

Spotlight

The e-newsletter for English Faculty Alumni



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Welcome!

Welcome to *Spotlight*, the Faculty of English Language & Literature's alumni e-newsletter.

Following the building work which took place in the St Cross Building, we have enjoyed making the most of our much improved space for socializing – whether groups of students passing time between lectures or doing some work, conference or event lunches, or drinks receptions after seminars and lectures, it's wonderful to have such an airy and spacious room to mingle and chat. Over the summer, the Missing Bean's coffee shop was reinstalled in the Café area on the second floor, and we're delighted to have them back, providing much-needed refreshment and delicious food.

Our academics continue to lead the way in research, and we are pleased to say that a number have been recognised for the way in which they have been able to bring their attention to a wider non-specialist audience, whether through public exhibitions, reading groups, or other means. Two of this year's exhibitions at the Weston Library have been curated by faculty members – Professor Emma Smith with 'Shakespeare's Dead', and Professor Kathryn Sutherland with 'Which Jane Austen?' In addition, the University's Recognition of Distinction panel recently conferred the title of Professor on Matt Bevis and Paulina Kewes, to honour their significant and sustained contribution to the academic life of the University.

Looking forward to the next generations of scholars, we are delighted to have taken part in three University-wide Open Days this year, as well as supporting a number of outreach events aimed at local schools and sixth forms. Dr Catherine Redford and Professor Emma Smith were involved in running a Shakespeare study morning for local A-Level students in September; you can read more about the day below. It's always exciting to see the numbers of young people coming through the doors, exploring their potential and envisioning their future here. As I write this, term has begun, and this year's intake of students are starting to get to grips with their courses, colleges, libraries, and indeed the whole Oxford way of life. Judging from the hubbub in the foyer between lectures, they're enjoying it very much so far!

At the other end of the University experience, several Faculty members have been involved in the recent [Meeting Minds Alumni Weekend](#). Professor Sally Shuttleworth and members of her team gave short presentations on their research into the life of the nerves in nineteenth-century culture, and Professor Fiona Stafford talked about the ways in which trees and their stories are entwined with human society, following the publication of her book *The Long, Long Life of Trees*. Next year's *Meeting Minds Alumni Weekend* in Oxford will be held on 14-16 September 2018, so do make a note of this now and we hope to see you there.

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Spotlight on Research

Promoting the Academic Study of Comics



In September 2015, I began my three-year British Academy-funded postdoctoral research fellowship at the English Faculty, University of Oxford, where I had completed my DPhil a few months earlier. The British Academy have funded a couple of postdoctoral projects related to comics and graphic novels in recent years, and I myself am a fortunate beneficiary. Now, two years later, my project has led to a book due to be published with Routledge in 2018. Entitled *Urban Comix: Collaboration, Reconstruction and Resistance in the Divided City*, the book provides readings of contemporary comics that depict cities marked by histories of division and ongoing forms of physical and social segregation. Its constituent chapters each focus on six different city-specific case studies – Cairo, Cape Town, New Orleans, London, Delhi and Beirut – to explore how comics are used by artists and writers to reconstruct divided cities, and to resist the ongoing segregationist tendencies of twenty-first-century urban development. It therefore identifies this global cultural production as ‘Urban Comix’: ‘urban’, because the defining feature of urbanity is interaction between heterogeneous communities, chance encounters that give rise to new ways of thinking, communicating and living; and ‘comix’, because that term gestures toward the history of underground collaboration and subversive sociopolitical content with which comics have so long been associated.

I hope that if this brief description of my recent research suggests anything at all, it is that, as scholars, critics and readers, we are only just beginning to explore the increasing diversity of comics production, and to account for their many formal capacities. Alongside the specificities of my personal research, I maintain a much wider interest comics, as they evolve in the hands of astonishing artists and writers who increasingly

push the form toward innovative ends. But I'm also particularly curious about comics' gradual movement into the cultural mainstream, as well as its slow institutionalisation – of which I myself am clearly a part.

These were some of the larger questions that I wanted to explore when I applied successfully to the TORCH Network scheme and the John Fell Fund to set up an academic research network, entitled 'Comics and Graphic Novels: The Politics of Form', which began in Michaelmas Term 2016. The network was designed to cultivate an open and inclusive environment where students, critics and practitioners from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds could come together to explore the power, politics and potential of the comics form. Featuring bi-weekly seminars with talks from visiting comics critics and practitioners from across the UK throughout the Oxford term time, the network facilitated an interdisciplinary dialogue about a form that clearly demands more comprehensive and ongoing critical analysis.

The first year of the TORCH Comics Network came to a conclusion in June 2017 with a day-long international symposium entitled 'Documenting Trauma: Comics and the Politics of Memory'. It sought to explore several key questions: why have so many comics and other graphic narratives, the production and publication of which has exploded in recent years, been framed as memoirs or non-fictional documentaries of traumatic events? Is there a relationship between the comics form, as distinct from film and written narrative through its inclusion of multiple visual panels, and the remembrance and recovery of trauma? Speakers came from countries as diverse as the US, Canada, Australia and Hungary, tackling these questions through eighteen papers on six panels from a range of critical perspectives and through discussions of many different kinds of comics. An edited collection comprised of papers from this event is in its very early stages.



The symposium concluded with a keynote talk from Professor Hillary Chute of Harvard and Northeastern University, and who was also awarded one of the English Faculty's Astor Visiting Lectureships of 2017. Entitled 'Disaster Drawn: Comics and Picturing Violence', Professor Chute's lecture explored a range of issues related to the symposium's themes, from the relationship of graphic drawing to photojournalism through to comics' ability to depict multiple layers of history and memory. With this talk, Professor Chute became the first ever Astor Lecturer to speak in her public lecture on comics, a landmark moment for the form that will hopefully herald a wider receptivity to, celebration of, and critical engagement with comics and graphic novels in years to come.

