

# EXON

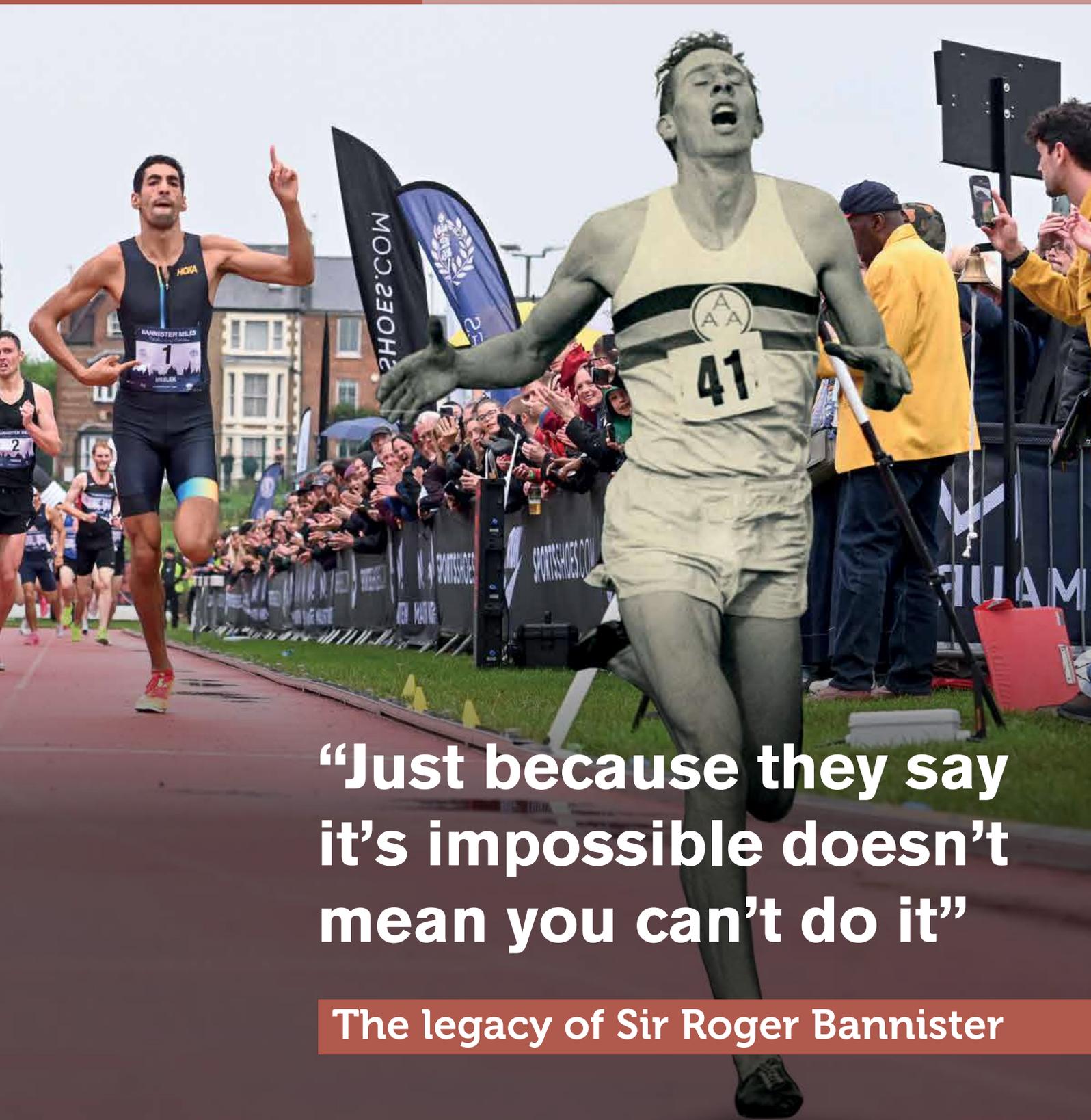
THE EXETER COLLEGE MAGAZINE ISSUE 27 WINTER 2024  
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Formula One world champion Nico Rosberg on racing towards a sustainable future

The British Olympic Association's Andy Anson discusses building Team GB for greatness

Ella Stadler explores the controversial history of gender verification in sport

Exeter's first mile world record holder, Tolkien's first published poem, and England's first black footballer



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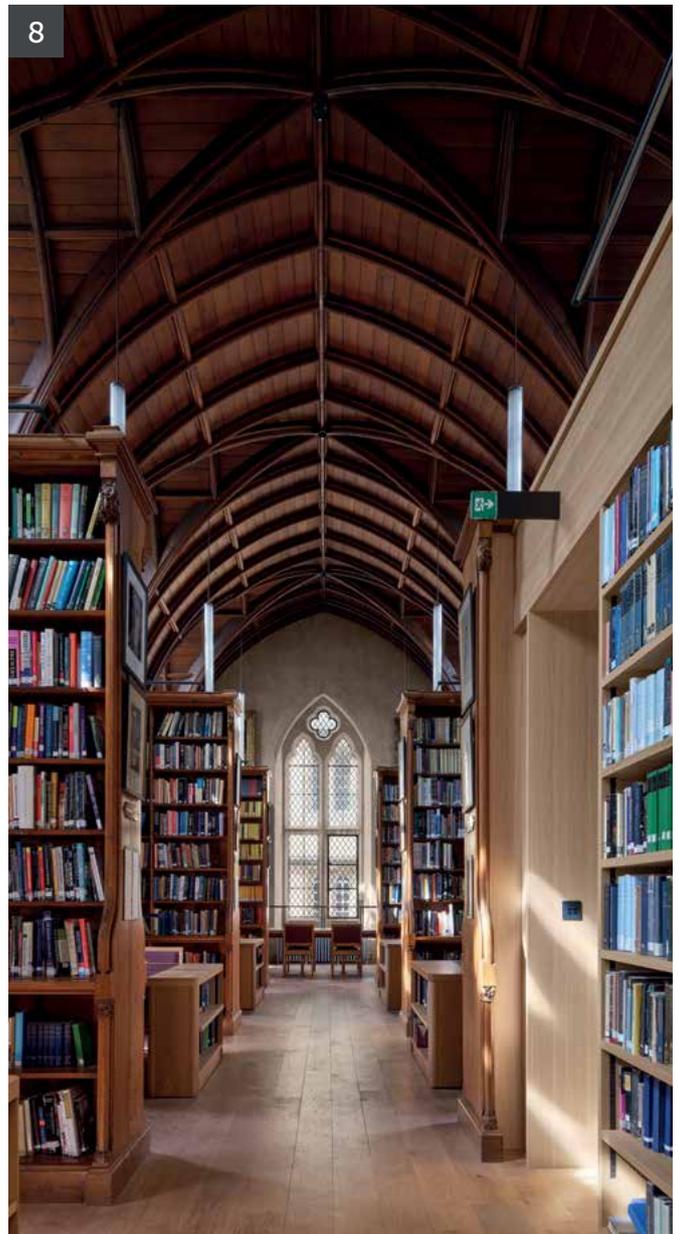
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# Editorial

Regular readers of *Exon* will know that each year we focus on a different theme. Given the important part it plays in College life, it is a surprise that only now, issue 27, has sport taken the spotlight.

Naturally we have included news of Exeter's sporting achievements from the last academic year, including Cuppers wins for both the men's and women's rugby teams. It is also exciting to share the College's plans to redevelop its sports grounds. But the impetus to choose sport as our theme for *Exon* 2024 (reaching you early in 2025, a little later than usual) was two significant anniversaries: 70 years since Sir Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile, and a staggering 200 years since Exeter College Boat Club was founded.

We have four pages covering Sir Roger's feat, the commemorations that occurred in May, and Sir Roger's legacy. But did you know that Sir Roger was not the first Exonian to set a world record for the mile? Jack Lovelock did so in 1933. He went on to break more records and win gold at the 1936 Olympics (see p. 28).

Marking 200 years of Exeter's Boat Club, we have articles on the Club's history, its fortunes on the river in its bicentenary year, and the remarkable pipeline of rowers progressing from Exeter's to Oxford's Boat Club.

We have alumni contributions from the CEO of the British Olympic Association, Andy Anson, the Chair of UK sports charity Chance to Shine, Tim Score, and the outgoing Chair of the MCC, Bruce Carnegie-Brown. Sports events organiser Rachel Dulai gives a different perspective on what it takes to succeed, and Matt Tiller shines a light on the first black man selected to play football for England.

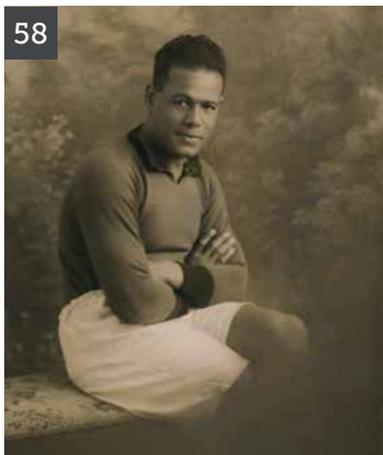
Student contributions include the sacrifices required to become an elite athlete (and coping with failure), using engineering to predict football outcomes, confronting prejudice as a pole fitness enthusiast, gender verification at the Paris Games, constructing sporting viewing experiences, and an analysis of JRR Tolkien's first published poem – a marvellous mock-epic tale of a school rugby match.

My thanks to all the contributors, and I hope you enjoy this edition of *Exon*.

**Matthew Baldwin**

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# Rector's review

As he steps down as Rector, **Professor Sir Rick Trainor** reflects on a triumphant and memorable year for Exonians.



Supporting activity, the theme of this year's *Exon*, has long been an important part of the life of Exeter College. Exeter was one of the first Oxford colleges to row competitively, for example, and sports such as cricket, football, and rugby soon became vigorous rivals for the attention of the College's students. The advent of women reinforced this pattern – there was a women's boat in the initial year, 1979-80, of female students, for instance. Also, women have helped to diversify sport at Exeter, notably through netball. The College has had its fair share of intercollegiate female as well as male sporting triumphs over the years, and both men and women have contributed excellence to University squads, notably but by no means only on the river. Sport, including informal running, retains the attention of a significant proportion of the Exeter student body. Also, the enthusiasm goes beyond students: there was a Fellows' Eight in the time of Rector Cairncross, and many staff members are regular participants in Oxford foot races.

In this report on the College during academic year 2023/24 I propose to give due weight to this variety of persisting sporting enthusiasm. But I shall also use sport – broadly defined as vibrant enthusiasm going beyond academic activities – as a vehicle for surveying the life of Exeter more generally during the past twelve months. For the College's vibrancy manifests itself in a wide variety of extracurricular activities as well as in academic pursuits themselves.

Returning to sport narrowly defined, its importance in the life of the College was symbolised by two spectacular events during academic year 2023/24. Both occurred in May. First came Exeter's share of the celebrations, during the initial bank holiday weekend, of the 70th anniversary of the breaking of the four-minute mile by a truly famous Exonian, the late Sir Roger Bannister (1946, Physiological Sciences). His son Thurstan (1979, PPE) organised community running events in the town, complementing the expert races run at the Iffley Road track, the scene of Sir Roger's epic triumph. Each of Sir Roger's colleges staged a celebration, but not the least of these was the culmination, a dinner at Exeter attended by a galaxy of sporting notables



*Celebrating the legacy of Sir Roger Bannister, the Bannister Miles brought runners of all ages and abilities together in May*

including Exeter Tutorial Fellow Professor Simon Clarke (Chemistry), formerly a leading Oxford student runner. The evening featured addresses by the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor (herself a racing participant during the weekend and an enthusiastic champion for sport generally), and Sir Roger's elder son, Exonian Clive Bannister (1977, PPE). Clive's illustrated speech brought home the persisting, broadly-based sports promotion of his late father; it also demonstrated the way in which Sir Roger's career, like the life of his undergraduate college, joined together sporting prowess and academic (in his case medical, more specifically neurological) excellence. The atmosphere was highly festive. It was one of the most memorable of all the events in which I have participated at Exeter.

Equally festive, in its own splendid way, was the dinner, on the Saturday of the month's second bank holiday, celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Exeter College Boat Club. Former and current Exeter rowers crowded the Hall. Happily, Exeter overall had had a good Summer Eights – which culminated that day – especially in the women's boats. Also, 2024 had seen a record number of Exeter students in the various University boats on Boat Race day. So there was much to celebrate, present as well as past. And the proceedings feted not only the Boat Club's fortunes on the river but also the formidable esprit de corps and diverse organisational prowess which has long permeated the Club and continues to inspire both its current members and its alumni. The latter – especially Matt Holyoak (2015, History) – had done much to organise the dinner, and the alumni group continues actively to promote the Club, including through the ongoing renovation of the ageing 1960s boathouse. The Boat Club's role as one of the greatest centres of vitality at Exeter was on triumphant display at the bicentenary dinner.

Of course sport at Exeter goes well beyond rowing, as you will see in the report from the JCR Amalgas Representative, Ava Milne (2022, Medicine), in this edition of *Exon*. A splendid instance was Exeter's triumph, in 2023/24, in Sailing Cuppers, and further Cuppers glory was enjoyed by both the Men's and Women's rugby teams. It is also significant that, in the spring, the College's Governing



*Later that day guests raised a glass to Sir Roger in Exeter's dining hall*



Clockwise from top left: Exeter's sailors won Cuppers in 2024; Exonian Rasmus Bakken helped Oxford win the men's karate Varsity match for the first time in over a decade; MCR student Hemalatha Desai represented Oxford in cricket, rowing and badminton at HEC Paris's 2024 MBA Tournament; Williams College student Mohammad-Mehdi Mojarradi (in black) impressed in the intercollegiate welterweight boxing in 2023/24; Rachael Merritt (far right) helped Oxford retain the Varsity Polo trophy and win the Pacific Polo Cup

Body gave in principle approval to the redevelopment, in collaboration with Hertford, of the colleges' adjoining sports ground at New Marston. Also, many staff members and students ran alongside each other in the Oxford Town and Gown 10km race, also in May, earning funds for Exeter's 40-year-old student-run charity, ExVac, which raises money for, and implements, holidays for children from Oxford who otherwise would not enjoy such a break.

That organisation reminds us of the relevance, to the theme of this year's *Exon*, of a wide range of extracurricular activities, combining – with sport – to produce a balance, for Exeter students, to the intense academic life both of undergraduates and postgraduates. There are regular lively 'bops', of course. And there is also vigorous student participation in, and organisation of, the annual College Ball. Held each year – much more frequently than in most other colleges – and in late April (exceptionally early by Oxford standards), the Ball is invariably cold and sometimes wet but is always sold out and provides a joyful spectacle of dancing, dodgems, competitive indoor games, and liberal indulgence in food and drink. This year, as in 2023, the Ball also featured a DJ 'set' by the Rector – my choice of music heavily influenced by the greater knowledge of my daughter-in-law and daughter – but that is another story!

Extracurricular life also includes enthusiastic student participation in the annual Exeter festivals, which included, in 2023/24, Diwali, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Burns Night, Lunar New Year, Vaisakhi, and Passover. Many Exeter students also participate in dramatic productions, albeit they are usually staged outside the College. There is also substantial Exeter student participation in a variety of art forms – including poetry, film, and fine art itself – in the annual Turl Street Arts Festival, jointly mounted with Jesus and Lincoln, which culminates in Evensong, usually in Exeter Chapel, with exuberant singing by the combined choirs.

The Exeter Choir, like the Boat Club, is a beehive of student organisational activity – indeed Exeter is unusual in having a high-quality choir which not only largely consists of students but is also student-run. Vigorously supported by the Chaplain and the Parry Organ Scholar (Sungjoon Park), the Choir continued during the past academic year to spread its musical virtuosity across four services each week during term. The Choir also made a European tour in the summer, creating a gap – for a Gaudy Evensong – very ably filled by members of the Exonian Choir, which consists of alumni of the Choir itself. Other notable musical events during the past twelve months include well-attended weekly organ recitals – organised by Graduate Organist Michael Koenig

and with my wife Marguerite as patron. In Trinity Term there was also a spectacular concert of sacred music by Visiting Fellows Delvyn Case (a composer and pianist from Wheaton College) and John Pfumojena (an actor, composer, theatre director, and researcher – and a formidable singer). Likewise the Middle Common Room staged an evening combining organ playing and fine wine in the Chapel.

Students – along with staff and Fellows – were also enthusiastic volunteers for Open Days and the Offer Holders Day. Likewise people from all these categories of affiliation participated strongly in the year's continuation of the College's sustainability campaign, including bike days to keep the scores of student bicycles on the road and plans for increased biodiversity at the sports ground. The success of these efforts was encapsulated by the College's Gold Award, for the second year running, in the University's Green Impact scheme.

Competitive entrepreneurship likewise continued to attract Exeter students. For example, undergraduate Kristy Huang (2021, Music) formed part of the winning team for the StEP Ignite student entrepreneurship competition organised by Oxford University Innovation. Likewise creative writing attracts the sustained attention of many Exeter students. Notable here in 2023/24 was the first novel, *Something About Her* (Putnam), produced by DPhil student Clementine Collett (2020, DPhil Information, Communication & Social Sciences) under the name of Clementine Taylor.

Readers of *Exon* might be forgiven for thinking that my bracketing together of sport and extracurricular activities is slightly artificial. If they do, they should reflect on the fact that more than a few Exeter students combine the two spheres. Such, this year, were Freddie Crichton-Miller (2021, English), cox, ExVac leader, and President of the Junior Common Room, and Rachael Merritt (2022, Social Science of the Internet and Rhodes Scholar), President of the Middle Common Room and a regular competitor in polo. Rachael's achievements in 2024 included helping Oxford retain the Varsity trophy and, in China, secure the Pacific Polo Cup!

