertenor Andreas Scholl, who have held the role jointly since 2020, and is the first composer to be elected to the role in over a decade.

"Cheryl Frances-Hoad is a leading light in the Western classical music tradition. It is immensely exciting to have the opportunity to work with her at Oriel next year," Director of Music Dr David Maw said.

"Her compositions draw on a wide range of influences, and I shall be intrigued to see how these come to bear on her work with us. I'm sure she'll make a striking contribution to the musical life of the college."

Frances-Hoad's compositions have garnered numerous awards, including the RPS Composition Prize, the Mendelssohn Scholarship, and three Ivor Novello (formally BASCA) British Composer Awards.

One of her more recent compositions — "Your servant, Elizabeth" — was commissioned by BBC Radio 3 and premiered during the BBC Prom's Platinum Jubilee celebrations at the Royal Albert Hall in July 2022.

The composer said she feels "exceptionally honoured" to have been elected as the Visiting Fellow in Music. "It will be wonderful to get to know the Fellows, students and staff at Oriel, and I am very excited to work with the choir under Dr David Maw's direction," she added.

Frances-Hoad officially joined Oriel in October and alongside holding masterclasses with students will be commissioned to compose an anthem for the chapel choir to celebrate the 40th anniversary of women being admitted to the College in 2025.

International Women's Day 2024

Women in tech

Dr Irina Voiculescu, Lecturer in Computer Science at Oriel College, chaired an inspiring panel of women in the tech industry on 8 March.

The panellists Amanda Storey (2001), Sian Cox-Brooker (2007) and Lia Yeh (2020) shared their experiences of regularly being the only woman in the room throughout their careers, offering guidance on how to approach working in a male-dominated tech industry, and discussed safety online.

In 2023, 11 per cent more 18-year-old women started computer science degree courses across the UK compared to 2022. But men still outnumber women at a ratio of 3.8 to one, according to BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT.

A doctoral student in Quantum Computing, Yeh recalled being known as "the girl" in classes at her undergraduate college. "I wanted more of an identity. So I had to really think about my own ⏩

identity. And I had to learn how to communicate effectively what I was doing," she said.

In October 2023, Yeh was the only recipient of a Google PhD Fellowship completing a doctorate in the UK. Alongside her studies, she is a part-time research engineer at Quantinuum, a quantum computing company.

"It's important to ask yourself, 'What skills can I bring, what perspective can I bring?'" said Cox-Brooker, who studied a master's degree in women's studies and, before moving into tech, had a background in journalism.

Today, as the news programme lead of the Product Content Operations team at Meta, Cox-Brooker helps set content standards and guidelines across Meta platforms. "If there's one thing I hope I can demonstrate, it's that you don't need a background in tech to go into tech," she added.

As a senior director at Google's Trust and Safety team, Storey, who studied experimental psychology at Oriel College, ensures policies dictating what content is permitted online sustain the "safety of the ecosystem". Her career advice to audience members was to find a career which utilises their "differentiating skill". "You'll move a lot faster," she said. Negotiating, she added, was hers.

Both Cox-Brooker and Storey attribute their ability to hold their own in business to the tutorial system. "Once you've had that [experience], nothing scares you," commented Cox-Brooker, half-joking. "You tell yourself, 'You can do it because you already have.'"

Yeh said that she first became aware of the underrepresentation of women in computer science when she worked at a summer camp, teaching students about the code behind popular computer games. The experience was partly why she wanted to organise an all-women and non-gender binary student hackathon years later, she explained.

Diversity in the tech industry is not helped, said Storey, by the fact that career progression is based largely on self-promotion, something men are more disposed towards than women, meaning representation of women decreases the higher up the ladder you climb.

"We found that if you say, 'If you think you're only 75 per cent ready, apply,' more women apply," she added. "You've got to think about the right nudges to get over structural inhibitors."

Professor Paul Gilroy scrutinised attempts to tell a 'clean colonial narrative'
Photo by Aarti Basnyat/Oriel College

Colonial legacies

UK 'forgetting the Caribbean'

When he delivered the annual Rex Nettleford Lecture at Oriel College in May, Professor Paul Gilroy scrutinised attempts to tell a "clean colonial narrative" and claimed that "the UK seems to be forgetting the Caribbean" in its discussions about colonialism.