It has been fascinating to me to work on a culturally, institutionally and academically marginalised subject at one of the most recognisable universities in the world. That I do so is not only in and of itself indicative of the slow processes of institutionalisation and canonisation currently taking place in the field of comics; it also allows me a front row seat from which to see these processes taking place in real time. Originally a literature student by training, in my previous experience canons had always already been there. By contrast, it is incredible to see how the fluid cultural landscape of comics, when lightly touched by the powerful finger of a higher education institution like Oxford, morphs tectonically into a fixed and deeply striated panorama. As comics are gaining the critical recognition they have long deserved, now sometimes controversial processes

of canonisation are beginning to take place. This brings with it a whole new set of questions about the binaries of 'high' and 'low' culture, overlooked mass produced artefacts and subcultural practices, and their evolving relationships with higher education institutions – much larger issues from which scholars, even those who have never been interested in comics before, can surely learn.

Dr Dominic Davies
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Which Jane Austen?

Professor Kathryn Sutherland and Professor Freya Johnston look behind the popular image of Jane Austen to reveal a world more complex and varied than we usually realise. An exhibition, celebrating her bicentenary, brings the hidden side of this popular author to public attention.



On the face of it, Jane Austen had few connections with Oxford and not much interest in the university. Although several of her leading male characters are Oxford-educated clergymen, the novels have little to say about the place. When Fanny Price passes through, en route to Southampton, it is 'the dirty month of February' and she catches no more than 'a hasty glimpse' of her beloved Edmund's college.

As a seven-year-old, Austen had come to Oxford with her sister and their cousin to be taught by Mrs. Ann Cawley, widow of the Principal of Brasenose. If Jane Austen is indeed the author of a spoof letter by 'Sophia Sentiment' in *The Loiterer*, an undergraduate journal edited by two of her older brothers, the experience seems to have left her feeling bored, exhausted, and resentful. 'For my part', Sophia writes, 'I never, but once, was at Oxford in my life, and I am sure I never wish to go there again – They dragged me through so many dismal chapels, dusty libraries, and greasy halls, that it gave me the vapours for two days afterwards.'

Whether young Jane liked it or not, her family had enough ties to Oxford to ensure regular and prolonged visits. Two of her brothers, James and Henry, studied at St John's, as had their father; her mother's uncle Theophilus Leigh was Master of Balliol and Vice Chancellor of the university.

So it is in many ways fitting that the Oxford English Faculty is taking the lead in celebrating the life and work of Jane Austen in 2017, the 200th anniversary of her death. The exhibition, 'Which Jane Austen?', curated by Professor Kathryn Sutherland, is a showcase for Oxford's rich Austen holdings of manuscripts and early editions and an opportunity to draw unique items from other international institutions and private collections into a shared space that encourages us to reimagine Jane Austen – to see her in new lights and from different angles.

Jane Austen was born into a world changed little in many ways since the days of Shakespeare, 200 years before. She died, ridiculously young, at 41. Only a few years later there would be steam trains, photography, and the telegraph – the modern world. She is just, only just, out of view and out of reach. She teases us in many ways. We know so little about this writer to whose fictions we feel intimately bound. And yet (there is always an ‘and yet’, where Austen is concerned) there is far more to know than we allow. This is what ‘Which Jane Austen?’ sets out to explore.

One of the oddities of our fascination with Austen is how cosy and confined we have required her to be – her life and her fictions. Since the nineteenth century, readers have been wrapping themselves up in, patching themselves up with, Austen as a way of guarding against hard times. She was read as therapy in the trenches of the First World War and broadcast in the form of teatime family entertainments from the BBC during the Second World War, when she was billed as a ‘refuge from present realities’. More recently, her novels have been reimagined for film as romantic comedies in regency costume. And yet this comfortable writer is distinctly discomforting in so many ways – ‘read and enjoyed by precisely the sort of people whom she disliked’, as D. W. Harding wittily observed in 1940.

The idea behind the exhibition is to present the underexplored aspects of Jane Austen that hide in plain sight and to ask what difference it makes to know, for example, that three of her novels were published in a Military Library. Or that, while she published her first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, aged 35, from at least the age of 11 she wrote fiction displaying all the classic traits of modern adolescents on the loose: binge-drinking, boyfriend stealing, violence, hysteria, intense friendships, and utter contempt for parents. This is not exactly the moral landscape we encounter in the celebrated novels. Then again, what difference does it make to discover that she was thoroughly war-conditioned – Britain was at war with France for most of her adult life? Through her remarkable family – her sailor brothers and her glamorous cousin Eliza de Feuillide – she was connected to danger and war zones and international intrigue. And what difference does it make to know that she was a professional when it came to the business of publishing, prepared to take huge financial risks with the little money she possessed; or that, contrary to the metropolitan caution prescribed in her novels, she adored London life and its many material pleasures?

The exhibition, an associated book of essays, and the publication, by Freya Johnston and Kathryn Sutherland, of a radically new edition of Austen’s teenage fiction represent major reassessments of Austen’s legacy in 2017.