Such vigour, variety, and balance, are designed to spill over into the post-Exeter lives of our alumni. That they do is exemplified by the publication, by Exonian Richard Sparks (1970, English), who has had a varied career in entertainment (and is a frequent host of Exeter events at his home in Beverly Hills), of *New Rock New Role* (Arc Manor), the first of his series of fantasy adventure novels. Alumni virtuosity in a very different sphere was exemplified by the election to Parliament, in July's UK General Election, of two Exonians: Claire Coutinho (2004, Mathematics and Philosophy), former Cabinet minister and now Shadow Secretary of State for Climate Change and Net Zero, re-elected as a Conservative for East Surrey, and Chris Murray (2005, Modern Languages), newly elected as Labour MP for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh. Meanwhile, although as Rector I am naturally biased in favour of alumni giving, I can't but admire the continuing vigour of such generosity to the College, notably at Giving Day in autumn 2023, with 253 donors contributing



Lunar New Year was one of the many festivals celebrated in Exeter College in 2023/24



Visiting Fellows Delvyn Case and John Pfumojena delivered an astonishing concert in Chapel in June

Of course, for our current students it is hoped that the wealth of sporting and extracurricular activity is balanced by excellent academic work. That it does so is illustrated by the 37 Firsts gained by Exeter undergraduates in Finals in 2024 and by the 31 doctorates and 62 taught degrees (including 19 Distinctions and 29 Merits) secured by the College's postgraduates during the academic year. The enthusiasm of Exeter students for their studies is also borne out by the fact that they queued to enter the College Library when it reopened in October and crowded its expanded number of reading spaces for months thereafter.

As this survey indicates, in 2023/24, as long before, Exeter students – and alumni – have productively combined sport and other extracurricular activities with professional excellence. This continuing wide-ranging success provides, I hope, a fitting conclusion to my final summary, for *Exon*, of the College's year.

**Rick Trainor**, Rector 2014-24

# WELCOME TO THE “WELL OF INSPIRATION”

Author Sir Philip Pullman formally opens Exeter College's Jackson Library following major restoration. By **Matthew Baldwin**, Head of Communications.





FOLLOW US INSIDE



**O**n 18 May, Exeter College was delighted to welcome author Sir Philip Pullman (1965, English and Honorary Fellow) and other esteemed guests for the formal opening of Exeter College's Jackson Library following a multimillion-pound restoration and transformation project.

The Victorian library was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott in the Neo-Gothic style and originally opened in 1857. Over the decades it has been the heart of academic life at Exeter College for generations of students, including celebrated authors such as Sir Philip, JRR Tolkien, Alan Bennett, Sir Martin Amis and Tariq Ali, athlete and neurologist Sir Roger Bannister, and former president of Ghana His Excellency John Kufuor. More recent former students include Turner Prize-winning artist Helen Marten, BBC journalists Reeta Chakrabarti and Sanchia Berg, and actress and writer Imogen Stubbs.

The library is now named the Jackson Library, to honour the father of the project's principal donor and Exeter College alumnus William Jackson (1983, Geography).

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*The Jackson Library's striking Victorian Gothic architecture has been preserved and restored, revealing original features, some of which had been hidden for decades.*

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Nex Architects undertook the complex redesign of the Jackson Library, enhancing its original features and making substantial improvements to transform the beautiful building into one that is fit for 21st-century study.

Following a year of restoration and renovation work, the Jackson Library reopened to Exeter students at the start of the 2023/24 academic year, with people queuing to be among the first in. It is now fully accessible, with a lift that services all floors, step-free entrance and a wheelchair accessible toilet. The lighting, electrics, ventilation, and environmental performance of the building have all been significantly improved. There are also more reader spaces, with every desk fitted with electric plugs and lights for each person and the option to raise or lower some desks electronically. The Jackson Library's striking Victorian Gothic architecture has been preserved and restored, revealing original features, some of which had been hidden for decades. The stonework, woodwork and oak bookcases have been restored, and where there is new woodwork, such as in the new mezzanine floor in the annexe, outstanding craftsmanship has ensured that it is of the highest quality throughout and sympathetic to Gilbert Scott's vision.





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*"You will see the sort of technology that, in the words of Arthur C Clarke, is indistinguishable from magic."*

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Speaking at the formal opening, Rector Professor Sir Rick Trainor said: 'The Jackson Library has substantially more reading spaces and better accommodation for library staff than it did before the construction began. Also, the building now has a lift and modern services fit for the digitised work of early 21st-century students. In parallel there has been an emphasis on restoration. Not only is the stonework in much better shape than before, the interior of the library, with cluttering modern bookcases removed, has much more of the air and light that Gilbert Scott intended, complete with restored historic bookcases and the great bulk of existing books back in place.'

The Jackson Library was formally opened by Sir Philip, a champion of libraries who was knighted for services to literature in 2019. Speaking before cutting the ceremonial ribbon, Sir Philip praised the transformed building's technology, which he pointed out helps make both the physical space and the digitised resources available to all. Sir Philip said: 'Look up Exeter College's Jackson Library online and you will see the sort of technology that, in the words of Arthur C Clarke, is indistinguishable from magic. All that information at the stroke of a few keys on your phone. We should be walking about in a continuous state of wonder. You can sit at home in Argentina or New South Wales and read medieval manuscripts held safely in the archives of Exeter College in the comfort of your own pyjamas!'

Sir Philip concluded: 'Libraries are about books. Books

are their heart and soul and mind and spirit. The library of any place of learning is the engine room, the treasure chamber, the nursery, the seedbed, the well of inspiration, the arsenal, the kitchen garden, the beacon, the lighthouse, the workshop, the glory of the past, the present and the future. I could not be happier or more honoured than to declare this library open.'

We would like to thank the many alumni, students, staff and friends of Exeter College who made gifts in support of the library transformation, many of whom were at the formal opening. Among those in attendance were the co-founder of Twitter, Biz Stone, and his wife Livia, who together contributed \$1 million towards the library refurbishment, alumnus Bart Holaday (1965, PPE), who made an equally generous donation, and lead donor William Jackson.

The Jackson Library is open 24/7 to Exeter College students, except for a brief closure at Christmas, and since its reopening it is proving more popular than ever. It has received considerable praise from architecture journals, with *The RIBA Journal* stating the restoration 'brings imagination and a touch of intrigue to update the Oxford college's library and add study space, while barely affecting the sensitive context.' The Jackson Library has been nominated for numerous awards already, including Higher Education Project of the Year at the *Architects' Journal* Architecture Awards and Retrofit Project of the Year and Social Infrastructure Project of the Year at the British Construction Industry Awards.

# Exeter and Hertford United

Exeter is joining forces with Hertford College to reinvigorate their sports grounds and provide facilities the Colleges and community will enjoy. Finance and Estates Bursar **Nick Badman** explains.

**E**xeter College has teamed up with Hertford to redevelop our neighbouring sports grounds. Our vision is to create a vibrant central Oxford sports hub for both students and residents to use. In addition to traditional turf sports (such as cricket, rugby and football), we will be building padel tennis facilities, a golf simulator, hard courts for netball, volleyball etc. and a café.

Where are the sports grounds, some of you may ask? Well, a bit out of sight perhaps but still pretty central and easily accessible by walking, cycling and scooter from anywhere in the city.

## The challenge

The University recognises the importance of sport and that the provision for sports at Oxford falls well short of that offered at other top universities around the world, particularly in the US. Exeter College's sports grounds are no exception. Although some improvements have recently been made (for example we have hired a full-time groundsman who has already significantly improved the quality of the turf pitches), the buildings remain boarded up and unusable by students.

Our buildings are vandalised on a regular basis. Sadly, the site is a target for anti-social behaviour, especially during the summer months when the students are away. The once lovely buildings are in increasingly poor condition, covered in graffiti and generally unsightly, which only encourages a vicious cycle of more vandalism. This ongoing and costly problem for the College is a lost opportunity and frustrating for students.



*The redeveloped sports grounds will benefit students, residents and nearby schools and sports clubs*



The new sports facilities will include Oxford's first padel courts

### The opportunity

We have been working with Hertford for the last two years on a plan to transform and reinvigorate the sports grounds. We aim to run the grounds as one large sporting venue with all income and costs split 50/50.

At the heart of our plan are two elements:

- Our desire to create a harmonious, accessible, vibrant sporting hub designed for both student and local community use. This will include indoor sports that can be played in all weathers and during dark winter evenings in order that the sports grounds will be busy all year round; and
- Our need to generate an income stream to justify the capital investment required, whilst still providing many sports free of charge to students.

With this in mind, the centrepiece will be a brand new padel tennis centre, with four indoor and three outdoor courts (see examples above). Recognising the rapid growth of padel in the UK and elsewhere, we aim to have first mover advantage at scale in central Oxford. We are working with Padel People to run the padel facility and take bookings for the site more generally.

Hertford's double squash court will be repurposed as the padel shop/office, and will also include a café, dry and wet changing rooms, and a multi-purpose room for hire by local residents.

The Exeter Squash Court will house a golf simulator. We will also put in several hard courts for netball, basketball etc., as well as half a dozen cricket nets.

The grounds are already being used by various cricket and football clubs. We intend to expand this usage by clubs to also include local schools, for example for sports days.

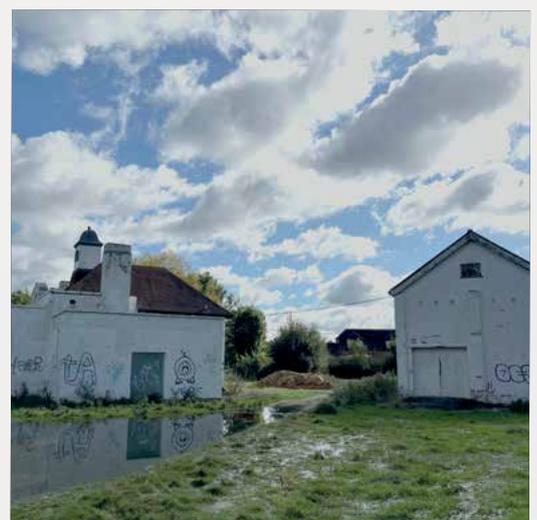
Following a positive consultation with local residents, we have now submitted a planning application. The planning bar is high as the site is in the Green Belt. We are hopeful, however, as we have been comprehensive in our approach and have taken on board the Council's pre-application feedback.

We hope you will support this exciting project to benefit students, involve the local community, and generally enhance Exeter as a desirable home for students.

*With thanks to Andy Anson (1983, Mathematics), CEO of the British Olympic Association, for his insight into the padel opportunity and his support more generally throughout the process, and to Mark Houghton-Berry (1976, Literae Humaniores) for his perspective on golf simulators.*



The once lovely buildings are in increasingly poor condition.



We want to enhance Exeter as a desirable home for students.



Exeter extended a warm welcome to Emmanuel College students for the annual Exeter-Emma sports day

# Sibling rivalry

A sports day with sister college, Emmanuel, Cambridge, topped an enjoyable and successful year for Exeter's sportsmen and women. JCR Amalgas Rep **Ava Milne** (2022, Medicine) rounds up the action.

**A**fter an initial postponement due to flooding in Hilary Term, the annual Exeter-Emma Sports Day took place on home turf on Saturday 4 May. This time we got lucky with the weather and competed against our Cambridge sister college on what turned out to be one of the nicest days of Trinity Term! Around 40 students from Emmanuel College visited, and we enjoyed a morning of football, rounders and badminton, followed by an afternoon at the boathouse with a barbecue. We then swapped our shorts and leggings for suits and dresses and got to show off our beautiful hall to our visitors with a formal dinner in the evening. We ended the day with pool, darts and card games in the undercroft bar, while Exeter students signed the Emmanuel College yearbook to commemorate the occasion. Whilst no-one could quite decide who had won the day (I still maintain that Exeter came out on top, but was shouted down by our visiting students), I hope that this leaves room for a rematch next year when we travel to Emmanuel – and hopefully try out the swimming pool they have on their college grounds!

Within the Exeter community, we have many different sports clubs and teams on offer. The aim of these teams has always been to provide a level of sport which is competitive, but that is most importantly open to everyone

and fun. This ideal remained at the core of Exeter's sport in the 2023/24 academic year. We have many different College teams, including men's and women's rugby and football, mixed lacrosse, mixed netball, tennis, cricket, darts and pool. These teams, whilst always fun, have also seen some great success over the past year. On one very impressive day, both our men's and women's rugby teams won their respective Cuppers trophies!

At Exeter, we always try to support anyone to start their own club or team if the sport that they love doesn't currently have a team, and so this year has seen the beginning and/or revival of mixed hockey, croquet, and sailing. In fact, our sailing team – made up entirely of freshers – won Sailing Cuppers for Exeter!

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*The aim of these teams has always been to provide a level of sport which is competitive, but that is most importantly open to everyone and fun.*

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Left: A team of freshers crewed Exeter to Sailing Cuppers glory  
 Right: When the river was too high, ECBC's camaraderie and competition moved to dry land

Rowing is of course a staple of Oxford University and of Exeter College. In fact, Exeter College Boat Club (ECBC) was only the fourth boat club to take part in intercollegiate amateur racing. In 1824 we raced Jesus, Brasenose and Christ Church, and were crowned Head of the River for the first time. (See p. 18 for a celebration of the 200th anniversary of ECBC.) Whilst 2024's Torpids races in Hilary Term were unfortunately cancelled due to severe and persistent flooding, we had a very successful Summer Eights in Trinity Term. Notably, the women's first eight reached the highest position that ECBC women have ever held on the river, with a glorious and well celebrated bump on the final day in front of the boathouse. The past year has also been notable for the enthusiasm of first years who, despite two terms of almost no rowing due to flooding, somehow stayed motivated, miraculously allowing ECBC to enter six competitive boats in Summer Eights.

Crucial to Exeter's sporting success are the sports facilities we have both on site and around the city. Over the past year we embarked on a big project to update some

of these spaces. A group of student volunteers planted a wildflower meadow at our Marston sports grounds, to improve biodiversity around college. Of course, this has the added bonus of creating a lovely environment at the sports grounds for spectators and players alike! Work at the boathouse has made it a much more suitable and pleasant place to train. And we have also purchased new equipment for the College gym, including dumbbell weights, a weight rack with pull up bar and safety bars, an erg machine, and other weighted equipment. This choice of equipment was guided by students, and will hopefully make the gym a more functional space, ultimately furthering Exeter's prominence in sport.

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*At Exeter, we always try to support anyone to start their own club or team.*

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# Exeter Rugby team wins men's Bowl

Rugby round-up by **James Hughes** (2023, Economics and Management), Exeter College RFC captain.



The 2023/2024 season marked a new beginning for ECRFC through a merger with University College and Trinity College, forming a formidable playing team with hopes of competing for silverware. The joint name, 'Trexetersity', is as fierce as the team itself (though the Univ kit is not quite as intimidating!). Although the playing side merged, ECRFC maintained its off-field camaraderie and distinctive character by ensuring that Thursday socials at the undercroft bar were well attended.

After a shaky start, with a loss in the year's first rendition of the Turl Street Derby, we recognised that merger synergies are rarely immediate. The team leveraged lessons learned from early games to build back stronger in our run for Cuppers glory. While hopes of winning the Cuppers Cup were unfortunately dashed by a strong St Peter's performance, we refocused on bringing the Cuppers Bowl back to Exeter College.

Highlights from our run to Cuppers Bowl glory included storming to a 34-19 victory over Jesus College, firmly taking control of Turl Street rugby. However, the semi-final against a joint Wadham and Pembroke team stands out as a key moment for our season. Torrential rain and strong winds led to a scrappy and upfront game, with all team members

putting their bodies on the line to win the physical battle. The final score of 6-5 reveals the attritional nature of the game, but clinical kicking from OURFC Blue Vasco Faria sealed the victory for ECRFC.

In reward for the team's effort the previous week, ECRFC got to touch down on the esteemed Iffley Road pitch on a sunny spring day, which promised to deliver some champagne moments. However, in what had become typical of ECRFC, the clock was in the red, and the score favoured a strong Corpus/Catz team at 15-10. Fortunately, due to brave defensive efforts and jackalling from Ramsay Davis, a quick tap-and-go penalty led to a try for ECRFC. This left Vasco Faria with the biggest kick of his career so far (some argue even more so than his Varsity Match kicks). With no doubt in anyone's mind, Vasco added the extra points, securing a last-gasp 17-15 victory for ECRFC. The Cuppers Bowl was secured and returned to Exeter's undercroft.

Looking forward to the 2024/2025 season, there is much for the club to be excited about. With new kits and training gear on the horizon, ECRFC hopes to improve its on-pitch performance and bring home more silverware.

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*The semi-final against a joint Wadham and Pembroke team stands out as a key moment for our season. Torrential rain and strong winds led to a scrappy and upfront game, with all team members putting their bodies on the line to win the physical battle.*

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# Two for two: Wom\*n's team completes Rugby clean sweep

Wom\*n's captain **Maria Elgaard Jespersen** (2022, Chemistry) celebrates Exeter College RFC's second Cuppers silverware of the year.

The 2023/24 season saw a sudden surge in the popularity of Exeter College Rugby Football Club (ECRFC) among wom\*n, with both freshers and veteran rowers being successfully persuaded to join the sport. As the season went on, we saw Exeter wom\*n play for all three Oxford University Rugby Football Club teams, with a handful choosing to play touch as they 'didn't like the mud'!