Gilroy is one of the foremost theorists of race and racism working and teaching in the world today and the founding director of a centre for studying racism and racialisation at University College London. In 2019, he was awarded the Holberg Prize "for his contributions to critical race studies, post-colonialism and related fields".

Rex Nettleford, after whom the lecture series is named, was an alumnus and Honorary Fellow of Oriel College from Jamaica who served as the vice-chancellor of the University of the West Indies from 1998 to 2004.

In memory of the late vice-chancellor, Gilroy said that he wanted his lecture to "promote the importance of the Caribbean in the modern story of this archipelago and indeed the world."

Gilroy acknowledged how recent engagement with Britain's imperial past by historians has helped bring to light some of the various ways by which the country's colonial ambitions shaped the world we live in today. However, he criticised what he considers to be a "nationalistic yearning" for a history of empire which requires "no working through".

Britain's past colonial cruelty in the Caribbean is being steadily erased from collective memory, Gilroy said, adding that the resulting amnesia is one the reasons why migrants from the region are being persecuted by government agencies (as was the case recently with the Windrush scandal). They are perceived "xenologically as aliens and invaders," he said.

Only by learning to engage in an open and honest dialogue about the colonial past can we ever hope to adequately respond to the challenges that today confront humanity, argued Gilroy. However, in order for this to occur, he said, we require "another solidarity, a new involution, capable of responding to the triage of humankind that is underway."

At the Rex Nettleford lecture, Tutorial Fellow in English Dr Nicholas Gaskill presented the winners of the Rex Nettleford Essay Prize, Theo Kamara and Jay Tuffnell, with their awards. Held annually, the prize invites year 12 students to interrogate the legacies of colonialism and engage critically with its (to quote Gilroy) "bloody archives and bad habits".

"Britain's past colonial cruelty in the Caribbean is being steadily erased from collective memory, Gilroy said, adding that the resulting amnesia is one the reasons why migrants from the region are being persecuted by government agencies"

Diego Ramirez Alcade
Photo by Jared Smith/Oriel College

Diego Ramirez Alcalde

Leaving a legacy

Diego Ramirez Alcalde (2023) has become the youngest member of the Adam de Brome Society after deciding as a graduate student to leave a legacy to Oriel College.

Alcalde described his experience of arriving at the College: "I found a home, a really really welcoming place. And that's not about the buildings or how old we are. It's about the identity. It's about the community, how friendly we are."

"It's a beautiful place that is worth protecting, keeping, preserving, nurturing," he added, explaining why he chose to remember Oriel in his will.

Another sign of his dedication to the College, Alcade has been elected the president of Middle Common Room (MCR), Oriel's graduate student body. He views the main purpose of the role as fostering tranquillity and tolerance among MCR members.

He added: "You shape minds when you have the right environment. That's how for example you can make a community more diverse. You create an environment in which everyone feels welcome, no matter what, no exceptions."

In his academic work, Alcalde, who is completing a two-year master's degree in Philosophical Theology, expostulates against a conception of ethics as the study of rules by which one ought to live. Ethics, he said, should concern how to value things. More so than what you do, what you live for and who you are.

Abstract, rule-based moral philosophies have little bearing on real human beings, real lives, claimed Alcalde. Worse still, he added, they do not offer a justification of existence — and if there is no reason to be alive, then why be moral?

"You shape minds when you have the right environment. That's how for example you can make a community more diverse. You create an environment in which everyone feels welcome, no matter what, no exceptions"

By arguing for a more holistic conception of ethics, Alcalde joins a school of thought which he described as "very new, but very ancient". "I'm focusing a lot on Wittgenstein, to work out what the relevant questions are, but I'm also exploring certain other ways of doing ethics such as drama and tragedy — like the Greeks did," he stated.

Alcalde believes that acquiring a detachment from material things is an important part of forming a moral character but argued that this does not mean you should not enjoy things. "You can enjoy goods. We all do and life is supposed to be fun, right, and that's good? But you see things with a certain detachment," he said.

Alcalde, who is from Chile, trained as a monk in the Catholic Church for eight years, from the age of 16. His theoretical interests completely entangled with the personal, he said that his research is partly a reply to this religious background.

He said: "It's in a way a critique, what I'm doing, of traditional religious approaches. But it's also a way of going for a true deep questioning of religion that allows you to completely shift your view of the world.