‘Which Jane Austen?’ runs from 23 June to 29 October in the Weston Library, the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. For more information about Jane Austen, we recommend Jane Austen, Writer in the World, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Bodleian Library Publications, 2017) and Jane Austen, Teenage Writings, ed. Kathryn Sutherland and Freya Johnston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Spotlight on Students

Charlotte Oakes



Having just finished my first year studying History and English at Merton College, I can safely say that it has been even more varied and enjoyable than I could have anticipated. As an extremely indecisive person, I spent weeks agonising over the decision of which of my A-Levels I wanted to pursue further, and having reached the conclusion that I couldn’t bear to give up either English or History, I decided to apply for the joint school. Although the prospect of studying options from two different subjects simultaneously at Oxford was daunting, I have found that the structure of the course is both flexible and stimulating. This has allowed me to explore periods I already enjoy, such as British History from 1330-1550, with such diverse topics as Victorian literature, ideas of gender and nationhood at the end of the 18th century and interdisciplinary

theories of historical and literary study.

From a very young age I developed the habit of reading anything and everything I could get my hands on, from Tolkien and Agatha Christie to excerpts from Samuel Pepys' diary and biographies of the wives of Henry VIII, and this still hasn't changed. By the time I was applying to Oxford, I'd discovered my particular love of the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Hardy, and I was excited to find out that I could devote a tutorial essay to a study of the latter in my first term. The texts I studied at A-Level also broadened my literary horizons; whilst the Middle English of Chaucer's 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale' was initially totally alien and difficult to get to grips with, studying it in a small class turned out to be incredibly fun, and I found that it became one of the texts that I enjoyed the most. This experience is undoubtedly the reason why I'm so excited to study literature from the period 1300-1550 next year, and explore the works of Chaucer amongst the wider literary context of the period. Hopefully having studied vernacular literacy in this period on the History side of the course this year will also prove useful!

My first year at Oxford has been fantastic, and a brilliant environment both to live and study in. Whilst it's naturally incredibly useful to be surrounded by all the books that could ever be needed, and to be able to work in amazing spaces like the reading rooms of the Old Bodleian, it's definitely the people that make being here so special. It's been really enjoyable to push myself to explore texts from different perspectives using different skills, and to be part of a supportive network of friends, tutors and faculty members. At the moment, I'm still too indecisive to know what I want to do in the future, but I'd love to be able to pursue my love of late medieval and early modern literature and history further. I'm looking forward to next year's challenges, including Middle English, Shakespeare, an interdisciplinary bridge paper and juggling essay deadlines with 6am starts for rowing!



Charlotte Oakes, BA History and English, Merton College

Miranda Reilly

The aspect of studying English I love the most is the ability to overlap your academic studies with almost any extracurricular interests and passions that you have: if you like cats, you can research cats; if you're interested in travel, travel writing, and so on. For me, since coming to Oxford, one of the main focuses of my free time is disability activism.

I first got involved with the student union (OUSU)'s disabled students' campaign, the Oxford Students' Disability Community (OSDC), at the end of my first year here. Struggling a lot with social anxiety, I founded a small group called SASI (Social Anxiety, Shyness and Introversion) and a friend met through this introduced me to OSDC. I found the community massively supportive and grew hugely as a person through our accessible socials and campaigning, reaching a point where I am now quite comfortable with most social situations and even do some public speaking. I am currently the President of OSDC and we are in the process of formally merging with Mind Your Head, OUSU's mental health awareness campaign.

As I learned more about disability theory, law and representation, I realised how underrepresented disability is even within subjects which embrace at least to some degree discussion of gender, race and queerness. Although these areas could still be developed far further, browsing bookshelves for feminist literary theory, for example, is significantly easier than doing the same for disability literary theory. The texts on disability which do exist, although admittedly less in number, are by no means common theoretical reading, despite some coming out around two decades ago. This is what initially sparked my interest in specialising in disability in literature, and after completing my BA I intend to apply for an MA in disability studies at Leeds University.

For my dissertation next year, I am currently starting to research the staging and embodiment of disability in productions of Shakespeare, and audience responses to this – disability appears in Shakespeare's works in far more than only Richard III (which has been a central text for literary disability scholars); academics in

recent years have discussed, among other examples, the epilepsy, or 'falling sickness', of various characters including Othello and Caesar, allusions to Kate having a limp in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Falstaff's gout, and, of course, the mental health of many characters. I have also been finding it very useful thinking about disability in relation to fairytales, which is my special option for next term, although my primary focus so far has been on the agency of children in fairytales and parent-child relationships.

I was very fortunate this summer to be offered a funded internship at the Pitt Rivers Museum, which included creating the foundations of a disability narratives trail similar to the Out in Oxford LGBTQ+ trail debuted in LGBTQ+ History Month 2017. After bringing in various members of OSDC and the Staff Disability Network to contribute to the trail over this upcoming Michaelmas term, we hope to be able to debut our trail in UK Disability History Month of this year (22nd November – 22nd December). This project was largely influenced and aided by the 2004 *Buried in the Footnotes* project, which can be read online, as well as the researchers' subsequent work, including *Re-Presenting Disability: Activism and Agency in the Museum* (2010). A full account of my internship can be found on the Pitt Rivers Object Collections blog, where I discuss this in more detail.

In the immediate future, I will be running for a one-year, full-time elected role at OUSU to begin in July 2018 as Vice President of Welfare and Equal Opportunities, which includes the overseeing of the disabled students' campaign and most of the other liberation campaigns. If elected, I'll be dedicating some of this role to continuing the push to increase Oxford's accessibility for students with disabilities, particularly regarding colleges. I would also hope to use some of my free time continuing independent research, especially as I would still have a bod card as a member of the university.

What I have found most useful about Oxford, in my personal experience, is the people I have met, not just for my academic progress but for my progress as a person. I have made many good friends within OSDC, the Staff Disability Network and OUSU, and have had very accepting classmates, and supportive tutors. Although I've only been at the university for two years, it already feels like something of a home to me, and I would like to return here in the future.