Heading into Cuppers, Exeter wom\*n were looking strong and hoping to compete for the trophy. Being merged with Corpus Christi (and a handful of students from other colleges), we quickly dubbed ourselves 'CorpExe'. The chemistry was palpable, the hands were good and great shapes were being run—we all agreed that it felt like we had been playing together for years! Minutes before our first match of the round kicked off, we overheard the other team scrambling to find lifting blocks, which gave us the final bit of confidence we needed. After a good shift from beginners and experienced Exonians alike, we beat Keble. The score was reported as 26-10 (although CorpExe still

maintains that it was at least 36-10!). With the first win secured, we looked forward to the second match of the day against St John's. We worked hard as a team, creating opportunities for line breaks and we were rewarded for our hard work with a massive 53-0 score line (credit to Alisa Kanganis's two early tries which set the tone of the match).

We headed into the final as the only undefeated team, full of confidence and looking for a final win to cement our glory. Despite facing the historically strong Worcester team, spirits were high; the sun was shining, the stands were full and we were promised plenty of water breaks. The good vibes continued as we quickly put ourselves in the lead, forcing Worcester to spend the rest of the match playing catch-up. With a brilliant try from Alisa and a great shift from everyone we won 22-14, and triumphantly brought the Cuppers trophy home to the Undercroft!

The future of the ECRFC wom\*n looks bright with Emily White and Ella Downham, both integral to our Cuppers win, taking up the mantle as captains and looking to defend our title.

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*We worked hard as a team, creating opportunities for line breaks and we were rewarded for our hard work with a massive 53-0 score line (...). We headed into the final as the only undefeated team, full of confidence and looking for a final win to cement our glory.*

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# ECBC Bicentenary: A President's Look

Black flags, 'Tug-of-Warpids' and biblical levels of rain marked out a stormy but successful bicentenary year for Exeter College Boat Club, reports **Ruby Rowlands** (2022, Jurisprudence), ECBC President 2023-2024.

The 2023/24 academic year was truly defined by the weather. Until then, I, for one, did not even realise a 'black flag' existed, however I became particularly well-acquainted with it during Hilary Term. A black flag – the highest level on our flag safety system – means not only are we prohibited from going out on the river, but we also can't set foot on Boathouse Island due to severe flooding. This, as I am sure you can imagine, makes it fairly difficult to do any meaningful training. However, ECBC found a way, and I am very thankful to the captains, coaches, and other members of the executive committee, who all worked extremely hard to find other ways of training, which included group runs, circuits, and tank sessions. Unfortunately, Torpids was ultimately cancelled due to the bad weather, but that didn't stop us from putting on a great show at its replacement, 'Tug-of-Warpids', hosted by Pembroke College, with around 50 crews taking part. Our team, 'Legseter', breezed through the first few rounds, and ultimately defeated Magdalen in the final to take headship (or should I say tugship?!). Prizes included a free glass of Pimm's and eternal bragging rights, although I doubt we'll be chalking any murals up on the College walls for that one!

The highlight of the year was undoubtedly Summer Eights, though it began with biblical levels of rain – sticking to the year's theme. Despite the challenges, we managed to field six crews, three each for the men's and women's squads, which speaks volumes about the dedication of our novices and the committee's efforts to keep them engaged. By the end of the week the sun was out in full force, as were our rowers' friends, family, and the many alumni who made the trip back to celebrate the club's bicentenary with us, and I can confidently say that we were by far the loudest club on the river (beaten only by whoever was playing bagpipes on Brasenose's balcony!). Although the week had some mixed results (for example,

the M3 becoming particularly well-acquainted with a tree), Saturday brought great successes, including an utterly triumphant bump by our W1 right in front of the boathouse. This achievement placed the ECBC women on their highest bung-line ever, and the highest ECBC bung-line overall since 2012!

In the evening, we celebrated our bicentenary with over 90 alumni, and it was a genuine honour to meet so many people, who despite their varied lives, all cited ECBC as a significant part of their university experience. Indeed, writing this article now, I reflect on the role the boat club has played so far in my own university experience. From the moment I joined, I felt immediately welcomed and encouraged by the other members, particularly the women's squad, which allowed me to develop my confidence and leadership skills. Just two years ago, I would have been terrified to give a speech to over 150 people at the bicentenary dinner, yet I felt at ease stepping into that role. I have had the confidence to tackle new challenges head-on as president, knowing that I am supported not only by my committee, but also by College, in particular the Development Office.

The bicentenary dinner was also a great opportunity to celebrate several of our most dedicated supporters. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Rick and Marguerite for their unwavering support; it has been wonderful to see them both so engaged with our successes, and regularly coming out on the bank to support during their time at Exeter. As I hand over the presidency to my successor, I can confidently say that ECBC has been a defining part of my university experience, and I have made friends for life through this club. Seeing alumni from all decades, dating back to the 1950s, share this sentiment at our 200th anniversary celebration reinforced the sense of community that membership of this club can bring. With exciting plans in the works, I cannot wait to see where we go next!

# What ECBC means to me



**Azka**

"ECBC has been such a warm and welcoming environment as a first year trying to find my first steps in university. Sticking to a disciplined schedule with a tight-knit team, all for a common goal, was an immensely rewarding experience to have alongside the academic side of things."

**Ava**

"ECBC has been a place and a community where I have made some of the most important friendships of my life and pushed myself harder than I ever thought I could."

**Ella**

"Without ECBC, I wouldn't be the person I am today. The club introduced me to a new sport, and its incredible coaches inspired me to join the university team, where I competed in two Boat Races in the Blue Boat. Thanks to ECBC, I had the opportunity to serve as OUBC Women's President and now leave Oxford with a job lined up in sports consultancy. Attending the ECBC freshers' BBQ set me on a path that led to the most amazing experiences of my five years at Oxford."

**Misha**

"The boat club for me was a very effective way to tune out from the hubbub of Oxford. There is no finer way to tune out from a looming essay deadline than to get out on the river with no sounds except the swans and blades entering the water."

**Will**

"ECBC has underpinned and underscored every part of this time in my life. It has been a source of community, a source of elation, and a source of constancy throughout my time at Exeter. My college and university experiences would have been irretrievably poorer without this remarkable club and the people who proudly call it theirs."

**Maisie**

"Without such a tight-knit club I wouldn't have had the confidence to run for president, having learnt to row less than a year ago. The supportive and social environment at ECBC grew my love of rowing, making my time at Oxford much more enjoyable."



From left to right: Hattie Cooper, Ella Stadler, Maria Nielsen-Scott

# Exeter's newfound pipeline – from bumps to Boat Races

**Harriett Cooper** (2021, Engineering) says Exeter's ability to cultivate skilled rowers, particularly in women's rowing, has solidified its reputation as a rising powerhouse in the sport.

Exeter College Boat Club may be one of the smaller rowing clubs at the University of Oxford, but its influence, particularly in women's rowing, has been remarkable. Despite the club's limited size and the constraints of training on the Isis – the narrow and often crowded stretch of the Thames – Exeter's women's squad has consistently contributed to the University's Boat Club and its development squad in recent years. This history has forged a strong pipeline, where novices at Exeter hone their skills before representing the University in the prestigious and historic Boat Race, cementing Exeter's presence on this iconic stage.

Exeter's 2024 Women's First Eight (W1) showcases the success of this pipeline through their accomplishments. Over three-quarters of that W1 squad have competed at Henley Women's Regatta or Henley Royal Regatta, representing Oxford University Boat Club. These prestigious regattas are among the most revered events in the rowing world, attracting elite crews from across the globe and further affirming Exeter's growing stature in the sport.

Among the standout athletes who have risen through Exeter's rowing ranks from novice to University squad are Ella Stadler (2019, History; 2022, History of Science, Medicine, and Technology) and Maria Nielsen-Scott (2018, Medicine). Stadler made history by rowing in Oxford's prestigious Blue Boat twice, in 2023 and 2024, and serving as Women's President of the newly merged Oxford University Boat Club in 2024 – an extraordinary achievement that reflects her dedication and skill. Competing in the Blue Boat is the pinnacle of university rowing, a goal many aspire to but few attain. Likewise, Maria Nielsen-Scott has made her mark, rowing for Osiris in the Reserve Boat Race twice (2023 and 2024) and defeating Cambridge in the 2024 Reserve Race. Her accomplishments further demonstrate the strength of Exeter's rowing programme and its ability to develop top-tier talent.

The Oxford University Boat Club's Development Squad greatly facilitates the pathway from novices training on the Isis to full-time student-athletes competing on the Tideway in London.

This programme offers coaching and racing opportunities during Trinity Term, after the Boat Race season, to help athletes transition from college to university-level rowing. Since Stadler and Nielsen-Scott joined the Development Squad in 2021 and 2022 respectively, Exeter has seen a notable rise in athletes – particularly women – aspiring to achieve this progression. Seven of the nine athletes in Exeter's 2024 W1 squad have benefitted from this opportunity, boosting Exeter's standings in bumps races. Georgia Stonage (2018, Chemistry) progressed to represent the Lightweight Reserve crew in 2023. Harriett Cooper (2021, Engineering) trained alongside Stadler and Nielsen-Scott in the 2023 Development Squad season and later represented OUBC in 2024. In 2024, ECBC women's captains Ava Miller (2022, Medicine), Emilia Perry-Poletti (2022, PPE), and Jemima Allen (2023, Philosophy) received top-tier coaching. They went on to race with OUBC Development Squad at Henley and other summer regattas.

The depth of talent within Exeter College Boat Club's women's squad has made the W1 and W2 crews formidable contenders in bumps races. This strong foundation has propelled Exeter's W1 to its highest-ever bung-line position in Summer Eights, marking a historic achievement for the club. Exeter's ability to cultivate skilled rowers at every level has solidified its reputation as a rising powerhouse in college rowing. As we look to the future, there's no telling what the next generation of rowers in Exeter's novice-to-Boat Race pipeline will accomplish – perhaps the next Blue Boat athlete or Women's President will be inspired at the next Freshers' barbecue!

# 10K fun run raises £2K for ExVac



The student-run charity continues its fantastic work within the Oxfordshire community, giving nearly 40 children a much-needed week's holiday, reports **Freddie Crichton-Miller** (2021, English).

This year, a team of 45 Exeter College runners took part in the Oxford Town and Gown, raising over £2,000 for ExVac, Exeter's student-run charity, and completing the 10km route in the heat of an early summer's day. All of our runners did an exceptional job and crossed the finish line to the applause of friends, family, and fellow racers, each receiving a medal to mark their achievement as well as having, for many (me included), the thrill of a new personal record in the 10km. The keenest among us will already be training for next year's 10K – or, depending on motivation, perhaps even the Oxford half marathon!

We were an eclectic mix of runners, consisting of staff, students and even the committed parents of some current Exonians, all united by our specially made Town and Gown 2024 T-shirts. A massive thank you must go to Philip Munday, Exeter College's steward, for his role in procuring our T-shirts and for setting this year's team event in motion – not to mention for speeding off at a pace on the day that left many of us students in the dust. Despite the heat, it was a lot of fun to run through the city that we know so well and to see so many of us turn out in support of ExVac.

The Oxford Town and Gown was launched in 1982 by local runners as a fun run to raise money for muscular dystrophy and, to this day, all profits from the race go to

Muscular Dystrophy UK. The run takes you all over the city, along the River Cherwell, up Longwall Street, and finally finishes in University Parks, where we were presented with our medals and a much-needed drink of water. The sides of the course were lined with friends cheering us on, and, as the route takes you right past Exeter College, no one could escape us. Rector Professor Sir Rick Trainor and his wife, Professor Marguerite Dupree, came along to support us too, much to the delight of the runners. They even completed the course themselves later that day.

Thanks to the fundraising efforts of our runners and the generous support of friends and family, we smashed our fundraising goal and raised over £2,000 for ExVac. The student-run charity continues its fantastic work within the Oxfordshire community and ran two successful trips to the New Forest in April, giving nearly 40 children the opportunity to have a much-needed week's holiday. For many, this would have been their first time away from home. As is the case every year, the children who take part in an ExVac holiday have been put in touch with the committee via Oxfordshire Social Services, and the vacations couldn't be run without the support of our donors. If you would like to make a donation, please visit [www.exvac.org](http://www.exvac.org)

# The highs – and high jinx – of Exeter's 200-year-old Boat Club

In 2024, Exeter College Boat Club marked the two-hundredth anniversary of its foundation. **Matt Holyoak** (2015, History), Chair of the Exeter College Boat Club Association, has been leafing through the history books to shine a light on past successes – and misdemeanours – and celebrate Boat Club achievements that continue to this day.

There is a temptation to write respectfully and with reverence about an institution marking its two-hundredth anniversary. For Exeter College Boat Club, however, exploring its history reveals that the Club has, on occasion, been marred by rowdiness, drunkenness, and politics. The Club's first formal rules were established in 1831: among the perfunctory administrative matters of the constitution, there was a list of fines for members committing 'bawdy' swearing, being found 'in a state of intoxication' (one to five shillings), or even contracting venereal disease (one pound).

Rather than stamping out bawdy behaviour, the first fines were doled out mere hours after the rules were introduced. Messrs Hocker and Peard were slapped with a fine of two shillings and sixpence apiece for being found drunk the day after the constitution's ratification.

Two centuries later, the Boat Club's focus is on writing history on the water, not on the sauce, although the Club still likes to celebrate hard work and success. Happily, over the past year there has been plenty to celebrate throughout the rowing calendar, which has remained largely unchanged for one hundred and fifty years.

In March sunshine, old members and guests packed the function room above the Blue Anchor in Hammersmith to support three Exonians in the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Races. Prompting our first bicentenary cheers, Jelmer Bennema (2023, MSc in Mathematical and Computational Finance) passed below the window in the men's Blue Boat, followed by Maria Nielsen-Scott (2018, Medicine) stroking Osiris, the women's reserves. The cheers grew when the women's Blue Boat led Cambridge past the pub, featuring Ella Stadler (2019, History; 2022, MPhil History of Science, Medicine, and Technology), Exeter's first ever female President of a university rowing club, and the first Women's President of the newly merged Oxford University Boat Club, now incorporating openweights, lightweights, men and women.



*Exeter's 1858 Henley crew, from a set of the oldest rowing photographs in the world*

Exeter's first ever Boat Race representative, Ferdinand Thomas Stephens, emerged in Dark Blue in the race's second edition, in 1836. Stephens proved to be a trailblazer as, throughout the nineteenth century, Exeter College regularly supplied oarsmen to the University team, including titanic sporting figures such as Richard Kindersley (see p. 20 to read Harriett Cooper's article on how this trend appears to be repeating). Kindersley was indirectly responsible for the creation of the International Rugby Board in 1883, after scoring a controversial try for



*Exonians donned replicas of the Club's original kits at Henley Regatta and red blazers and peonies at the ECBC Dinner in Exeter College Hall*

England against Scotland (rowing was not his only sport). The diplomatic dispute that followed forced the creation of rugby's first consistent set of rules.

In May 2024, hundreds of alumni returned to Oxford to watch the final day of Eights Week. Following the conclusion of racing – marked by a thrilling bump for the women right in front of the boathouse – Exeter College Hall was packed with old members who had travelled from as far as Hong Kong and the USA. Rowers from the 1950s sat shoulder-to-shoulder with current students in a celebration of the Club's longevity. Peonies (the Club flower) and red blazers were in abundance.

The good behaviour of students and alumni this year was a marked contrast with the celebrations after Exeter's most recent headship – in 1884 – when, according to contemporary records, students set Turl Street on fire after detonating a 'flat-bottomed bath full of terrifying combustibles'. After launching fireworks at the Bodleian, the students ignited a bonfire in the quad which burned, among other things, a grand piano and a Trinity undergraduate (who mercifully survived).

The showpiece of the rowing season is held at Henley-on-Thames. Exeter has enjoyed some historic successes there – though not since winning the Grand Challenge Cup in 1882 – but has also had its share of failures. The exemplar is the inaugural regatta, in 1839, in which Exeter

entered itself, and then confused bankside journalists by failing to appear. There was also the defence of the Ladies Challenge Plate in 1858, when the captain, Robert Wells Risley, described (in graphic detail) the crew's stomach problems on their way to losing in the first round. That crew did accomplish a small but noteworthy milestone by featuring in the first ever photograph of the sport.

And so, the celebratory events of 2024 were concluded with a ceremonial row-past at Henley Royal Regatta. A crew of old Exonians, representing every decade back to the 1970s, drew considerable interest from the spectators who were amused by the crew wearing replicas of the Club's original Victorian kits. After braving the wind, rain, and polite applause, the crew was joined by other Boat Club members in the picnic field for a piece of the Club's birthday cake, kindly made by old member Paul Cornes (1978, Medicine).

Following the conclusion of events this year, Exeter College Boat Club benefitted from some very generous donations from old members. On behalf of the Club, I would like to express our heartfelt thanks to those who have contributed.

ECBCA members are kept updated throughout the year on the Boat Club's news, as well as upcoming events and how to attend. If you would like to join, please email [matthewholyoak@outlook.com](mailto:matthewholyoak@outlook.com) for more information.

# HONOURING A LEGEND:

Oxford celebrates 70th anniversary  
of Sir Roger Bannister's  
historic sub-four-minute mile

On 6 May, thousands gathered in Oxford to celebrate the life and legacy of athlete and neurologist Sir Roger Bannister (1948, Physiological Sciences), whose record-breaking mile 70 years earlier continues to inspire people to this day. **Tom Barrett** (2019, St Anne's) reports.



## BANNISTER MILES

On Monday 6 May 2024, Oxford once again became the epicentre of national sporting history as thousands gathered to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Sir Roger Bannister's (1946, Physiological Sciences) groundbreaking sub-four-minute mile at Iffley Road.

The celebrations were organised by the University of Oxford, Oxford University Cross Country Club, and Oxford University Athletic Club, supported by the Bannister family, World Athletics, the British Milers' Club, and Oxfordshire County Council.

The day's events kicked off with the Bannister Community Mile, as 1,500 participants embarked from St Aldate's, making their way down Oxford's High Street and finishing at Iffley Road, passing several of the city's most iconic landmarks along the route.