"[It's about] looking beyond the forms and the norms and the structures and the buildings and saying, OK, what does religion actually mean?"

Having generously stated his intention to leave a legacy to Oriel, Alcalde will be invited to future gatherings of the Adam de Brome Society.

Anyone considering making a provision for Oriel in their will should email development.office@oriel.ox.ac.uk to arrange a confidential conversation.

Oriel's men's first eight at Summer Eights 2024. Photo by Nikola Boysova

Rowing

Three Olympic medals, eight Blues, 36 times Head of the River

Eight athletes from Oriel College were selected for Oxford's varsity squads ahead of the Boat Race. Of them, four raced against Cambridge in the blue boats. Oxford may have lost in both the men's and women's event. But it was a fantastic turn-out for Oriel.

Next was Summer Eights. The men's first eight rowed over on all four days, remaining Head of the River. Which means that Oriel boats have held the top title 36 times since 1815, more than any other college.

The men's second eight, moving up one place, is still the only second boat in a second division. And the women's first eight competes in the first division.

Last but not least came the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. Four rowers from Oriel advanced to the finals, where three clinched medals, taking the College's cumulative medal count to at least nine.

Liam Corrigan (2021), a financial economics alumnus, won a gold medal for the USA in the men's four. Current graduate Charlie Elwes (2021) won a gold as part of Team GB's men's eight, having previously won bronze in the event at Tokyo 2020.

Nick Rusher (2024), from the US, joined Oriel in October 2024. He won a bronze medal rowing in the men's eight. Tom Mackintosh (2024), from New Zealand, also joined in October. He placed fifth in the men's single sculls.

Politics

A rising voice in Labour's ranks

Having campaigned while simultaneously completing a bachelor's degree in music, on 8 April, Bella Simpson (2021) was elected as the voice for female members of the national Labour Party aged 26 and under.

In order to encourage women of all ages to get involved in politics, the recent finalist says her priorities are establishing a network for young women members, creating safe spaces for all women and tackling the "epidemics" of sexual harassment and assault.

She describes herself as "a strong believer in the idea that 'if you do not do politics then politics will do you.'"

A network for young women members would, in effect, be a youth branch of the already-existing Labour Women's Network, which campaigns for women's equality within the Parliamentary Labour Party.

In the latest general election, over 190 Labour women MPs were elected, forming the largest cohort of female MPs in history. Of those newly elected, 58 were graduates of the Labour Women's Network's programmes and workshops.

But there is progress to be made. After someone shared a post about Simpson's election on social media platform X, another user replied saying, "Is she f***ing someone in the [Parliamentary Labour Party]?" In response, Simpson shared an image of the derogatory reply, adding the caption: "Women deserve better."

Simpson later cited the fact that women in politics regularly experience smear campaigns, misogynistic language and abuse as why she stood for the role of women's officer in the first place.

She clarified that she represents all women in the role. "I am a proud member of the LGBT+ community and stand shoulder to shoulder with my trans siblings," she said and added: "The Labour Party is a party based on solidarity. All women must be represented, listened to and supported. I will ensure that."

Dr Dean Jobin-Bevans, left, and Dr David Maw, right, at the album release in June 2024
Photo by Aarti Basnyat/Oriel College

Henry Aldrich

A chapel choir debut

Henry Aldrich was many things. A composer, yes. But also an architect, a polymath and a print collector to boot. And also of course, the Dean of Christ Church.

The chapel choir at Oriel College have debuted compositions by Aldrich with a new album release. The music has been transcribed by Dr Dean Jobin-Bevans, a music scholar who was a senior academic visitor at the College from Lakehead University, Canada. Oriel's Director of Music, Dr David Maw, conducts the choir on the album.

Before the long-running recording project, much of Aldrich's music had been waiting, silently, in manuscripts for the centuries since its composition (in some cases after only ever being performed once).

Among the recordings on the recent album are a number of recompositions. These recompositions appropriate the works of others, including, not least, Tallis and Byrd, as well as Palestrina and Carissimi. However, they are not mere reproductions. They are original arrangements by Aldrich; musically significant contributions by the composer.

Jobin-Bevans compared the recompositions to Aldrich's architecture, which often incorporates the structural motifs of existing buildings to create entirely new designs.