Sophia Smout

I have just completed my first year of studying English and German at Oriel College. I applied to study English having always fostered a great love of reading and an interest in language and its development. I was also interested in what literature is able to teach us about the historical, social and cultural contexts it is born from, and about the people behind and within it. As a destination for study, Oxford was for me an exciting choice; I was fascinated by its history and the opportunity to study such a diverse course, which spans a huge range of eras and movements and allows for an enormous amount of flexibility.

My expectations of the course were realised very quickly after starting at Oxford in October. During my first term I studied Victorian literature from 1830 to 1910; beginning with the industrial, social commentary novels of Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, we looked at a huge range of topics and authors, from American transcendentalism to fin-de-siècle decadence and the dramatic monologue form. During this term I really enjoyed the opportunity to revisit some authors I had investigated before, and to explore and discover many whose work was new to me. I also greatly appreciated the opportunities for individual choice and study; our final week allowed us to study an author of our choice, which was both interesting and refreshing. It is this allowance for individual freedom and interest which I have really enjoyed this year; this aspect signifies the difference between school and university and has given me the opportunity to develop my own personal interests and to discover new ones.

In the coming years I am looking forward to developing my knowledge of literature from earlier periods: I have elected to study Middle English from 1350 to 1550 and literature from the Restoration period alongside

Miranda Reilly, BA in English,

a close study of Shakespeare for my Final Honours Schools. Being a joint honours student means that, whilst I have to make (very difficult!) decisions about which modules to study, I am able to again tailor my studies very specifically towards personal interests. I am greatly looking forward to studying these earlier periods; I have very little knowledge of them and so am excited to extend my knowledge of the language, literature, culture and history in this era.

I will be spending the third year of my degree abroad in Germany for the modern language side of my course, before returning to Oxford to complete my studies. Following my degree, I am interested in potentially pursuing a career in law, although I am still uncertain and am therefore determined to keep my options open for now. I am certain that my studies at Oxford will equip me with the skills I will require in the future; for now, I am very excited for what the rest of my degree will bring!

Sophia Smout, BA English and Modern Languages (German), Oriel College

Spotlight on Staff

Professor Laura Marcus



Which book has had the biggest impact on you?

As a child, books I read and re-read included *Little Women* and *What Katy Did*. The moment in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* when Lucy goes through the wardrobe and feels the snow crunching under her feet has stayed with me. As an adult, the book that has probably meant most to me is Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. It brings together many of the themes which I research – memory, autobiography, the visual arts – but it also moves me as much as anything I've read. Leisure reading this summer has been Karl Ove Knausgaard's *My Struggle* - 5 volumes of the 6, as the final one has not yet been translated into English from its original Norwegian. I found it very compelling, though (like many of its readers) I am

not sure why.

What do you do in your spare time?

What I mostly do in my spare time is read more books. I also watch films when I can and listen to music. I live in a village outside Oxford, and there are muddy walks to be taken. And I enjoy cooking.

Describe your ideal day.

An ideal day is one in which there are no pressing writing deadlines. So that could be spent at home, pottering, but, more rewardingly, it might involve going to London, to the theatre or an art gallery. A trip to the sea (I find Oxfordshire very land-locked, after living in Brighton and then Edinburgh) would also be very good.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would that be?

I frequently feel as if the place I'm visiting would be great to live in. So, recently, that has been Copenhagen and Amsterdam. Paris always enchants. I visit New York quite regularly, and I can imagine living there very happily. Ultimately, though, I think it would be London. I grew up there, and it feels curious now to visit it as an outsider.

Who had the greatest influence on you during your childhood?

My grandfather, who was a pianist and whose love was truly unconditional.

When did you learn there was no Santa Claus?

What do you mean, no Santa Claus? In fact, and while I can recall many moments of disenchantment, this isn't one of them.

As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A vet. I still love animals, but my first experience of dissection in a biology class made me realise that this wouldn't be something for which I could train. After that, I had an idea that what I would really like to do is adapt literary texts for television. Nothing came of that either.

What teacher had the greatest impact on you?

I remember how good Miss Gough, my English teacher at secondary school, was at encouraging our writing and our responses to what we read.

Do you have pets?

I have a black rescue-cat called Marsha, of whom I am very fond but who can be a bit of a trial, as she likes to 'tread' on me for hours, with her sharp claws extended, accompanied by drooling.

Were you popular as a teenager?

I had a group of close friends, some of whom I still see.

What is your favourite music?

Schubert, Beethoven, Vaughan Williams – and many others. I've recently been listening with pleasure to later twentieth-century composers, such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass.

If you could have dinner with five famous people from history, who would they be?

One of them would have to be Virginia Woolf. Sigmund Freud would almost certainly be an interesting dinner companion. Sergei Eisenstein, the great Soviet film director. He would also be a good dinner companion for Samuel Beckett, who I would very much like to have met – and Beckett wrote to Eisenstein saying he would like to come and train with him in Moscow. (Eisenstein doesn't appear to have replied, so it would be a good opportunity for them to talk.) The nineteenth-century writer and economist Harriet Martineau, mainly because she was once described as being coquettish with her ear-trumpet, and I would like to see how this was done.

Describe yourself in five words.

It is a strange thing, but while I read a great deal of life-writing with interest and pleasure, and write about it quite substantially, I cannot think 'autobiographically'.

What do you like most about your job? What do you like least?