The event was officially started by Steve Cram CBE, former world champion and mile world record holder. Joining him in the first wave of participants were current world record holder Hicham El-Guerrouj, as well as past world record holders Nouredine Morceli and Filbert Bayi. Members of the Bannister, Chataway, and Brasher families were also present, honouring Sir Roger's historic achievement on 6 May 1954, and the teamwork that made it possible, supported as he was by his friends and fellow elite runners Chris Chataway and Chris Brasher.

Local residents, including many schoolchildren, participated in the Bannister Community Mile, contributing to the event's vibrant atmosphere and emphasising the long legacy of Sir Roger's achievement, which continues to inspire people to attempt feats that might at first seem challenging, sometimes even impossible.

Among the various waves of participants was one dedicated to World Kids' Athletics Day. With support from World Athletics, local schoolchildren received free entry to this special celebration. College and department groups from the University also featured prominently, joined by schools, sports clubs and businesses, all coming together to celebrate the historic occasion.

In the afternoon, the Iffley Road Sports Centre hosted the Bannister Track Miles. Almost 3,000 spectators assembled to witness a series of mile races, encompassing junior, veteran, and para races, before the elite men's and women's races set off at 6 pm, precisely 70 years after Sir Roger's record-breaking run.

Khahisa Mhlanga won the women's race in 4:36.09 and Ossama Meslek won the men's race in 3:56.15 – the fastest mile ever recorded at what is now named the Sir Roger Bannister Running Track.



*Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey is an advocate for sport*



*Olympian Steve Cram was among the day's runners*

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**Just because they say it's impossible doesn't mean you can't do it.**

Sir Roger Bannister

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Three other athletes – James Young, Tiernan Crorcken, and Max Wharton – broke the four-minute barrier, delighting the many spectators gathered along the track.

Afterwards, Ossama Meslek said: 'We always watch *Night of the 10,000m* and think how great it is, so to have something like that for the mile is great.'

Exonian Thurstan Bannister (1979, PPE), Sir Roger's son, added: 'A very high expectations barrier was broken on Monday. Four world record holders watched four athletes go sub-four on the Bannister four-minute mile anniversary, and 80 per cent of athletes (about 240 in total) in the track mile races achieved new personal records. Capacity turnout for a joyful Bannister Community Mile.'

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**The reason sport is attractive to many of the general public is that it's filled with reversals. What you think may happen doesn't happen. A champion is beaten, an unknown becomes a champion.**

Sir Roger Bannister

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*In front of thousands of supporters, Ossama Meslek comfortably breaks the Sir Roger Bannister Track record for the mile in a time of 3:56.15*



*Eighty per cent of athletes in the track mile races achieved new personal records*

# REMEMBERING SIR ROGER BANNISTER 1929 – 2018

In the late 1940s, Sir Roger was a brilliant student of medicine, the discipline to which he would devote his life. But it was one spring day in Oxford in 1954 when he saw his name flash throughout Britain and around much of the world, when he became the first man to run the mile in less than four minutes. Exactly why this athletic feat engulfed him in a surge of fame has been much discussed, but there is no doubt that it was seen as an historic human achievement. Like the first ascent of Everest, it appeared to symbolise human progress, to mark a step-change in humankind's ability to overcome seemingly impossible odds.

In British consciousness, Roger Bannister became a standard bearer for success and progress, which was largely due to his personality, which shone through all that he did. He was intelligent and articulate, but relaxed, modest and charming, and he became beloved of the news media, summing up all that was best in the British character. If a man had ever demonstrated that it was not simply what you do in this life that is important but how you do it, it was Roger Bannister.

He retired from competitive athletics in 1954, having won gold in the Commonwealth Games and the European Championships that year, in the mile and 1500m respectively, and was immediately in demand as a sports journalist. Later he became an influential sports administrator, including as the first chair of the Sports Council (now called Sport England). He worked tirelessly to improve standards and facilities in British sport. He became – or rather, he had always been – a philosopher of sport, especially solitary sports like endurance running.

He wrote extensively on the therapeutic power of sport to aid the growth and development of the individual, and society as a whole. He tried to teach that sports can have a vital place within a hierarchy of humane values that can



May 6, 1954: Roger Bannister breaks the tape at 3 minutes 59.4 seconds, a new world record

enrich our entire lives. He was a humanist, and his career came towards the end of the traditional codes of amateur sport, when earnest private devotion to a demanding exercise like elite running could be a part of a rich and fulfilling life, without the lure of money and stardom. After the 1950s, he became uneasy about the ever-increasing commercialisation of Olympic sports, the political conflicts, and the looming problem of drugs in sport.

After studying at Exeter College, Sir Roger went on to become a distinguished neurologist and, between 1985 and 1993, Master of Pembroke College, Oxford; he was universally admired throughout his later life. He was a man whose life formed a harmonious pattern, based on dedication, an idealism that was both personal and public, and prizing positive achievement. Sir Roger Bannister's memory, and his legacy, remain alive as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the four-minute mile and the man who first achieved it.

*"Doctors and scientists said breaking the four-minute mile was impossible, that one would die in the attempt. Thus, when I got up from the track after collapsing at the finish line, I figured I was dead."*

*"It is a paradox to say the human body has 'no limit'. There must be a limit to the speed at which men can run. I feel this may be around 3 minutes 30 seconds for the mile. However another paradox remains – another runner could be found to marginally improve on that time."*

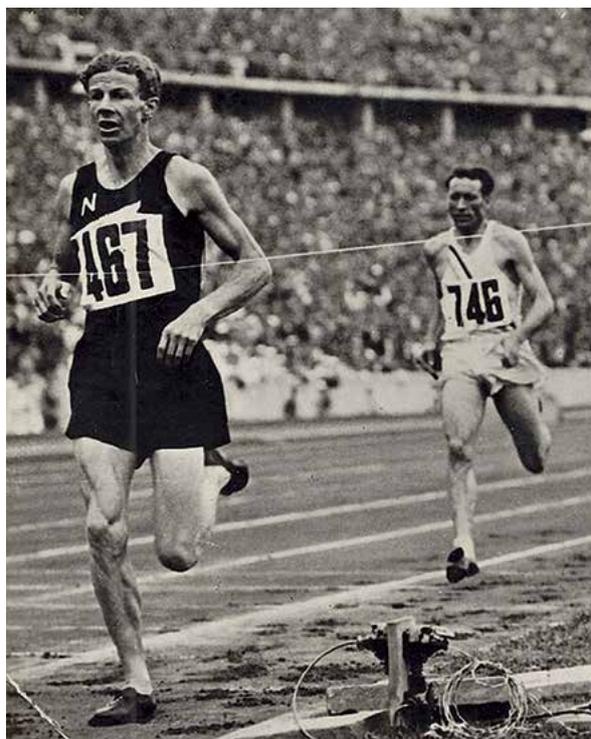
# AHEAD BY A MILE: THE LEGEND OF LOVELOCK

Meet the Exeter record breaker and middle distance pioneer who 'paved the track' for Bannister. By **Evan Leonhard** (2023, MSt English).

Any discussion of Exeter's triumphs in the world of track and field will, without fail, conjure up a single name – Roger Bannister, revered across the globe for his completion of the world's first documented sub-four-minute mile on the Iffley Road track in 1954 (see p. 24 for a celebration of the 70th anniversary of that feat). However, there is a lesser-known Exeter alumnus who 'paved the track', so to speak, for Bannister's record-breaking career. Jack Lovelock, a middle-distance runner and accomplished doctor who attended Exeter in the early 1930s, is a fascinating and undeniably impressive character worthy of more people's attention.

Born in 1910 in Crushington, New Zealand, Lovelock showed signs of athletic potential from a very early age. He excelled in a variety of sports – rugby and boxing alongside running – throughout his primary and secondary school years. He began to focus on track and field during his time as an undergraduate at the University of Otago, where he studied medicine and represented the university in the one-mile race at the New Zealand national championships. In 1931, Lovelock won a Rhodes scholarship and made the long journey to Oxford, continuing his dual pursuit of running and medicine at Exeter.

Lovelock's first major success as a runner came in 1932 when he broke a 37-year-old record for the quickest three-quarter mile. The following year, while still a student, he broke the world record for the fastest mile run, the same record broken by Bannister just over 20 years later. Finishing at four minutes and seven seconds, Lovelock surpassed French runner Jules Ladoumègue's previous record by two seconds.



Berlin Olympics: Lovelock breaks the 1500 metres world record

The Olympic middle-distance runner Jerry Cornes, a contemporary of Lovelock's and an alumnus of Corpus Christi College, regarded him as 'a pioneer in the study of the one-mile and 1500-metre races'. Lovelock had developed what many considered to be the 'perfect' running style – wearing down his opponents by treading at a rhythmic, even pace. In fact, an Exeter groundsman is said to have discouraged the young Bannister from sticking with track and field after he struggled to reproduce Lovelock's signature style.

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*Lovelock had developed what many considered to be the 'perfect' running style – wearing down his opponents by treading at a rhythmic, even pace.*

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The undisputed high point of Lovelock's athletic career is his performance at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, an infamous year in the event's history. The world was well on the road to war. Adolf Hitler, already in his third year as dictator, saw the games as a prime opportunity to flaunt Nazi ideals on the global stage. Political tensions ran high; and many countries, including the UK, saw the rise of significant boycott campaigns urging withdrawal from the competition. The year had its triumphant moments,

nonetheless. Foremost among them were the iconic gold-winning performances of Jesse Owens, the African American track star whose incredible talent upended the racist claims of Nazi ideology before a global audience.

Lovelock was responsible for another legendary moment on the racetrack that year. Competing for New Zealand, he took home gold, running the 1500 metres in record time. The race, which he referred to as his 'artistic masterpiece', was apparently quite the spectacle, and the commentators at the time placed it among the greatest performances the event had ever seen. Lovelock pulled ahead in the last 300 metres, sprinting at full speed with the American Glen Cunningham on his heels. Reporters on the scene noted the deafening roar of the 100,000-person crowd as Lovelock crossed the finish line nearly six metres ahead of everyone else. Even then, five of the event's six runners broke the standing Olympic record that day, a striking testament to the intensity of the competition.

With the approach of the Second World War, Lovelock set running aside and put his Oxford medical education to good use. He served on the British home front as a Major in the Royal Army Medical Corps, rehabilitating injured soldiers. It was during this period that Lovelock met his wife, Cynthia Wells James, an American nurse working for the United Services in London. In 1947, he followed her across the Atlantic and continued his medical practice at Manhattan Hospital in New York City, specialising in the treatment of infantile paralysis. The couple soon welcomed two daughters, Mary in 1947 and Janet in 1948. Things were looking up for Lovelock and his new life in America.

However, just two years later, in 1949, tragedy struck. Lovelock grew ill while on call for a special operation. He left work early and was heading home on the New York subway when his condition took a sudden turn for the worse. Lovelock suffered from what police reports described as 'an attack of dizziness' that resulted in a lethal fall from the platform and into an oncoming train. The track legend's passing was met with an outpouring of love and admiration from the world of track and field. Articles reporting his death spoke of Lovelock as earning a place among 'the finest miles the world had ever known' and 'having contributed an immeasurable amount to British athletics'.

There remains significant interest in Lovelock's life and accomplishments. In his native New Zealand, many claim that a 'Lovelock legend' still haunts the popular imagination, his name and likeness having graced everything from high schools to postage stamps. Moreover, the story of Lovelock's life – with its humble start, heroic triumphs, and tragic ending – has even made compelling literary material, with the 1986 James McNeish novel *Lovelock* and the 2008 play *The Man that Lovelock Couldn't Beat*. He has undoubtedly earned a place alongside Bannister as one of Exeter's most accomplished athletic alumni.



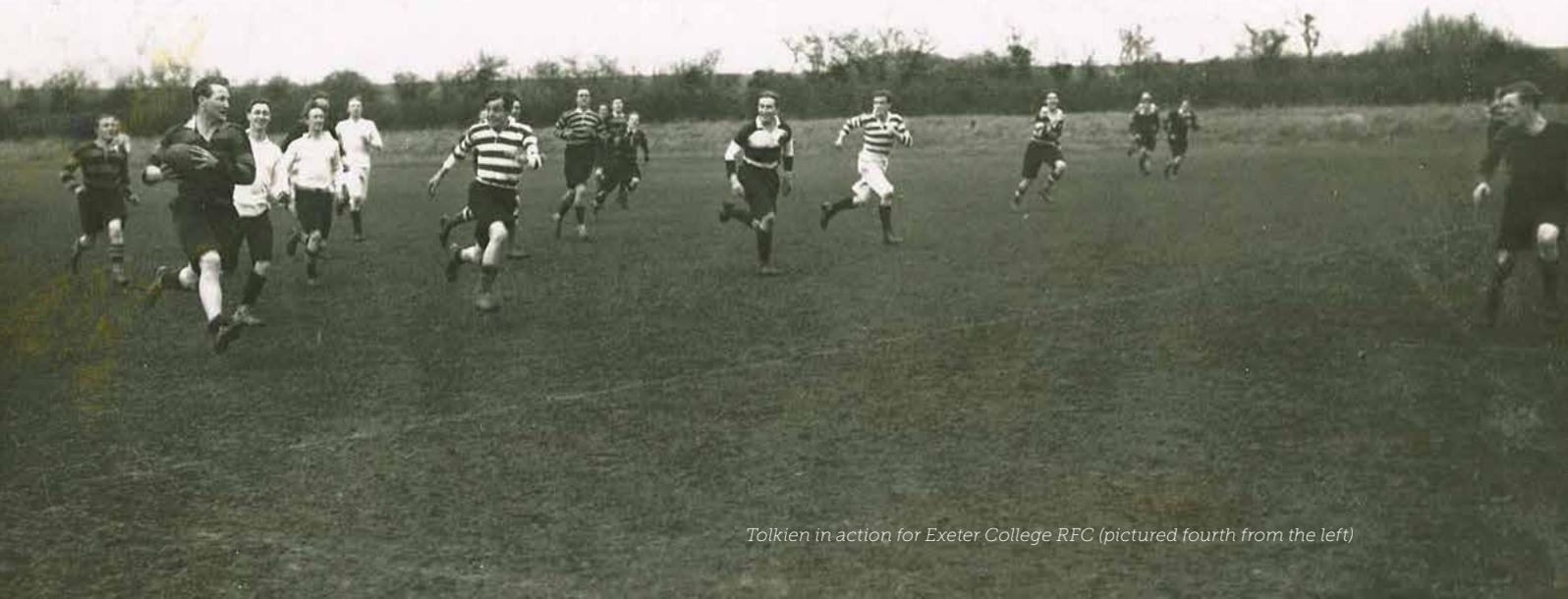
Lovelock was captain of Exeter's 1934 winning Athletics team

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*He has undoubtedly earned a place alongside Bannister as one of Exeter's most accomplished athletic alumni.*

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# *The clans will strive and gory writhe upon the field to-day*



*Tolkien in action for Exeter College RFC (pictured fourth from the left)*

Exeter College alumnus, **J.R.R. Tolkien** (1911, Classics and English), is best known for penning *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. However, his first published poem, *The Battle of the Eastern Field*, combines an interest in battles and legends with a schoolboy's love of rugby.

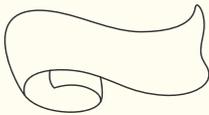
*Eastern Field* was published anonymously in the March 1911 edition of the *Chronicle*, a magazine written and edited by the boys at King Edward's School, Birmingham. It is introduced by G.A.B., a pseudonym of Tolkien's, who claims to have found the poem fragmented and incomplete in the waste-paper basket in the prefects' room. Alongside G.A.B.'s introduction, additions, and humorous marginalia, the poem tells, in epic style, the story of a house rugby match played out on the school's Eastern Road sports field.

Here, with kind permission of the King Edward VI Foundation archive, we reproduce Tolkien's first published poem, accompanied by a commentary by **Emily Titcombe** (2023, English).

# THE BATTLE OF THE EASTERN FIELD

*(On Friday March 31st I found this curious fragment in the wastepaper basket, in the Prefects' room. Much of it was blotted that I could not decipher it. I publish it with emendations of my own. G. A. B.)*

I.



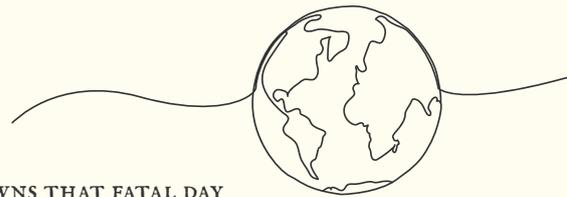
HO, RATTLES SOUND YOUR WARNOTE!  
HO, TRUMPETS LOUDLY BRAY!  
THE CLANS WILL STRIVE AND GORY WRITHE  
UPON THE FIELD TO-DAY.  
TO-DAY THE WALLS AND BLACKBOARDS  
ARE HUNG WITH FLAUNTING SCRIPT,  
FROM ATLAS ON THE STAIRCASE  
TO BOGEY'S DARKLING CRYPT.  
EACH KNIGHT IS ROBED IN SCARLET,  
OR CLAD IN OLIVE GREEN;  
A GALLANT CREST UPON EACH BREAST  
IS PROUDLY HEAVING SEEN.  
WHILE FLOWS OUR YELLOW RIVER,  
WHILE STANDS THE GREAT PAVIL,  
THAT THURSDAY IN THE LENTEN TERM  
SHALL BE A BEANFEST STILL.

II.