He said: "He clearly uses blocks from the past and puts them into place and then adds finishings of his own music to knit them together as you might take inspiration from Versailles to create another building which continues the same architectural tradition."

In the recompositions, Aldrich takes one or two vocal compositions, or motets, usually written in Latin, and then adds his own English text to those Latin originals. Then he composes new music to stitch different motets together, or to develop the appropriated compositions beyond their original form.

> "It's been a special privilege to conduct the choir for this exciting project. The work Dean is doing to resurrect Aldrich's music is not only historically significant, but it also augments our active heritage of the Anglican choral tradition"

In one of the arrangements on the new album, "O pray for the peace of Jerusalem," the composer fuses two motets by Tallis and sets them to an English translation of Psalm 122 with a doxology, creating a new work of music that is appropriate for a restorationist context.

Maw said that the album of recordings contains a "historically interesting repertory" that is "highly distinctive in the way that it offers an opportunity to engage with sometimes familiar music in a new way".

He added: "It's been a special privilege to conduct the choir for this exciting project. The work Dean is doing to resurrect Aldrich's music is not only historically significant, but it also augments our active heritage of the Anglican choral tradition.

"The choir very much enjoyed performing some of the pieces to appreciative audiences during its tour of the Loire Valley in 2023."

Some of Aldrich's music continued to be performed posthumously but the majority only survived through the manuscripts cared for by Christ Church. The recompositions and original compositions that Oriel's choir has recorded mainly belong to the latter category.

Jobin-Bevans described the experience of reviving the compositions with Maw and Oriel's choir as "a bit emotional". "You pick up the manuscript and you start transcribing. You do corrections. You send it out to the choir. David and I confer about some of the details. Then he makes his alterations. And then its finally recorded."

The new album by Jobin-Bevans, Maw and his choir, *Henry Aldrich: Sacred Choral Music II*, can be ordered from the Convivium Records website.

Events in 2025

WEDNESDAY 26 FEBRUARY TO SATURDAY 1 MARCH

Torpids

Annual intercollegiate bumps racing

FRIDAY 14 MARCH

Oriel Women's Network event

Annual International Women's Day event

FRIDAY 21 MARCH

1987–1990 Gaudy

Reunion dinner for alumni who matriculated between 1987 and 1990

SATURDAY 22 MARCH

Adam de Brome Lunch

Annual lunch for members of the Adam de Brome Society and guests

SATURDAY 26 APRIL

Oxford MA Ceremony

Annual ceremony at the University Church for those obtaining an MA

THURSDAY 1 MAY

Oriel London Dinner

Annual dinner in London. This year held at the House of Commons

FRIDAY 9 MAY

Champagne Concert

A biannual concert for members of College and their guests

WEDNESDAY 28 TO SATURDAY 31 MAY

Summer Eights

Annual intercollegiate bumps racing

SATURDAY 31 MAY

Oriel Garden Party

Annual Garden Party for alumni and their families

SATURDAY 6 SEPTEMBER

40 years of women at Oriel

Full day of events to mark four decades of women at Oriel

FRIDAY 19 SEPTEMBER

Alumni Weekend Dinner

Annual dinner open to all alumni

SATURDAY 20 SEPTEMBER

2000–2002 Gaudy

Reunion dinner for alumni who matriculated between 2000 and 2002

FRIDAY 24 OCTOBER

Champagne Concert

A biannual concert for members of College and their guests

SATURDAY 22 NOVEMBER

Raleigh Society Dinner

Biennial dinner for members of the Raleigh Society

Term dates

Michaelmas 2024	Sunday 13 October – Saturday 7 December
Hilary 2025	Sunday 19 January – Saturday 15 March
Trinity 2025	Sunday 27 April – Saturday 21 June

For more information about events or to book, visit:
alumni.oriel.ox.ac.uk
or email
events@oriel.ox.ac.uk

UBS chair Colm Kelleher (1975) was interviewed by Laura Noonan in October 2024. More in Issue 27

Oriel's women's first eight competing at Summer Eights, 2024
Photo by Nikola Boysova

Pre-dinner drinks at the 1996–1999 Gaudy
Richard Wakefield/Oriel College

The restored clock face in First Quad
Photo by Jared Smith/Oriel College

Oriel College

Issue 26 2024

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