I feel very fortunate to have a job which entails, for a good part of the time, reading, thinking, discussing and writing about what interests me most – literature, film, ideas. I very much enjoy working with students, who are also focused on these things. I have excellent colleagues and it's an extremely friendly environment, which isn't organized hierarchically. And there is always so much going on in Oxford – talks, lectures, music, dinners. Least – this isn't a terrible thing, and it is necessary, but reference writing can take up a great deal of time.

Why are we here?

I don't think I have ever believed that there was a higher being or a life beyond this one. I think we have a duty to avoid further damage to this planet, and I regret that the Green agenda is so sparsely represented in



current politics. Teaching is a profession in which one has the opportunity to help others learn and grow – this is, I think, important. Kindness and creativity are high values for me.

If you weren't a member of the English Faculty, what would you be?

There isn't another profession that I wish I'd pursued. If I think of possible jobs, they are always tied up with literature in some way – publishing, literary journalism etc.

Professor Daniel Wakelin

Which book has had the biggest impact on you?

In practical impact, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We performed it at school when I was eleven. My English teacher (Mansfield alumnus Rob Lock) took me through my lines explaining every word. I found that process totally absorbing and decided that all I wanted to do was study literature.

What do you do in your spare time?

Visit galleries, watch films, read outside things outside my research interests (so, fiction, mid-twentieth-century poetry, American literature and history). Travel as much as is possible, especially in wildernesses.

Describe your ideal day.

Waking in the cool morning in the mountains or red rocks of the American west. Driving and then not-too-strenuously hiking through a strange landscape. Burgers for lunch in an improbably hip diner in the middle of nowhere. Reading by the mid-century Modernist motel pool in the dusk heat. Cicadas, stars and cold beer at night.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would that be?

California, where I've spent a lot of time, or the mountain west of the USA.

Who had the greatest influence on you during your childhood?

Teachers (see questions 1 and 9). Also, my dad was a signwriter for much of my childhood – he painted letters for a living. Somehow it took me years to notice that, when was teaching palaeography, I was teaching essentially his subject.

When did you learn there was no Santa Claus?

What?!? Fake news.

As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A film director. I realized early on that I didn't have the wealth or connections to get into that. Later, inspired by others, I wanted to be a teacher, which I sort of am.

Who were your childhood heroes?

Very early on, explorers. Later writers and artists.

What teacher had the greatest impact on you?

A trio of teachers at my village middle school: Rob Lock (mentioned above), Dawn Porter and John Hindmarsh. Mrs Porter, the drama teacher, was a foul-mouthed, flammable former opera singer who took me into her life – that is, literally took me to her home (as would never be allowed now!) and introduced me to a life filled with the arts. Mr Hindmarsh, the equally flammable headteacher, looked like early incarnations of Dr Who and had opinions like Michael Foot's (both for their politics and their reverence for reading). He taught every group once a week for 'media studies', in which he would show us how to analyse newspapers or advertisements for the bias. I am very strongly influenced by their unconventional education.

Do you have pets?

No, as we're out of the house too long. I would like a funny ugly dog, such as a French bulldog or dachshund. My partner would like 'a proper dog', like a labrador. It's probably best that practicalities have prevented a fight over this.

Were you popular as a teenager?

No, I was too geeky. But I became part of the village am-dram clique.

What is your favourite music?

Early, baroque and twentieth-century choral music and opera. (Britten – I'm from Suffolk.) Folk and folk-influenced pop. And mid-century showtunes.

If you could have dinner with five famous people from history, who would they be?

From history, I'm intrigued by people who, with hindsight, were at the start of big changes: Abigail and John Adams at the founding of the USA; Peter Wildeblood in gay liberation. And I'd add Barbara Pym and W. H. Auden to make the dinner entertaining. I suspect the Adams family would be too dour on their own.

Describe yourself in five words.

Too longwinded to do that.

How would your friends describe you?

He is terrible at keeping in touch.

What do you like most about your job? What do you like least?

In teaching, I most enjoy hearing students' nascent ideas and helping them to formulate and develop them. I like least the pointless paperwork which Oxford's overlapping bureaucracies generate.

Why are we here?

For our and others' pleasure.

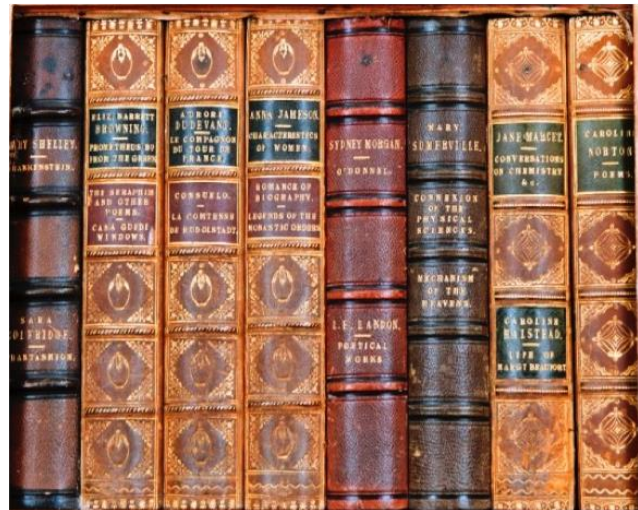
If you weren't a member of the English Faculty, what would you be?

A teacher in school. I could envisage switching career to do that. If all education is finally devalued and abolished, as seems threatened, I'll become a house painter.