THUS SPAKE THE GREEN-CLAD CHIEFTAIN  
TO THE FOE IN SCARLET DIGHT,  
"SHALL NO-NE WREST THE SILVER GRAIL  
"NOR DARE ANOTHER FIGHT!"  
AND THE DOUGHTY FOEMAN ANSWER'D —  
"AY, THE GOBLET SHALL BE WON,  
"AND ON A FAMOUS FIELD OF WAR  
"GREAT DEEDS OF PROGRESS DONE!"  
SO HARD BY BRUM'S GREAT RIVER  
THEY BADE THEIR HOSTS TO MEET,  
ARRAY'D UPON THE EASTERN FIELD  
FOR VICTORY OR DEFEAT!

III.

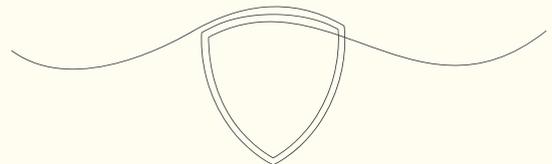


NOW GREYLY DAWNS THAT FATAL DAY  
UPON THE EASTERN FIELD,  
THAT THURSDAY IN THE LENTEN TERM  
WITH HONOUR EVER SEAL'D

\*\*\* (!!! G. A. B.)

NOR WITHOUT SECRET TROUBLE  
DOES THE BRAVEST MARK HIS FOES,  
FOR GIRT BY MANY A VASSAL BOLD  
EACH MIGHTY LEADER SHOWS.  
AROUND THE GREEN-CLAD CHIEFTAIN,  
STANDS MANY A HAUGHTY LORD,  
FROM EDGBASTONIA'S ANCIENT HOMES,  
FROM MOSELEY'S EMERALD SWARD;  
TOWERS ERICILLUS OF THE SANDS;  
GLOWERS FALCO OF THE BRIDGE.  
BUT NOBLEST STANDS THAT CHIEFEST LORD  
FROM THE FOUNTAIN'S LOFTY RIDGE.  
AMONG THE BLOOD-RED RANKS WERE SEEN  
'MIDST MANY AND HONOUR'D NAME  
GREAT SEKHET AND THOSE BRETHERN  
THE CORCII OF FAME.

IV.



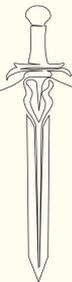
NOW STRAIGHT THE SHRILL CALL SOUNDED  
THAT HERALDS IN THE FRAY,  
AND LOUD WAS HEARD THE CLAMOUR  
OF THE WATCHERS FAR AWAY.

\*\*\* (bother !!! G. A. B.)

SWIFTLY RUSHED OUT THAT CHIEFEST LORD  
 AND FIERCELY ONWARD SPED,  
 HIS CORSELET GIRT ABOUT HIS WAIST,  
 HIS CLOSE HELM ON HIS HEAD.  
 NOW ROUND IN THICKEST THROG THERE PRESSED  
 THESE WARRIORS RED AND GREEN  
 AND MANY A DASHING CHARGE WAS MADE,  
 AND MANY A BRAVE DEED SEEN.  
 FULL OFT A SPEEDING FOEMAN  
 WAS HURTLED TO THE GROUND,  
 WHILE FORWARD AND NOW BACKWARD  
 DID THE BALL OF FORTUNE BOUND:  
 TILL SEKHET MARKED THE SLAUGHTER,  
 AND TOSSED HIS FLAXEN CREST  
 AND TOWARDS THE GREEN-CLAD CHIEFTAIN  
 THROUGH THE CARNAGE PRESSED;  
 WHO FIERCELY FLUNG BY SEKHET,  
 LAY LOW UPON THE GROUND,  
 TILL A THICK WALL OF LIEGEMEN  
 ENCOMPASSED HIM AROUND.  
 HIS CLIENTS FROM THE BATTLE  
 BARE HIM SOME LITTLE SPACE,  
 AND GENTLY RUBB'D HIS WOUNDED KNEE  
 AND SCANNED HIS PALLID FACE

\* \* \* \*

*(The rest of this scene and most of the remainder of the battle are blotted out. I hadn't time to put in any of my own.  
 G. A. B.)*



XIII.

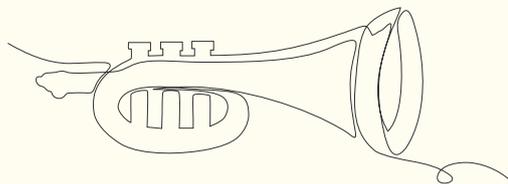
\* \* \* \*

MEANWHILE IN THE CENTRE,  
 GREAT DEALS OF ARMS WERE WROUGHT,  
 WHERE CUPID RAN ON CUNNING FOOT,  
 AND WHERE THE HILL-LORD FOUGHT.  
 BUT CUPID LO! OUTFRUNNING  
 THE FLEETEST OF THE HOSTS,  
 SPED TO WHERE BEYOND THE PRESS  
 HE SPIED THE GREAT TWIN POSTS:  
 HE CROSSED THE LINE ....  
     *[he scored a try? G. A. B.]*  
 AND ... THEN ...

\* \* \* fly

*(bother these blots, G. A. B.)*

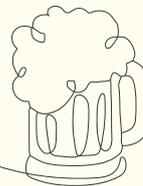
XX.



THEN TENFOLD FROM THE WATCHERS  
 THE SHOUTS AND DIN AROSE,  
 LIKE THE ROAR OF THE RAUCOUS SIGNAL  
 WHEN THE DINNER-HOUR BULL BLOWS  
     *(!!! G. A. B.)*  
 NOW BACKWARD AND NOW FORWARD,  
 ROCKED FURIOUS THE FRAY,  
 WHEN SUDDEN CAME THE LAST SHRILL CALL,  
 THAT MARKED THE CLOSE OF PLAY.

*[G. A. B. This is unworthy of the poet:  
 I emend to:  
 "When sudden from the midmost host  
 The clarion called for peace."]*

*[Ed. It wasn't a clarion, and "peace" does NOT rhyme with "fray".]*



XXI.

THEN CRIED THE KING MENSURA,  
 "HO, HENCHMEN LADE THE BOARD,  
 "WITH TANKARDS AND WITH VIANDS RARE  
 "FROM OUT THY TOOTHsome HOARD:  
 "FOR NEVER, I WEEN, SHALL WARRIORS,  
 "WHO HAVE FOUGHT A NOBLE FIGHT,  
 "ALL THIRSTY AND A HUNGERING,  
 "DEPART WITHOUT A BITE.  
 "SO LET THE WAR-WORN CLANSMEN  
 "OF BANNER GREEN OR READ,  
 "SIP MY STEAMING CUP OF PEACE,  
 "AND FRIENDLY BREAK MY BREAD."  
 SO AT MENSURA'S BIDDING,  
 WAS STRAIGHT A FEAST ARRAYED  
 AND THITHER LIMPED THE MEN OF WAR,  
 AND THIRST AND HUNGER STAY'D.  
 WHEN SO, THEY PUT FORTH FROM THEM  
 THE LUST OF MEAT AND DRINK *(!!! Homer)*  
 THOUGH NE'ER FROM FOOD OR FOEMEN,  
 DID ANY EVER SHRINK,  
 BEFORE THEM MANY A KING AND LORD  
 HELD SPEECH, AND MANY A CHEER  
 WAS RAISED FOR ALL THOSE MEN OF HEART  
 TO WHOM BRAVE WAR IS DEAR.

\* \* \* \* \*

*The Ed. won't let me put any more in. Most of them then went home to bed. G. A. B.*

**T**he *Battle of the Eastern Field* combines a familiar school rugby match with a legendary, ancient world. It offers us an insight into Tolkien's life at private school, sense of humour, and schoolboy passion for rigger, while also prefiguring his future works. Its scenes of battlefield camaraderie and heroic valour, as well as its 'lost manuscript framework', are easily compared to the epic legendarium he would go on to create, which draws on countless traditions to construct a mythological history for Britain. The poem is anticipatory in form and content, but also in sentiment – the heroes of the Eastern Field demonstrate many of the values that readers have cherished in Tolkien's wider corpus, balancing bravery and strength with humility and gentleness. Though light-hearted and entertaining, the poem is a forerunner for many of the themes that would go on to captivate Tolkien throughout his life: battle, violence, authorship, sympathy, and the transmission of stories and history over time.

Many of *Eastern Field's* features are taken from Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*, the first stanza in particular being an almost word-for-word parody. As in the *Lays*, Roman numerals denote each verse, instantly signifying a classical tradition. However, Tolkien alters this a little, skipping numbers (for example, leaping from IV to XII) to give the impression that the publication is a fragment of a larger whole. This allows *Eastern Field* to mimic the *Lays'* impressive lengths – *Lake Regillus*, for example, has forty stanzas – while remaining a suitable size for the school magazine. Some commentators also suggest that the jumps in the narrative indicate points in the match where Tolkien was too involved in the rugby match to describe the battle from an observer's point of view<sup>1</sup>. Another construct used to shorten the poem is the Editor's decision to cut off its conclusion, forcing G.A.B. to replace the ending with a prosaic summary. This abrupt ending demonstrates a wry self-awareness that the joke would probably wear off after hundreds of lines, and provides a final amusing shift from mock-epic revelry to humdrum student life.

Much of the poem's humour comes from this mix of archaic, classical grandeur with the familiar reality of life at King Edward's School, elevating the 'Eastern Field' from school rugby pitch to grand battlefield. The students are 'knight[s]', the rugby teams are their 'clans' and each captain is promoted to the role of 'Chieftain'. 'Blackboards... hung with flaunting script' take the place of banners and garlands; instead of a school rugby kit, the players are armed in 'close helm' and 'corselet girt'<sup>2</sup>. The nicknames, 'Moseley', 'Cupid',

'Sekhet', 'Mensura' etc., though drawn from mythology or the ancient past, all reference real players of the match. They inhabit the mythical land of 'Edgbastonia' – a slightly altered Edgbaston, the neighbourhood in which the school is located. One of the poem's most ironic references is to 'Brum's great river', contrasting the informal nickname for Birmingham with an exaggeratedly lofty description. As Tolkien's readers would have observed, the 'river' running near King Edward's is not, in reality, very 'great' – though eventually joining up with the larger River Rea, it is merely a thin, muddy brook where it passes the school. In an 1872 edition of the *Chronicle*, students mention the stream as a destination for misdirected footballs – less an epic spectacle than a mild inconvenience<sup>3</sup>. Tolkien pokes further fun with a reference to the 'Yellow River', a term used by Macaulay for Rome's River Tiber. The Tiber is loaded with mythic and legendary associations, making its application to any Birmingham waterway deeply ironic, let alone Edgbaston's tiny brook. The Eastern Field itself is both an imaginary, grand battlefield and real-life rugby pitch – the poem's original readers would likely have found great pleasure in

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*The students are 'knight[s]', the rugby teams are their 'clans' and each captain is promoted to the role of 'Chieftain'.*

---

recognising these familiar aspects of their school translated into a heroic, literary world.

The framing of the poem is also used to great effect – Tolkien presents *The Battle of the Eastern Field* as the work of an anonymous author, whose discarded paper is found by the fictional G.A.B. inside a wastepaper basket. Much of the text's humour comes from how seriously the character of G.A.B. takes his role as editor; he frequently writes as though he is recovering an ancient manuscript rather than a binned poem by one of his peers. His term 'curious fragment' is more evocative of archaeological discoveries than paper scraps, and he aims to 'decipher' the text as though it were an encoded riddle rather than clumsy pen-work. In place of the usual complications associated with ancient texts, such as fragility, light exposure, fire damage or missing leaves, G.A.B. wrestles with the rather more mundane problem of ink blotting (an irritation likely familiar to Tolkien's audience of 1910s schoolboys)<sup>4</sup>. Just as *Eastern Field* combines the world of classical battle with the humdrum world of the

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1. Maggie Burns makes this point in her commentary on the text, which is also available in *Mallorn*; issue 46.

2. This is one of the poem's most archaic phrases – a 'corselet' is a piece of armour protecting the torso, while 'girt' describes being encircled with a band or belt.

3. *The King Edward's School Chronicle*, Issue: 7 / November, 1872. Accessible on King Edward's online archive.

4. In the world of manuscripts, these lost or missing sections are called 'lacunae'.

school, G.A.B.'s ego and grander sentiments are contrasted against reminders of his schoolboy reality. His academic composure falls apart as he becomes increasingly frustrated with the poem's indecipherably sploidy handwriting. The flustered notes – '(bother !!! G. A. B.)', '(bother these blots, G. A. B.)', though a little stuffy and old-fashioned to us today, are comedic slips into informality at odds with his otherwise lofty language.

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*Victorian and Edwardian pro-war poetry frequently used 'game' language to espouse the British Empire's values of patriotism, valour and duty... Tolkien's characters do not find grandiose, everlasting glory in their roleplay as warriors, instead humbly returning to their beds.*

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A third character, the Editor, provides another layer of alteration to the text. His matter-of-fact attitude is a foil to G.A.B.'s more grandiose tendencies – when the poem is abruptly cut short, it is because 'The Ed. won't let [him] put any more in', apparently having decided enough mock-epic revelry is enough. G.A.B. makes his most presumptuous edit in stanza XX, declaring the concluding lines are 'unworthy of the poet' and positing his own lines in their place, to which the Editor's response is comically humbling. He draws attention to G.A.B.'s failures of both content and form: 'It wasn't a clarion, and "peace" does NOT rhyme with "fray."' Though entertaining, this exchange anticipates Tolkien's grievances with editors who would similarly attempt to 'correct' his work, a notable example being his deep unhappiness at the alterations of 'dwarves' and 'elvish' to their dictionary forms of 'dwarfs' and 'elfish'<sup>5</sup>. He felt such changes detracted from the 'special purpose and effect' of his work – likewise, G.A.B.'s fiddling, though well-intended, fails to be a true improvement due to his ignorance of its original author's craft. Throughout the poem, G.A.B.'s exchanges with the Editor provide humour, but also a secondary story – that of the text itself. This is known as a frame narrative, and is a technique that Tolkien would go on to use throughout his lifetime; the most famous examples being his Middle-earth legendarium. Both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are presented as the memoirs of the

hobbits they are written about, passed down and altered by many hands<sup>6</sup>. The layers of *The Battle of the Eastern Field* provide a comedic function, however, they are also an early example of Tolkien's lifelong interest in texts as cultural artefacts that are lost, recovered, moved and changed with the passage of time.

Though the poem's title promises a *Battle*, Tolkien diverges most from Macaulay in his depiction of conflict. The *Lays* glorify the ideals of duty, heroism and patriotism, which made them extremely popular texts for indoctrinating schoolboys with the colonial values of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. On the other hand, while *Eastern Field's* parodic nature gives it an automatic light-heartedness, Tolkien demonstrates a genuine preoccupation with kindness and a willingness to make light of the overly dramatic heroics of the battlefield. There is room for gentleness, as demonstrated in the scene where the 'Green-clad Chieftain' is wounded. He is immediately surrounded by concerned 'liegemen' and 'clients' who form a protective wall around him, 'encompass[ing]' him in their care<sup>7</sup>. We can assume this is not a particularly grievous injury; the simple description of 'his wounded knee' evokes a graze or bash rather than anything severe. Nonetheless, his teammates treat him with great tenderness – they 'gently rubb'd' his knee' / And scanned his pallid face'. The action of the poem halts during this scene, suggesting the player's wellbeing is prioritised over the game itself. Scanning his expression, his friends attend to his emotional state as well as the physical injury. A surprising amount of warmth and sympathy therefore radiates from a poem immersed in the overwhelmingly masculine worlds of battle and Edwardian all-boys rugby. This kind of gentle humanity echoes throughout the heart of Tolkien's corpus. *The Lord of the Rings* is beloved for its depictions of friendship between male characters, who, like the schoolboys here, are openly nurturing and physically affectionate with each other. The refrain '*the hands of the king are the hands of a healer*' accompanies Aragorn's acceptance as Gondor's ruler. *Eastern Field's* short but tender healing scene demonstrates the gentleness integral to Tolkien's conception of masculinity, and the value he placed in being loving and sympathetic.

It is also important that the poem ends in a happy feast rather than the victory of one side and the obliteration of the other. Though Tolkien's original audience would have been in the know, the poem itself does not make clear who wins

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5. See letter 236, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pp.312-314. He also grumbles about the amendments to his son, Christopher Tolkien, in letter 138.

6. See the final chapter of *The Return of the King*, in which Frodo passes his memoirs (previously belonging to Bilbo) to Samwise for completion. Tolkien describes how the book's cover page already contains 'many titles... crossed out one after another'. In-universe, this document comes to be known as the Red Book of Westmarch, and undergoes many more amendments before arriving in the form in which Tolkien presents it to us.

7. Tolkien likely uses 'client' here in its archaic sense, denoting a person under the protection and patronage of another (the captain's 'clients' are the members of his rugby team).



Exeter rugby team photo, with Tolkien at the centre of the third row

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*A surprising amount of warmth and sympathy radiates from a poem immersed in the overwhelmingly masculine worlds of battle and Edwardian all-boys rugby.*

---

the match; the concluding scenes are supposedly the most corrupted by ink blots<sup>8</sup>. Instead, the narrative skips to post-game feasting, a scene invented by Tolkien and entirely absent from *Lake Regillus*. In these stanzas, both teams are spoken of as a collective – they are all ‘warriors, / Who have fought a noble fight, / All thirsty and a hungering’. Sides become irrelevant, ‘war-worn clansmen / Of banner green or red’ coming together in a display of goodwill and sportsmanship. The more violent references to ‘slaughter’ and ‘carnage’ remain hyperbolic and humorous because Tolkien contrasts them against the reality of the game, in which the players are looking out for each other. Though the poem’s final lines demonstrate a surge of militant pride, describing the cheer that ‘Was raised for all those men of heart / To whom brave war is dear’, their bravado is abruptly cut off by G.A.B.’s interruption and the admission that ‘Most of them then went home to bed’. By having his players return firmly to their schoolboy role by the end of the text, Tolkien separates his poem from similar works promoting and indoctrinating young men with notions of imperial grandeur. Victorian and Edwardian pro-war poetry frequently used ‘game’ language to espouse the British Empire’s values of patriotism, valour and duty. Newbolt’s *Vitai Lampada* (1897), written about Britain’s involvement in Sudan, used the language of cricket to encourage boys and men to ‘Play up! play up! and play the game!’. This style of

propaganda would also be used throughout the First World War, most famously in Jessie Pope’s *Who’s For The Game?* (1915), published just four years after *Eastern Field*. Tolkien’s characters do not find grandiose, everlasting glory in their roleplay as warriors, instead humbly returning to their beds. Though the poem predates the Great War and Tolkien’s experience as a soldier, *Eastern Field*’s parodic attitude towards the glorification of violence prefigures the grim portrayal of conflict in his later works.