Spotlight on the Faculty

Public Engagement awards

Universities and researchers nowadays face increasing pressure to demonstrate the relevance of their research to the wider public, so we are delighted that Dr Sophie Ratcliffe has won one of this year's Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Public Engagement with Research, for her project *Unsilencing the Library*. The project which she leads both examines and takes inspiration from a 'mock' bookshelf in the library of Compton Verney House, an imposing eighteenth-century mansion in Warwickshire. This selection of mock books is particularly striking because all the authors cited in the book spines are female. In response, researchers have delved into the library catalogue to find out which books were actually read by Georgiana, Lady Willoughby de Broke, whose home and library this was. In addition, a workshop was held with students from Kineton High School to explore things that can be done with books beyond simply reading; Prison Reading Groups were invited to nominate books which should be added to a collection accompanying the Victorian feminist bookshelf; and guest curators including Emma Watson were asked to contribute their nominations.



Open to the public at Compton Verney, this exhibition offers new insights into why books mattered in the past, and why they still do today. More information can be found at www.unsilencingthelibrary.



The project *Shakespeare's Dead* was Highly Commended in the same category of the awards. This was an exhibition at the Weston Library in Oxford, designed and curated by Professors Emma Smith and Simon Palfrey as part of the commemorations of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, along with an associated programme of events. The exhibition looked at the theme of death in Shakespeare's works, and explored ways in which Shakespeare used the anticipation of death, the moment of death, and mourning the dead as contexts to bring characters to

life. 'Last words' – such as Mercutio's renowned 'A plague on both your houses' – funerals, and life after death were key themes of the display, illustrated by items from the Bodleian's collection including the First Folio, a number of early editions, and contemporary artworks.

More information on the awards and all winners can be found at www.ox.ac.uk/research/public-engagement.

'Postcolonial Conversations' Alumni Event



One of the great strengths of the Faculty is the extensive research which is going on in the area of Postcolonial writing. On Saturday June 3rd, Professor Elleke Boehmer, Professor Ankhi Mukherjee and Dr David Dwan shared their current research projects with English Faculty alumni. Following a gentle walk up to the Pitt Rivers Museum in the glorious sunshine, they then joined Dr James McDougall and Dr Faisal Devji from the History Faculty, along with a number of History alumni, for a discussion of what is meant by the term 'Postcolonial' (or indeed 'Post-colonial', for the Historians) and the aims and value of research in this field. Although the two disciplines have very different approaches and priorities, the opportunity for dialogue on this topic was warmly welcomed, and the panel members contributed freely and positively.

The afternoon was brought to a close with a wine reception in the main court of the Pitt Rivers museum, giving alumni the opportunity to explore some of the rich treasures of the collection, while continuing the conversation informally. One of the Museum guides was also on hand to offer further insights into some of the artefacts on display. Opinions of those present differed strongly as to whether the museum and its collection represented the worst of British colonialism, or a much more nuanced approach to understanding and valuing different cultures, seeing the similarities as well as the contrasts between them.

Shakespeare Study Morning for Local School Students

On Thursday 14 September, sixty-three students and their teachers from four local state schools (The Cherwell School, Oxford Spire Academy, Cheney School, and Bartholomew School) visited the English Faculty for a free A-level study morning. Led by Dr Catherine Redford (Career Development Fellow in English at Hertford) and Cathy O'Neill (an alumna of the Faculty who is now an English teacher), the morning focused on helping the students to engage with criticism – including thinking about performance as

criticism – in a meaningful and sophisticated way when studying Shakespeare’s plays.



The morning started with tea and coffee in the new foyer, allowing the students to meet some academics from the Faculty and discuss the different texts that they had been studying at school. Professor Emma Smith then delivered a plenary lecture that considered critical approaches to Shakespeare, with a focus on Othello, Hamlet, and Twelfth Night. Following the lecture the students split off into smaller seminar groups, each led by an Oxford academic. In these lively sessions, they got the opportunity to take some of the ideas raised by the lecture and discuss how they could use various critical approaches in their study of Shakespeare. The morning concluded with a talk on how to access quality criticism online, introducing the students to a variety of free scholarly resources including the Faculty’s ‘Great

Writers Inspire’ website.

The study morning was a great success, with the participants all agreeing that it had introduced them to new ways of thinking about Shakespeare’s work that built upon and complemented what they had already covered in school. We hope to run similar study days on different themes and topics in the future.

Dr Catherine Redford, Hertford College



Spotlight on our Alumni

Don Chapman (BA, 1956)

Don Chapman’s new book, *Wearing the Trousers: Fashion, Freedom and the Rise of the Modern Woman* (Amberley Publishing), is the first full-length history of the Rational Dress movement. This began in 1851 when Mrs. Amelia Bloomer publicised Turkish trousers in her temperance and women’s rights journal, *The Lily*, published and distributed locally in New York state. Her influence is reflected in the adoption of the term ‘bloomers’. The story went viral and within a few months was

tillating and infuriating newspaper readers in Australia and New Zealand. Central to the cause in Great Britain were two remarkable women. The first, Caroline Dexter, toured the length and breadth of the country in the autumn of 1851 lecturing in bloomers. The second, Lady Harberton, revived interest in the campaign in the 1880s by championing the divided skirt, *never* trousers.

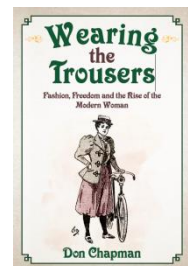
In 1851 hack writers rushed out playlets and ballads featuring the new costume, most of them adopting a fiercely male chauvinist stance. Only one reputable author would appear to have tried to cash in, the novelist Charles Reade, with his 1857 short story, *The Bloomer* – the unlikely tale of an American heiress, whose passion for bloomers lost her the affections of her fiancé only for her to win them back again when she rescued him from drowning in her eponymous bloomers. In the 1880s and 90s hack writers were again to the fore, but the movement also provided inspiration for two major dramatists and one novelist. H. G. Wells’ still very readable ‘holiday romance’, *The Wheels of Chance* (1896), which tells of a draper’s assistant who rescues a rationally dressed young lady from the clutches of a would-be seducer, drew heavily on Wells own early life as a ‘counter jumper’ and his painful experience of learning to ride a bike. Pinero’s farce, *The Amazons* (1893), the story of a marchioness’s attempt to counteract her disappointment at producing three girls by bringing them up as boys, was not in the same league as his classic farces, but delighted audiences first in Britain, then in America and Australia. *The Benefit of the Doubt* (1895) was more serious, prompting

George Bernard Shaw to quip: 'We shall soon have him suffering the same fate as Ibsen.' His own assault on marriage, *The Philanderer* (1893) featured a young lady dressed in rational dress knickerbockers, her detachable skirt beside her, reading in the Ibsen Club library. He could find no producer to present it and it first saw the light of day in 1898 in *Plays Unpleasant* when he published it with his first play, *Widowers' Houses* (1892) and *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893), which the Lord Chamberlain had refused to licence.

Don came up to St Cat's in 1952 to read for a pass degree in classics in his spare time while working as a book clerk at the Bodleian Library. His tutor was the University Public Orator, J. G. Griffiths, who persuaded him to come up full time and read for an honours degree. Not fancying greats or oriental languages, he opted for English. His tutors were F. W. Bateson, Christopher Tolkien and the Dean of St. Cat's, Chesney Horwood. A chance remark by Freddie Bateson – 'You write lively essays, Mr Chapman, you should be a journalist!' – led him to become a graduate trainee with the Westminster Press. After spells at Keighley and Swindon, he returned to his native city, Oxford, in 1959 where he was progressively general reporter and university correspondent – he launched the *Norrington Table* – columnist, feature writer and arts editor of the *Oxford Mail*. Until he took early retirement in 1994 he also served as the paper's theatre critic. His interest in rational dress dates from 1971 when a reader came to him with his grandfather's papers relating to the Western Rational Dress Club. He said the subject deserved a book and when he retired he would write it.

At the start of his retirement, the directors of the Oxford Playhouse invited him to write that theatre's history, for which Leicester University awarded him his doctorate in 2006 and the Society for Theatre Research with the University of Hertfordshire Press published as *Oxford Playhouse: High and Low Drama in a University City* in 2008.

Don Chapman read English at St Cats from 1952-56. Wearing the Trousers: Fashion, Freedom and the Rise of the Modern Woman is published by Amberly Press.



Tom Chivers (BA, 2004)



[A Medieval Poem for a Time of Crisis](#)

Fair Field, a theatrical reimagining of the medieval poem Piers Plowman, premiered this summer. Artistic co-

director and Oxford English graduate Tom Chivers (St Anne's, 2001-2004) explains why he brought a 650-year-old poem into the modern day.

I was first introduced to the 7,000-line, medieval poem *Piers Plowman* by the charismatic English lecturer (now Tolkien Professor of English) Vincent Gillespie. It was wild, weird and, as the poet promises in the Prologue, full of 'wondres to here'. "This is even better than Chaucer," I thought. I remember waiting impatiently outside Vincent's office door at St Anne's College, which at one point carried an A4 print-out of then-Education Secretary Charles Clarke, along with his comment, 'I don't mind there being some medievalists around for ornamental purposes, but there is no reason for the state to pay for them'. There is a lot of Vincent's wit in that gesture, and perhaps something of the poet of *Piers Plowman* too. Self-deprecating, inquiring, and sharp as a knife.

I fell in love with *Piers Plowman* as an undergraduate at Oxford, before commencing a career as a writer, publisher and arts producer. It was almost ten years later, after pulling my old copy from the bookshelf at random, that the idea of a theatrical production began to emerge. I was immediately hit by how many parallels there are between the world of *Piers Plowman*, and the world that we're currently in.

Piers Plowman is, fundamentally, a poem of crisis. Written in the late fourteenth century by the Herefordshire poet William Langland, *Piers Plowman* takes the form of an allegorical dream-vision. It tells the story of a wandering dreamer, Will, who ends up on a quest to find Truth. Will is an archetypal anti-hero - an unreliable narrator like Don Quixote or Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *Ulysses*. At the start of the poem, he falls asleep in the Malvern Hills in Herefordshire and then sees a vision of the world as a 'fair field full of folk, working and wandering' - a bustling panorama of medieval life. But this dreamscape is beset by problems - spiritual decay, corruption, binge drinking, you name it.

Despite being firmly situated in the medieval Christian imagination, *Piers* has clear links to modern problems, such as the MPs' expenses scandal. In the very first section Langland attacks absentee priests who spend none of their time in their parish, but instead live in London, living off the fat of the land while their parishes starve. Abuse of power and the corrupting influence of money are key ideas; and whilst modern parallels are never far away, these ideas emerge from stark historical reality. The fourteenth century was a time of social and economic change, in which old hierarchies were coming under pressure from an assertive labour force and new forms of trade - what we might identify as early capitalism. It's a theme taken up by journalist Paul Mason in his book *Postcapitalism*. 'In high feudalism,' Mason writes, 'credit is seen as sinful. So when money and credit burst through the boundaries and create a market system, it feels like a revolution.'

This sense of the dangerous, revolutionary power of money floods through *Piers Plowman*. Everyone seems to be on the make, from false beggars and dodgy friars to 'regraters' - city merchants who buy up food in one market, mark up the price and unload it in another market. Langland concentrates an entire early passage of the poem on 'Lady Mede', a character who represents 'reward' or 'payment', and through that passage stages a debate about the use and abuse of money. It's a carefully poised argument that seems as alive today as it did 650 years ago.