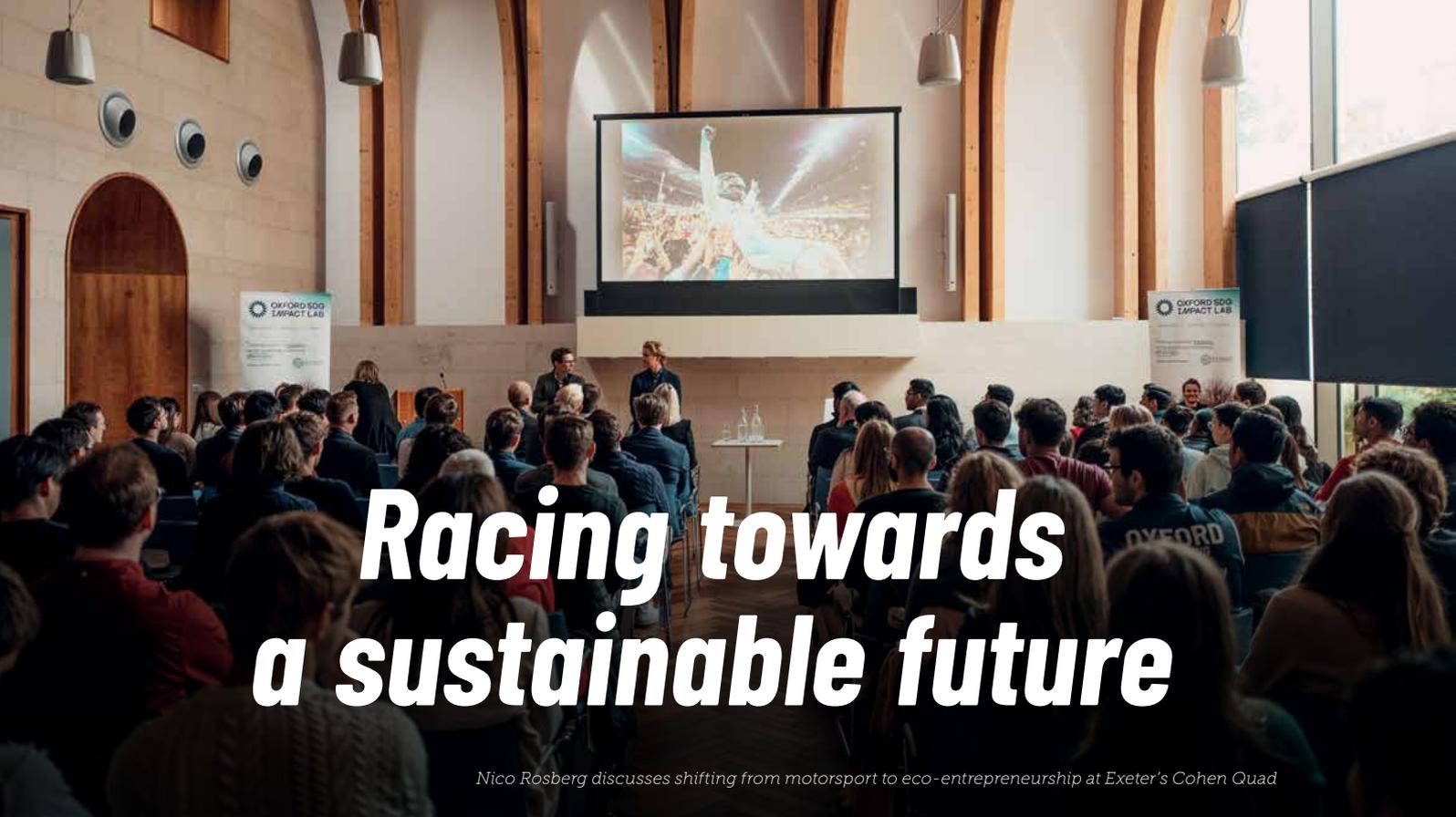
The values at the heart of the Middle-earth legendarium can be found underlying *The Battle of the Eastern Field*. The tender humanity displayed by its characters would remain integral to Tolkien’s lifetime of works, which are still celebrated for their depictions of friendship and love. We see in *Eastern Field* the early attitudes of an author who would continue to write of epic adventure and conflict, but always tenderly, and always with a celebration of those who have the strength to be gentle.

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8. The June 1911 *Chronicle* reports that Richards beat Measures by 11 points to 3. The match is described as ‘one of the finest games ever seen on the School ground’; an event that ‘will long be remembered by those who had the good fortune to play or to be spectators’.



# Racing towards a sustainable future

*Nico Rosberg discusses shifting from motorsport to eco-entrepreneurship at Exeter's Cohen Quad*

Exeter College hosted former racing driver, Nico Rosberg, in Michaelmas Term as he announced that Rosberg Philanthropies and Formula One will join forces with Oxford students to decarbonise the world's premier motorsport. **Matthew Baldwin**, Head of Communications, reports.

'Have any of you heard of Lewis Hamilton,' quips the 2016 Formula One world champion, Nico Rosberg. It is clear that Britain's seven-time F1 champion looms large in Rosberg's life. 'We used to be best friends,' he tells a captivated audience in Exeter College's Cohen Quad. 'When we were 13, 14, we were best friends, we used to go on holiday together. To go from there to being his enemy and going into the grey area against each other – some difficult things happened – it was such a tough situation, mentally.'

Their rivalry, it seems, was a major driving force behind Rosberg's shock decision to retire from racing just days after winning his first Formula One championship, at the peak of his talent, aged 31.

'I kept losing against him,' he explains with a rueful smile, 'which was not so cool! Now I understand why: he's the greatest of all time. He's quite fast. So I kept on losing year after year after year – even when I was 13 I was losing against him. I lost 12 times in a year, 12 times in a row. Twelve! That's a lot of losing. And then finally I put everything into it and got that championship, and it felt like such a good moment to say "OK, I've achieved my dream now" and go out at the very top, and just go out and start something new, and so that's the decision I took.'

It wasn't a decision Rosberg took lightly. Some accused him of walking away from the fight, his once-friendly rivalry with teammate Hamilton now a ruthless competition that sometimes got out of hand on the racetrack, in the Mercedes factory, and in the media – the 'enemy in your own family,' as Rosberg put it. Even closer to home, his father – 1982 Formula One champion, Keke Rosberg – opposed his decision: 'It was very scary. My father was shouting at me because I still had a contract for a couple of years, which was worth at least €100 million, so my father was screaming at me how could I throw that money into the bin when all I had to do was drive around in circles for a few more years!'

But stepping away from the intensity of elite sport was an opportunity for Rosberg to take a step closer to his young family and then into the unknown. 'I made the decision,' he recalls serenely, 'and it was super. It was difficult at first, not knowing what is next. But I went to speak to as many inspirational people as possible, and that really helped me. I got incredible ideas and inspirations, and I discovered the opportunities we have to make things more sustainable now with innovation. I leveraged my past success; doors open as an athlete and when you win a world championship you have the opportunity to meet a lot of people, and this is how I came down the path of sustainability.'

It's this path that brought Rosberg to Exeter College, to speak about his new passion, 'Racing towards a sustainable future'.

'At the time [of my Formula One career] I didn't use the platform at all,' he explains. 'Honestly, I just maxed-out, I had no capacity for anything else, I was so consumed at the time with trying to survive that situation, that rivalry, and so I didn't really have capacity to think about having impact, to contributing, to doing good, so for me it came afterwards. But I'm a pundit now on F1, and it's just to keep that platform alive, because that's going to help me with any other project in the future.'

One such project was launching the Greentech Festival, one of Europe's biggest sustainability events. The festival brings together entrepreneurs, innovators and changemakers to help develop successful businesses that can shape a greener future. A regular attendee is Dr Edward Brooks, co-founder of Oxford University's SDG Impact Lab, which encourages collaboration between students and industry leaders to make progress towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Brooks and Rosberg got talking and realised the potential to collaborate. 'I was like, "Wow! This sounds incredible, to have access to the most intelligent students in the world and have impact together, let's do this!" And so the Oxford SDG Impact Lab became a founding partner in my philanthropy.'

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***" It goes back to my roots, but doing good at the same time, so I'm very excited about that."***

---

Rosberg Philanthropies supports the development of innovation and initiatives that help preserve the planet for future generations. Among its programmes, it sponsors Oxford students to research climate change solutions. Students like Varun Shankar, a DPhil candidate in Engineering Sciences, who collaborated with Finnish renewable fuels manufacturer Neste to assess the potential for sustainable fuels in the maritime sector; John Chua (Masters in Public Policy), who worked with Swiss technology business, Climeworks, to analyse the UK's policy landscape and market readiness for direct air capture; and Nishant Chauhan (DPhil candidate in Earth Sciences), who worked with The Ocean Cleanup, investigating innovative ways to analyse data from previous expeditions to maximise the net benefits of plastic collection.

It is clear from Rosberg's energy he is excited about working with talented Oxford students. 'And I have an announcement to make,' he adds. 'Next year, with the Oxford Impact Lab, we are going to be working with Formula One. That's going to be awesome! There's big challenges there: they have a very big goal of decarbonising by 2030 and we



*Earlier in the day, Rosberg discussed encouraging students to explore spin-off companies with Vice-Chancellor, Professor Irene Tracey*

are going to be collaborating with them next year, which is awesome for me, it goes back to my roots, but doing good at the same time, so I'm very excited about that.'

So Oxford provides the bright young minds, Rosberg supplies a platform and investment, but does his experience in F1 contribute valuable lessons?

'There's just so much to consider in F1, a race is so complicated. The strategy, the tyres, the fuel, the opponents, the engine, the engineers. The complexity is incredible, and everything whilst you're doing 220 miles per hour and you have to be accurate by five centimetres left and right all the time. It's such a challenge to process all of that, so there's a lot that goes into preparation. But then also in F1 what you learn is about executing decisions, being brave and just going for it and committing. That's often something you find in the business world is a weakness. There's just these loops and no-one takes the decision and there are no actions that are taken from meetings, so that's definitely something business can learn from F1.'

Rosberg believes in pushing yourself to achieve marginal gains. In his determination to beat Hamilton he quit social media, took up meditation, studied philosophy and worked with a sports psychologist four days a week. Recognising it would take more than mental strength, he kept sharp by go-karting in his free time, stopped cycling to reduce his leg muscle weight, punched holes in his cockpit seat, and removed the lacquer from his helmet, just to shave off another 80 grams. 'One kilogram of weight was three hundredths of a second per lap slower. In qualifying against Hamilton in Japan, I was two hundredths of a second ahead, on pole position. That was the difference, from the helmet and the cycling and everything. So two hundredths of a second can make a huge difference.' Rosberg went on to win the race, which proved vital in securing the championship by just five points seven weeks later.

But while he was obsessed with making himself the ultimate racing driver, Rosberg appreciates that in sport, as in business and environmental sustainability, teamwork is key: 'As a team you can always achieve so much more than alone. Collaboration is super important.'

# *Appreciating the art* – AND SPORT – OF THE POLE

**Tanvi Dhingra** (2021, Jurisprudence) asks us to put stereotypes and prejudices aside and appreciate the positive aspects of this highly challenging combination of sport and dance.

I was nervous about trying pole for the first time. It seemed daunting. I would look at videos that the Oxford University Pole Society (OUPS) would post on their website and be in awe of everything they were capable of. They were able to perform high-level tricks and it made me worried about joining in the middle of the year as a complete beginner. I finally decided to take the plunge in my third year – I saw that taster classes were available and I didn't want to miss out on the opportunity to have a try. I'm relieved I went because it was fantastic and I had such a good time that I couldn't wait to get a membership. It took some time, as it does for most polers, before I was completely invested and setting alarms so that I would be able to book the highly sought after beginners' class, but I am so glad that I decided to attend that first class.

I love the community that I have discovered at OUPS. Everyone is so supportive and encouraging that I look forward to every class and to meeting someone new to share the pole with (as we have more students than poles). My first performance was at the Pole Society Ball, and I was nervous about being alone on the stage but the committee members were there to cheer us on and the audience oohed and aahed and applauded every trick. It was an amazing experience and finding out I qualified for Varsity based on that performance was incredibly affirming. While training for the competition was nerve-wracking, all the competitors would help support each other, give advice, and assist in tricks despite these being the people they would ultimately compete against. This creates such a great environment that really lets you flourish and improve. Watching all the performers from Cambridge and Oxford was an incredible experience because it was thrilling seeing how people would interpret the music and bring a story to life. I love pole as both a dance form and a sport because there is so much I can learn in both aspects and I enjoy being able to combine both elements in my routines.

Despite everything that I love about pole, it can be difficult to deal with the reputation it has. People tend to have certain conceptions about pole and that is something they automatically turn to if they find out that you do pole. It can be quite startling for people to find out that you learn pole sports because their assumptions about those who do pole are so negative that they cannot reconcile the fact that you do the same activity. They believe that pole dancing is restricted to sex workers and strippers and that makes them believe that the sport is extremely sexualised. Hence, they conclude that everyone who does pole is doing it in a sexualised manner and they liken those people to strippers. It is important to preface that there is nothing wrong with being a stripper, and there has in fact been a movement within the pole community to recognise where pole dancing comes from. Many pole athletes are in a privileged position where this is something they can choose to do, but pole originated from a marginalised community and ignoring the origins of pole does a disservice to the community. Pole has expanded beyond its origins and there are so many different types of pole dance and pole sports that assuming that everyone does a hyper-sexualised version of it is very limiting and ignores all that pole has grown to become. There is nothing wrong with being sexual or practising sexy pole dances and the people who do so are not less socially acceptable than those who might perform more 'acceptable' forms of pole (or dance, for that matter) such as learning it only for fitness reasons. The problem originates with those who believe that every pole dancer performs pole in a sexual way and that doing so is inherently wrong. Pole is an umbrella term for so many versions of pole sports, and people should be able to practise different disciplines without feeling that it is morally unacceptable.

I have had people tell me that I have no self-worth because I do pole or that I am basically a stripper. These reactions make it difficult to discuss something that is important to me because I am aware of the reputation that pole has and I don't want to have those conversations with people where I know I am getting judged or diminished because of a hobby that I enjoy. It sometimes makes me uncomfortable having people know I do pole because it can be difficult to predict how people will react and it is not always a safe environment to disclose that information. I am lucky that my friends and family are supportive of what I do and that I do not have to hide it from them, and I am

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*Pole is an umbrella term for so many versions of pole sports, and people should be able to practise different disciplines without feeling that it is morally unacceptable.*

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appreciative of the community I have found through pole. However, their opinions are not the same as everyone else's. The stereotyping of those who do pole has also created this arbitrary distinction between pole dance and pole fitness where pole fitness is more palatable because it, for some reason, does not carry the same baggage. People who might judge me because I do pole dancing are more accepting if I say pole fitness – they think that it is more worthy because they remove the association of strippers from it. Pole fitness has become more acceptable than pole dancing for many people because it is just a form of fitness and does not include dancing – I struggle to understand why the idea of dancing is villainised and the idea of using a pole becomes more acceptable when art is removed from the equation. It seems ridiculous that people have reacted this way to me and thought it was appropriate to do so, but they are comfortable sexualising pole dancers or behaving in a derogatory manner because they believe that practising pole dancing or pole sports automatically opens you up to that type of ridicule or harassment. People do not act this way normally but their misconceptions of pole dancing are so ingrained that it makes it difficult for them to understand that there is nothing wrong with doing pole.

I love learning new tricks or choreographies and having the opportunity to perform in front of an audience, and people's reactions are not going to stop me from participating in a hobby that I enjoy. I know that I am in a privileged position where I can talk about the fact that I do pole with limited repercussions, but I am still aware of the stereotyping of pole dancers and am impacted by it. Nevertheless, I am proud of what I have been able to achieve in pole sports and I am eager to continue my journey.

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*I love learning new tricks or choreographies and having the opportunity to perform in front of an audience, and people's reactions are not going to stop me from participating in a hobby that I enjoy.*

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# When seeing is not always believing

**Roland Chen (2021, Information, Communication and Social Sciences) suggests that whether we are watching through live broadcast or in-person, the experience of watching sport is a 'creation' influenced by the way it is presented and by multiple social values.**

I write this article in June, amidst the NBA finals, the Euros, and as the race to the Olympics is heating up. Together, these sports attract over three billion viewers, however their combined live, in-person viewership is no more than 170,000. The vast majority of viewers, including me, are tuning in through some form of media, whether television, social media, or perhaps live-streaming. When we view the television this year, we will see a myriad of oft-unnoticed visual effects, from the VAR in the Euros, the shot percentage in the NBA, the discus trajectory in the Olympics, and even the scorecard in the top corners of our screens. This means the sporting event we are watching is never a one-to-one representation of the sport 'as it happened'. Indeed, the camera placement, angles, and what it captures is itself a choice of media. Expanded further, even the sound effects of the crowd, the commentating, the half-time broadcasters are additions that serve to create an entertainment *product* rather than representing something that 'happened'.

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**The key word, to me, is creation. No longer stuck in the binary of representation, whether true-to-life or not, these entertainment products are a creative practice, something detached from reality as such.**

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The key word, to me, is creation. No longer stuck in the binary of representation, whether true-to-life or not, these entertainment products are a creative practice, something detached from reality as such. Normally, live broadcasting is seen as synonymous with 'real', whereas films, television shows, and advertisements are seen as 'fake'. Instead, I think all sports media exists in some nebulous zone of 'simulation' (and here I'm invoking Jean Baudrillard, a French postmodern philosopher), neither real nor fake, but somewhere in between, always created and therefore not on the spectrum of representation. These choices, arbitrary as they often are, are always both reflective of and creating social realities. For example, the graphic overlay of people's names and their nationalities in swimming may invoke and reinforce a societal understanding of the athlete as individual, bounded by their individuality, representing a

country, a national identity constructed by modernism. The lines that follow them as they try to beat each other and the Olympic and World Records may result from a collective desire for 'progress', a feeling of society moving forward. I am not trying to argue for either of those as truisms, but rather that sport is always a product, an act of construction which is always more than the construction itself, reflective of and creating societal values and particular ideologies. What we're watching is not necessarily 'real', but always filtered through the alterations and augmentations of media companies, creating a product that sits at a nebulous zone between what happened and what was created.

Here, I will go out on a limb. In-person viewership is as close to 'real' as possible, and yet even so the experience of the game is not of a representation, but a kind of creation. Stadiums are designed, advertisements are placed, stands are constructed, and rules have been changed and made all to serve the creation of a phenomenon we call professional sport. When watching sport this year, we should note how experience is mediated through the viewing experience, and how that creation can be embedded in multiple social values. This, of course, goes beyond sport. All forms of media: news, 'reality' TV, movies, and TikToks all exist in this zone of creation. Sport serves as an interesting example of this much wider phenomenon. It is both fully 'real' in that the players are literally playing their sport — when a player tears an ACL, their knee will no longer function the same. And yet sports are also arbitrary and 'fake', from the format of the game itself to the way it is represented both in-person and in the media. As players and viewers, we are always placed both in the spectrum of creation and are in a state of 'reality'. Ultimately, sports are a form of entertainment, a way to experience the joy of being alive and thus it is critical that we take note of how these joys are made, and what they mean for the rest of living.

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**What we're watching is not necessarily 'real', but always filtered through the alterations and augmentations of media companies, creating a product that sits at a nebulous zone between what happened and what was created.**

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# Building the brand for Team GB

Following the Paris Olympics, **Isabelle Winter** (2021, Modern Languages) met Exeter alumnus **Andy Anson** (1983, Mathematics), CEO of the British Olympic Association (BOA), to explore the BOA's role in supporting Team GB athletes and the future of the Olympic Games.

## Could you explain what the BOA is and its key responsibilities?

The BOA is responsible for preparing and supporting Team GB athletes for international competitions as the official representation of the International Olympic Committee [IOC] in the UK. Our role extends beyond taking athletes to the Games; we also promote the Olympic values throughout the UK, so we have a focus on social impact. Our operations are entirely commercially funded. We rely on partnerships, sponsorships, merchandising, and donations to raise the £80 million we need in a four-year cycle. This commercial side is vital to our mission.

Our broader strategy combines social impact, commercial elements, developing the Team GB brand, and supporting athletes in the lead-up to and during the Games. As it gets close to the Olympic Games, athletes are selected for Team GB and become our athletes. Ahead of the Paris Olympics we held a 'Kitting Out' event, where athletes tried on their official Team GB kit for the first time and truly became part of our team. Amongst several others, we partnered with TikTok to help athletes maximise their social media presence during this process.

## What does preparation for the Olympic Games involve?

Preparation is extensive. For Paris 2024, we had two prep camps: one in Saint-Germain-en-Laye and the other one was in Reims. These locations were already equipped with amazing facilities tailored for various sports, and we built gyms at each, creating an incredible high-performance environment. We collaborated with the two cities to make sure we were doing something for them as well, because they were giving a lot to us. Then at the right time, once the athletes finish their acclimatisation, training, and prep camps, they move into the Olympic Village or satellite locations, where we continue to provide high-performance support, including our High Performance Centre in the city of Clichy.

The Olympic Village can host up to 7,000 athletes at a time, and we make sure that Team GB has the right environment, including their own gyms, ice baths, physiotherapy services, and medical support. Additionally, we built a high-performance centre outside the Village to ensure our athletes had sufficient space for training and recovery. Our goal is to create a united team atmosphere under the philosophy of 'One Team GB', fostering a shared culture among all athletes.

We replicate that on a smaller scale at the Winter Games, although the upcoming Milan-Cortina event will be difficult due to the venues being spread across the Dolomites. We will have to adapt our approach to replicate that high-performance environment on a smaller scale at each location. We will support athletes with logistics, enabling them to go and perform and hopefully win medals, and then they go on to a programme called 'Managing Victory'.





### Can you tell us about Team GB House and its role at the Games?

In Paris, we introduced Team GB House, our hospitality hub, with rooms for both stakeholders and the general public. It allowed the public to celebrate with athletes after their events. It was a massive success, with up to 500 people gathering to enjoy DJ sets, interviews, and even seeing medal celebrations up close. When Tom Daley won his medal, he came in with his partner and their kids, and his little boy was running around the lounge with the medal, showing it off to all the fans. It was an incredible way for athletes and fans to connect, and we hope to replicate it in future Games.

### Athletes are starting to open up about their mental health struggles. How does the BOA support athletes facing such challenges while in the spotlight?

Mental health is increasingly important. Athletes face tremendous pressure, and while they have access to sports psychologists throughout their careers, the intensity of the Olympic environment can be overwhelming. We provide mental health support during the Games, but there's also the 'Olympic Blues' that many athletes experience afterwards. It's essential that the sports and the BOA help athletes manage this post-Games emotional dip.

Transitioning out of sport, particularly after retirement, is an even greater challenge. Olympic athletes are not highly paid generally and they don't retire with substantial savings, so they need to reinvent themselves. The BOA, along with national governing bodies and funding agencies such as UK Sport, need to do more to support athletes through this period, as it can be an incredibly difficult time.

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*Mental health is increasingly important... It's essential that [we] help athletes manage this post-Games emotional dip.*

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### You have a wealth of commercial experience, particularly at Manchester United and Disney. How do you approach cultivating the Team GB brand?

Building the Team GB brand is central to what I do. At Disney, I learned the importance of building, managing and maintaining brands with care. Disney is obsessive about it. Mickey Mouse is kind of the symbol of Disney, and I learned a very simple mantra: 'don't f\*\*\* with the mouse!' That discipline in brand management carried over to my work at Manchester United, a massive global brand whose customers are obsessive fans. At Team GB, a lot of good work has been done on creating the brand. But in recent years, we've really tried to reenergise it, especially with digital and social media, to make it relevant to younger audiences. We did a deal with TikTok, which attracts an audience that is younger than audiences on other platforms. That was a good step in the right direction.

It's fascinating for me that TikTok actually wanted to do a deal with us because it shows that they saw something in the Olympics. I think we saw that the Snoop Dogg element of the Games was a new way of entertainment and sports coming together and attracting new audiences; when the Games get to LA in 2028, we will see the coming together of the worlds of entertainment and sports on a level that we've never seen before. That makes LA such an exciting commercial and marketing property: the next four years will fly by because we'll have so much to focus on, to take the brand to another level.

**Can you expand on how knowing where the host city changes how you prepare for the Games?**

They've all got their own physical sports challenges. Paris was quite easy because it was mostly self-contained and transportation was relatively easy. LA will be tough because it's spread out, and all the venues are spread out. There's very little public transport: I think that will be one of the biggest challenges. But at the same time, the glamour, the venues! They're talking about putting swimming in the SoFi Stadium [a large American football stadium] with 40,000 people watching swimming every night. That will be an amazing atmosphere, and it'll be an experience that, certainly, the swimmers will never have had before. There's going to be something incredibly spectacular about Los Angeles, and knowing the people who are running it, it really will be the biggest celebrities from the world of entertainment meeting the biggest celebrities in the world of sport, and I think that's a very exciting proposition.

**Each Games features new sports. Do you see potential for these new sports to break into the public consciousness and achieve commercial success?**

I do and I don't. The new sports have definitely worked in terms of bringing new audiences, using different media channels to reach those audiences, to some degree or other. But they have to be good sports as well. I thought that the climbing in Paris was absolutely sensational. I thought the previous iteration in Tokyo was a bit of a mess when they mixed three disciplines together, but the bouldering and the lead climbing together was just a brilliant event.

It has to be a good sport, not just modern and youth-oriented; I think that's the most important thing. I sometimes look at skateboarding, for example, and think they need to do something extra. But I think it's worth trying these new sports. Interestingly, in LA, some of the new events are more traditional sports; you've got squash, lacrosse, and flag football. They're not necessarily youth-oriented sports in the way that BMX freestyle, skateboarding and surfing have tried to be, but they bring something different and it will be fascinating to see how audiences respond.



*The next four years will fly by because we'll have so much to focus on, to take the brand to another level.*



*Images: P42: Tom Daley and Helen Glover are flagbearers for Team GB ahead of the Paris Olympics; P44: Team GB's Women's Rugby Sevens depart for Paris; P45: Team GB took home 65 medals at the Paris Olympics, including in boulder and lead climbing, equestrian eventing, and the 4x400m mixed relay*

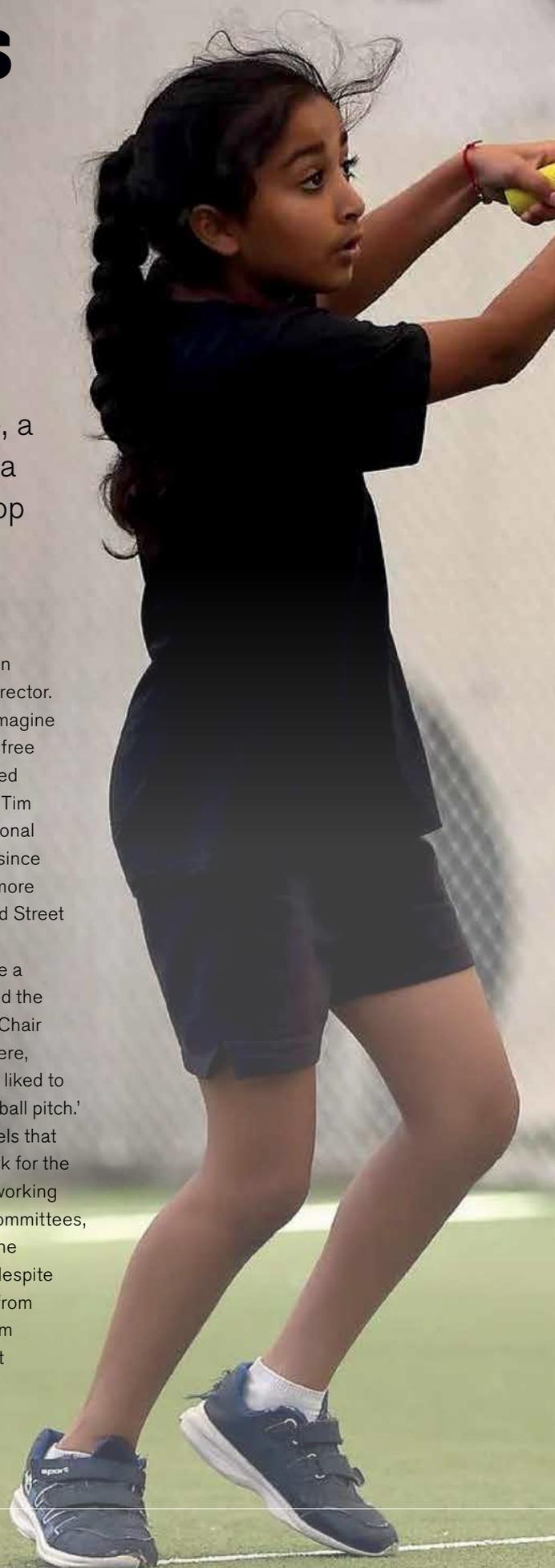
# HITTING A SIX FOR YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES IN CRICKET

Cricket Blue **James Pyman** (2019, Modern Languages) spoke to Exeter alumnus **Tim Score** (1979, Modern History) about Tim's role as Chair of Trustees at Chance to Shine, a national charity that gives 600,000 children a year the opportunity to play, learn and develop through cricket.

I speak to Tim on a Thursday afternoon. He is between a working lunch in London and a board meeting for the FA, where he is a non-executive director. 'I stopped working full-time in 2015,' he explains, although it's hard to imagine that his current 'plural existence' of non-executive positions leaves much free space in his diary. Prior to 2015, Tim was the CFO of the Cambridge-based tech company ARM for 13 years. Retiring from his role at ARM has given Tim the opportunity to spend time 'on the inside' of a number of areas of personal interest, whether it be government, sport, the arts or charity. To this end, since 2015 Tim has held positions at British Land, Pearson, HM Treasury and more recently at the FA, the Royal National Theatre, Bridgepoint, Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Charity and Chance to Shine.

Tim studied History at Exeter between 1979 and 1982: 'Sport was quite a big thing [at college]. Tim played for the college cricket side and captained the football team in his second year: 'Myself and Richard Meddings (now the Chair of NHS England) were the centre backs for Exeter and Meddings and I were, between 2015 and 2021, both non-executive directors of HM Treasury. He liked to bring up this notion that no-one got past Score and Meddings on the football pitch.'

Football has been a life-long passion for Tim, and I ask whether he feels that his grounding as a player and fan might have informed his decision to work for the FA: 'It was a continuum, really.' Tim is in his eighth and penultimate year working with the FA board, where, beyond chairing the audit and remunerations committees, his responsibilities have included participating in the process that led to the appointment of Debbie Hewitt, the FA's first female Chair. It is clear that despite the challenges of his position, Tim finds the role deeply rewarding: aside from being a part of shaping a game that he loves, his position also provides him with two tickets in the royal box for all games at Wembley; he tells me that soon after he joined the board, he went to the FA Cup final and watched from the royal box as his team, Arsenal, beat Chelsea 2-1: 'it doesn't get much better than that.'





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*"The problems in cricket run pretty deep... but Chance to Shine is in a sense part of the solution."*

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We turn to the topic of Tim's responsibilities as Chair of Chance to Shine, a charity formed in 2005 principally to provide opportunities for young people in disadvantaged areas to develop themselves through playing cricket. As they near their 20-year anniversary, Tim's admiration for the charity's achievements is plain to see. He tells me that the charity is in a quarter of all primary schools in the UK, has reached 600,000 young people in the last year and, several months ago, had their seven-millionth participant in a Chance to Shine programme. Tim describes how cricket is used as a tool to unlock social skills for a lot of those who participate, allowing them to thrive in other environments and giving them confidence to play and interact with others.

Since 2005, the charity's growth has been staggering, and they have no intention of slowing down: 'We want to reach a million kids in 2028; that's the target that we're working towards.' Tim believes that the charity has a very scalable model, especially with the introduction of its Street Cricket programme, which establishes places for children and young adults to play cricket that wouldn't normally be used for that purpose: 'kids can play in a carpark, a youth club, a sports hall, wherever. We locate these close to schools which can then ideally feed into cricket clubs, so that the many participants who fall in love with the game can continue to play. We've created about 300 street projects, which effectively doubles the capacity of cricket clubs in the UK.' Introducing young people to clubs and widening access to those clubs is at the heart of Chance to Shine's activities.

Among major UK sports, cricket is recognised as a game which often has significant barriers to entry: equipment is expensive and good facilities take up a lot of space; access to local community cricket clubs is not guaranteed and neither is expertise in schools. Chance to Shine works to broaden access to cricket at grass-roots level, providing opportunities for young people and removing barriers to entry into cricket: 'The great thing about Chance to Shine is that, to participate, you don't need any money or kit, you just turn up'. The charity has made important steps towards tackling some of the access issues at the heart of cricket, but the game

has a considerable way to go in this regard: In 2023, the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) released a report that challenged the way that cricket addresses equity, diversity and inclusion in England. The report laid out ways in which the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) was failing to promote equity, diversity and inclusion in the sport. The commission made 44 recommendations, of which two explicitly mention Chance to Shine's role in solving the problems identified in the report. The recommendations suggested that investment in Chance to Shine would help both to scale up accessible cricket provision in areas where access to cricket is otherwise limited and to increase provision of cricket in state secondary schools. 'The problems in cricket run pretty deep... but Chance to Shine is in a sense part of the solution.' Having spent the last 20 years addressing issues of access and inclusion in cricket, it is unsurprising that the charity has been so prominently recognised by the ICEC.

So, what next for Tim and for Chance to Shine? The charity is at an exciting stage, they have a mandate to address issues raised in the ICEC report and are under new leadership with Kate Stephens as their new Chief Executive. The major limiting factor in their ability to scale their reach, Tim explains, is funding. Chance to Shine is currently awaiting £10 million of investment (£2 million per year for five years) that was announced by the last government. The funding is currently under review by Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves and her team, but the charity is hopeful that this delay will be over shortly, allowing them to grow, and to offer an ever-increasing number of young people a way to find enjoyment and fulfilment in cricket.

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*"We've created about 300 street projects, which effectively doubles the capacity of cricket clubs in the UK."*

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## ‘Where there’s a belief in the art of the possible...’

It started with a medieval banquet, continued with the first Royal Parks Half Marathon, and most recently turned into Olympic Rowing – events ace **Rachel Dulai** (1986, Music), currently special projects lead at British Rowing, tells us what it’s like to organise major sporting events for the first time.