Fair Field aimed to make accessible live theatre which also honours the poem's wildness. The production opened this summer in the Herefordshire market town of Ledbury and the nearby Malvern Hills with an outdoor spectacle of music and performance. The wider project included an exhibition at the National Poetry Library at Southbank Centre, featuring an exquisite early manuscript of *Piers Plowman*, as well as a website where you can now watch a film of the production (www.thisfairfield.com), and workshops about medieval poetry for schoolchildren. I hope audiences experienced something of what I did back at Oxford almost fifteen years ago: to hear some of Langland's extraordinary language performed aloud in resonant spaces, and to explore the strange, hallucinatory world of ideas that it creates.

Christopher Heywood (Rhodes Scholar, 1949-52)

Now retired, I previously held the post of Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Literature at the University of Sheffield (1956-1988), followed by the post of Professor of English at Okayama University, Japan (1989-1995). My research for the past 30 years has concentrated on the Brontë family, emphasising the bilingual Emily as leader of her siblings' mature writing careers after her year in Brussels. The results run to some 15 articles, beginning with 'Yorkshire Slavery in *Wuthering Heights*', *RES* 38 (1987), 184-98. My recent article, 'Ireland, Africa and Love in Emily Brontë's "Gondal" Poems', *Brontë Studies* 38 (2013), 111-125, became the most frequently cited article in that journal during the three years following its appearance. Its topic reappears in greater detail in an article currently under construction, titled 'Emily Brontë's Irish Allegory of Love'. The early articles prompted an invitation from Broadview Press to provide their annotated edition of *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Heywood (Peterborough ONT, 2002).

A number of articles on the 'Gondal' poems are currently being melted down to form the central chapter in a book about Emily Brontë, similarly under construction. Its five draft chapters are preceded by a dedication to Rachel and David Cecil, providers of the inexhaustible supplies of hospitality, fun and information that led to my BLitt thesis, 'The Influence of the French Realists on English writers and Critics 1880-1915'. Lord David's enthusiastic response to the early Brontë articles has acted as a green light to the present. These were preceded by a flotilla of around seven articles arising from my similarly welcomed discovery of the earliest version of *Madame Bovary* by the part Irish writer Mary Elizabeth Braddon.

As a former South African (Rhodes Scholar at New College, 1949-52), the convulsions in Africa after 1960 led to my volunteering as Professor of English for two years, on leave of absence from Sheffield, at the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. Following a medley of related conference papers and articles, I was invited by CUP to write their book, *A History of South African Literature* (CUP 2005). It received under-informed punishment in reviews, more exactly, hastily improvised newspaper articles. As a liberal, anti-imperialist bilingual, like others I do support aspects of the Afrikaner nationalist movement, after stripping off the ideology it borrowed from Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20e Jahrhunderts* (1935). My book survives as the present paperback, with modest sales. Possibly its Rosenberg and U-Boat topic may warrant a future article giving details for which the book offered insufficient space. During annual visits to SA, I gossip for fun at informal gatherings of retired professors of English in South Africa.

The Brontë work explains my living now in North Yorkshire, along the sisters' route to school at Cowan Bridge, and at the centre of the spider's web of archives that led to the 1987 *RES* article.

Helping you stay connected: Oxford University English Faculty Alumni LinkedIn page



Did you know that the English Faculty has its very own LinkedIn page specifically set up to allow you to reconnect and network with Alumni? LinkedIn is a valuable platform for professionals to explore and promote business opportunities and build a pool of contacts across different sectors.

You can access the page by [clicking here](#), or search for 'Oxford University English Faculty Alumni' within LinkedIn.

The group is managed by the English Faculty Administrative Team, but we are very keen for members to open up their own discussions and conversations on the page: this is your space, so please do go ahead and use it.

Should you have any questions about LinkedIn or the Faculty's page, please contact the [Faculty Office](#). You can also keep up to date with Faculty news and related information by liking our [Facebook page](#), or following us on [Twitter](#).

Spotlight on Events

We have a varied programme of public lectures on each term. Forthcoming highlights include:

Visiting Professor of Creative Media Lectures

We are delighted that Stig Abell, Editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* will be our Visiting Professor for Creative Media for 2018. His lectures, under the title 'The End of Journalism?' will be on Friday 23rd February and Monday 26th February. Full details will be on our website shortly. Admission is free, and all are welcome.

Summer Schools

Plans are currently under way for two summer schools next year. In July, the Medical Humanities summer school will take place at Green Templeton College, to bring together and sixth-form level for a week of interdisciplinary study. The course is taught thematically, with topics covered including illness narratives, language and communication (including body language), observation, medical ethics, ageing, and diversity, gender, and (anti)heroes.

'Here be Dragons': the Oxford Fantasy Literature summer school will be held in the Faculty in September, and is open to everyone. Speakers from the Oxford English Faculty and other UK universities will look at different aspects of the genre, through 14 talks delivered over three days. Along with talks focussing on the works of individual authors such as Tolkein, G. R. R. Martin, J. K. Rowling and Diana Wynne Jones, and overviews of the history of fantasy, there will be a number of short lectures on wider themes such as fantastic beasts, writing processes, and Arthurian fantasy.

More information on both of these summer schools is available via our website.

Contact us

To keep us informed of what you're doing now, or to submit suggestions for what you'd like to see in our newsletter, please email english.office@ell.ox.ac.uk. Alternatively, you can write to:

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