‘**W**hy do you put yourself through it?’ friends often ask. As anyone who has put on an event of any scale knows, they can sometimes (read ‘often’) be stressful, and part of this is due to the very fixed deadline. The answer: ‘It’s such a buzz seeing a concept become reality and then people enjoying the new reality.’

The first taste of this, funnily enough, came through staging a medieval banquet in my second year at Exeter College, supported by my noble friend, Bill Westwater. Shut your ears now – anyone in health and safety at the college – but we had the fires lit, straw bales to sit on, readings of Chaucer, jesters, music, candles in wooden holders that my Dad made, and then everyone wore costumes, including the serving staff. Bill and I researched medieval recipes that the kitchen cooked, and guests drank mead. It was incredibly atmospheric, a lot of fun and very rewarding.

Fast forward 21 years to 2009 and the first Royal Parks Foundation Half Marathon was born. Similarly, in some ways, a lot of research was done, this time into how to create a

half marathon that truly reflected its venue – a Royal Park. I was the event director and worked closely with The Royal Parks, The Royal Parks Foundation and Westminster City Council. The multi-stakeholder approach is a challenge, but also brilliant when everyone comes together to deliver something special. It was the first time Hyde Park Corner had been closed to traffic for an event of this nature – the traffic management plan was incredible but having people who ‘know their stuff’ as part of the team makes everything relatively straightforward. But why is this event in its ‘new guise’ of the Royal Parks Half still going? It is because it had its own unique selling point (USP) – same as the banquet (though not at all sure another banquet has similarly been staged). This USP – sustainability – was something that has now resurfaced recently – more on that later, though it wasn’t called that at the time.

In creating something that was different, forward thinking and attractive, we built on the Parks theme; i.e. minimising our impact on a national treasure. First came the

design – autumn-themed; the look and feel of events is incredibly important because it immediately sets the tone. Then came other initiatives co-created with the wonderful CEO of the Royal Parks Foundation, Sara Lom. We worked with Crew Room to create bamboo t-shirts; these had never been seen before. They were sent out to competitors ahead of time – a novel concept, then! M&S collected any clothing dumped at the start and gave it to charity. Medals were made of wood in the shape of a leaf – would people like them? It was a gamble – they LOVED them (in future years they were then made out of wood from fallen trees in the park itself). We didn't have goody bags – would there be anarchy? – NO – we had a food village instead, with food people actually wanted to eat, we had small water bottles that were then recycled into the following years' water bottles – again courtesy of M&S – a partner with the same vision. IT WAS SUCH A BUZZ! I am so happy it's still happening (now organised by London Marathon Events).

Fast forward 10 years to 2018: another event director role and the next creative event. This time it was on the water. How can rowing be made a spectator sport? Jeff Foulser, CEO of Sunset+Vine, the sports TV production company, said that an audience 'Has to Care Who Wins'. This was then applied to rowing – do people care about X Rowing Club? – well, it might be a moot point, but, en masse, arguably not. Do people care about their city? – I would gamble that you'd be more on to a winner with this one.

We created a rowing version (Power8s) of The Hundred – three years before cricket did. We transplanted rowing into an existing festival – The Bristol Harbour Festival – and the rowers raced for their cities. Each city had its own colour – the branding (don't forget the branding) reflected this. It was raced over 350 metres in eights only, so that it was possible to see the start and finish of the race (unusual in rowing), and 20,000 people came to watch the spectacle that started and finished in two and a half hours, like watching a show. Manchester Bees won – a year after the bombing in Manchester, which made it particularly poignant. You can watch an unusual interpretation of the event by the Bristol City Poet, Miles Chambers, at: <https://bit.ly/Power8s-MC>  
Power8s was broadcast live on BT Sport but it sadly

hasn't been since, as – despite the plan to roll out to the Nottingham River Festival and to do a night race in Newcastle – it was expensive-ish to produce, and British Rowing isn't flush with money (if there are any potential sponsors out there please contact me immediately – branding still exists in anticipation of the concept having legs). Everyone loved it though, and it brings me a tinge of joy and sadness to still see rowers wearing their Power8s caps and kit.

The next creation, or adaption really, was Beach Sprint Rowing. What is this? Well, watch the LA Olympics to find out. In 2022, I was the event director for the World Rowing Coastal Championships and Beach Sprint Finals that took place in Saundersfoot, Wales. My friend and colleague, Guin Batten, was the creator of this concept, but we adapted it to move the entire event infrastructure up and down the beach over a distance of 300 metres. We had to do this to show the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that the concept could indeed be staged anywhere around the world, including beaches with huge tidal ranges.

It didn't come without its challenges, particularly as it was also live streamed – cables, movement and sea not being known as best bedmates. But, through keeping everything mobile, very lightweight (and what about the branding I hear you cry – well – it had to have lots of holes in to let the wind through) and using effective volunteer-power on the beach, we succeeded. The IOC observed the event, and last year it was announced as a new rowing format for LA 2028! We also decided to focus on sustainability, and gained the ISO 20121 certification for sustainability in events – another first for a UK Sport funded sporting event.

But where to now? My work at British Rowing is largely focused on the Clean (or dirty) Water Agenda, having created the British Rowing Sustainability Strategy. We're working on weaving it into our own events. Who knows – can anyone even dream of a swimming event in the Thames? I'll leave you pondering over that conundrum.

Where there's a belief in the art of the possible, boundaries are pushed, concepts actually happen – and there is never a status quo.



*20,000 people watched eight cities fight for supremacy at Power8s in 2018*

# The XY FACTOR



**Ella Stadler** (2019, History; 2022, History of Science, Medicine, and Technology) observes the sporting community ‘grappling with the same old fears and biases’ around chromosome-based gender tests, as she reflects on history repeating itself at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

**A**s the final medals were awarded and the 2024 Paris Olympics drew to a close, a shadow lingered over the celebration of athletic excellence: the contentious issue of gender verification. While the Games showcased remarkable feats of unity and competition, they also reignited fierce debates around the eligibility of boxers Imane Khelif (Algeria) and Lin Yu-ting (Taiwan), both disqualified due to controversial sex chromosome tests at the 2023 Women’s World Championships. Their cases, echoing the Cold War-era gender debates, have brought the unresolved issues of fairness and identity in sport back into focus. It is a striking reminder of how history seems to be repeating itself, reviving injustices once thought consigned to the past.

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The Cold War was characterised by intense ideological clashes, with the Olympics becoming a battleground for nations to showcase their strength and superiority. As sports historian Allen Guttman noted, from Helsinki in

1952 to Montreal in 1976, the Games were ‘a continuation of politics by other means’. This dynamic persisted beyond 1976, as seen in the tit-for-tat protests between the USA and USSR during the 1980 Moscow and 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. The Games became a cultural arena for competition between communism and capitalism, where victories and defeats were perceived as reflections of ideological and national strength. Governments, officials, and coaches pursued gold medals with extraordinary fervour, often compromising athletes’ well-being in the process. Allegations arose, particularly against Eastern European coaches, of coercing athletes into using performance-enhancing drugs or even entering male athletes in female events to boost medal counts.

Amid this fierce rivalry, concerns about the integrity of gender categories led to the introduction of gender verification tests, beginning with the controversial Barr Body test in 1968. However, the roots of this discourse trace back even further, to 1936, when Avery Brundage, then the President of the American Olympic Association, expressed alarm over a letter questioning the eligibility of female athletes. He highlighted an unnamed competitor whose supposedly ‘masculine’ attributes—such as a ‘deep bass voice, height, and 10½ inch shoes’—raised doubts about her suitability for the female category. Brundage suggested that, in the absence of measures,

medical examinations might be necessary before Olympic participation, revealing deeply ingrained suspicions toward female athletes and marking the onset of a long and troubled history of gender verification policies.

The issue resurfaced during the 1966 Congress of World Athletes in Budapest, where the IAAF first broached gender verification. This led to controversial physical inspections at the European Championships, where female athletes were subjected to examinations by a panel of female doctors—a practice many deemed unacceptable. Similar inspections took place at the 1967 Pan-American Games in Canada, further fuelling criticism. By the 1968 Winter Games in Grenoble, the Barr Body test—a chromosomal test based on cheek cell analysis—was instituted. Female athletes were randomly selected for testing, and by the 1970s, presenting an IOC-issued gender verification certificate became a routine requirement. Although this testing method was eventually phased out by the 1992 Albertville Winter Olympics, replaced by PCR and hormone testing, its legacy of discrimination lingered.

However, the headlines of summer 2024 evoke painful memories of this Cold War-chromosomal testing era. Despite assertions that gender verification protects female athletes, the IOC has faced significant criticism due to the potentially public nature of the testing process. In the past, athletes were advised to withdraw discreetly from competition following an initial chromatin test failure, often citing injury to evade further scrutiny. Yet, the press and fellow athletes frequently speculated about their gender verification status, leading to damaging assumptions and narratives.

A poignant illustration of this phenomenon is María José Martínez-Patiño's troubling experience. In her 1987 letter to IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, she recounted her journey as an athlete representing Spain internationally. After receiving an IAAF-issued gender verification card in 1983, she faced a life-altering challenge in 1985 when she forgot her femininity certificate at the World University Games in Kobe, Japan. A subsequent test revealed a 46, XY karyotype, prompting event officials to advise her to withdraw, suggesting she cite a warm-up injury to protect her privacy.

Tragically, when Martínez-Patiño attempted to compete again in 1986, she faced the same dilemma: withdraw discreetly or risk public exposure. Despite her decision to compete and winning a gold medal, her triumph was overshadowed when a Spanish doctor revealed her 1985 test results to the press, igniting widespread outrage. Consequently, she faced severe repercussions: expulsion from her athletic residency, loss of her university scholarship, and abandonment of her studies. Stripped of her accomplishments and shunned by acquaintances, she appealed to Samaranch for assistance, recounting the 'most distressing moments' of her life and grappling with feelings of shame and loss. Her case vividly exemplifies the failure of the IOC's confidentiality assurances, leading to significant infringements upon women's rights and the premature

termination of careers.

The events of the 2024 Olympics highlight how sport's reliance on outdated gender verification tests continues to perpetuate exclusion and scrutiny, even as the world supposedly moves towards greater equality. As IOC President Thomas Bach remarked, 'We have two boxers who were born as women, raised as women, who have passports as women, and who have competed for many years as women'. Despite this, the IBA's reliance on chromosome tests to bar them from competition has drawn criticism for its lack of nuance and fairness. Critics argue that chromosomes alone cannot define an athlete's identity or abilities, and that continuing to use them as a determining factor repeats the mistakes of the past.

Voices across the sporting and political spectrum have weighed in on the controversy, highlighting the divisiveness of the issue. While some, like Khelif's father, have defended the athletes, calling the disqualification 'immoral', others have drawn clear ideological lines, as seen in figures like J.K. Rowling and Elon Musk, who have voiced opposition to their participation. These polarised reactions underscore how deeply entrenched the gender debate remains, further complicating the path forward.

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## *Sport's reliance on outdated gender verification tests continues to perpetuate exclusion and scrutiny.*

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As we reflect on the 2024 Paris Olympics, it is evident that the conversation surrounding gender verification has returned to where it began. Alun Williams, a professor of sports and exercise genomics, has pointed out that assessing unfair advantages requires more than simply looking at chromosomes, calling for a more sophisticated and inclusive approach. 'Simply looking at someone's sex chromosomes ... is incomplete', he argued, stressing the need for evaluations that consider hormonal and individual biological responses.

History is repeating itself in ways that should alarm us all. Despite technological advancements and a broader understanding of gender diversity, the sporting community finds itself grappling with the same old fears and biases. The 2024 Paris Olympics present a crucial moment for reflection and change. The continued use of chromosome-based tests—relics of a Cold War mentality—reveals that the fight for gender equity in sport is far from over. If history teaches us anything, it is that these patterns of exclusion must be broken. Only by recognising the failures of the past and addressing the realities of the present can the sporting world move towards true inclusivity, where athletes are celebrated for their talent, not questioned because of their identity.



# HOW'S THAT?

Despite significant challenges at both national and international level, cricket's future is bright, says **Bruce Carnegie-Brown** (1978, English), outgoing chair of Marylebone Cricket Club.

As the sun sets on another English cricket season (and for me, on my term as chair of Marylebone Cricket Club [MCC]), it is interesting to observe the phenomenal growth of professional cricket globally. Today, it is the second most watched sport in the world, after football, and will be played by numerous nations for the first time at the Olympics in Los Angeles in 2028. There are many reasons for this: the explosive demand from broadcasters for live content, which has benefitted all the major sports; the growing wealth and economic might of India with its cricket-mad population of over a billion people; and the adaptability of cricket to excite enthusiasm in many different formats – a unique feature of cricket, not replicated or replicable in football or rugby to anything like the same degree.

In its earliest iteration, a game of cricket was not limited by time at all. There were 99 timeless Test matches between 1877 and 1939. The longest of these was the fifth Test between Australia and England, played in Melbourne in 1929, which lasted for eight playing days. Today, cricket offers professional matches from 200 to 2,700 balls bowled in a game (although slow rates of play make this target for a five-day Test match increasingly hard to achieve). In the amateur game, formats typically range from 200 balls to 600 balls per game.

Most of us of a certain age are devotees of Test Match cricket, but the fastest growing part of the game is its shortest form. Franchise cricket has proliferated globally, with tournaments in Australia (the Big Bash), India (IPL), South Africa (SA20), Dubai (IL T20), England (The Hundred

and the Blast) and the USA (Major League Cricket), to name only the largest.

The recently completed fourth series of England and Wales' The Hundred saw 540,000 tickets sold for the four-week tournament and television audiences that were 500,000 greater for the final of the men's tournament at Lord's than in 2023. Forty-one per cent of tickets for this year's tournament were sold to families and 30 per cent to people who were new to cricket. The Hundred has also catalysed a huge growth in interest in the women's game. A record number of spectators – 22,000 – watched the women's final at Lord's this year, a similar number to those who watched the women's T20 match between England and Australia earlier in the summer, itself a new record for spectators watching women's cricket in the UK.

The growth in the women's game represents a huge opportunity for cricket globally – and at MCC itself, where currently only three per cent of its 18,000 full members are women and where there are huge challenges to changing the membership demographic given the Club's 26-year waiting list.

The explosive growth among spectators helps bolster the rapidly growing participation by women and girls in the amateur game in England and Wales. The game's regulators and leading participants are scrambling to respond to this mounting demand by training new coaches and increasing the number of venues able to host women's cricket.

The lack of cricket pitches in state schools and the need to provide separate changing facilities and improved safeguarding in cricket clubs create their own challenges for the infrastructure of the game. Even at Lord's, the 'home of cricket', there are challenges hosting 'double header' games involving men's and women's teams because there are only two changing rooms. Thankfully, impressive investment is now going into the game's grass roots to develop the amateur game, to make it more inclusive and to build pathways from the amateur game into the professional game. Examples of this abound in charities like Chance to Shine (chaired by Exeter College alumnus, Tim Score [1979, Modern History] – see p. 46 of this edition of *Exon*), the ACE Programme (founded in 2020 by former England cricketer Ebony Rainford-Brent to encourage inner city children to play and develop their skills) and MCC's own Foundation, which runs summer cricket hubs around the country for talented children aged 11 to 16. In 2024, 126 of these hubs coached 4,700 aspiring cricketers, of whom 40 per cent were girls. This is an increase from 77 hubs in 2023, and will further increase to more than 150 hubs in 2025.

In addition to the investment of the MCC Foundation in grass roots cricket, MCC continues to promote the game beyond the hallowed confines of Lord's, with its members playing over 500 matches against UK schools and universities each year and with a touring programme which saw both men's and women's MCC teams visit Canada, Rwanda, Malta, Netherlands and Estonia in 2024.



*Cricket is rapidly enticing more women and children to take part*

The challenges facing cricket are significant: climate change; congested schedules; player burnout; increasing dominance of the strongest nations and relative decline of other nations, particularly in Test match cricket. But there is also a huge amount to celebrate: the growing number of countries competing in the sport at international level (including USA, Ireland, Afghanistan and Netherlands); the growth in women's cricket; increasing demand from new audiences – particularly women and children; more lucrative broadcasting rights, bringing more money into the game, which filters down to the recreational game, enabling greater access to and participation in the sport. In short, a series of developments which, in combination, are further internationalising the game, further democratising the game, and growing participation and interest at all levels and in all formats of the game.



*Duels and contact injuries have significant financial implications at elite level sport*

# Why predicting the outcome of football duels turned out to be a real gas

To tackle the question of how many times a player might do battle – and win – against another on the football pitch, **Sam Ritblat** (2019, Engineering) drew inspiration from particles in a gas to model their behaviours – and see if he might outsmart the bookies...

In the rapidly growing field of sports data analysis, some questions stand out as particularly intriguing. You might wonder, 'How many times will Erling Haaland engage in duels with opposition defenders in his next Premier League match' or 'Can a computer simulation founded on historical data predict the number of duels between any pair of players as a function of team selection?'. I'm pleased to share that my fourth-year project, ably supervised by Associate Professor of Engineering Science, Jeroen Bergmann, tackled both of these pressing questions.

The question of duels – broadly defined as physical encounters between two or more players competing for the

ball – arose during my investigation into injury risk. Injuries in elite football carry significant financial implications and can derail sporting ambitions, as evidenced by Arsenal's thwarted 2022/23 title campaign. Governing bodies of contact sports face increasing pressure to minimise injuries, such as concussions, while also being mindful of reputational considerations. As I explored the link between duels and contact injuries, I also discovered data suggesting a connection between the number of duels and team success. This intriguing relationship led me to shift my focus, making duels the central theme of my project rather than solely concentrating on injuries.



*Can two-dimensional models help predict the outcome of football matches?*

The core of my project involved building a computer simulation to predict duels. I drew inspiration from particles in a gas, picturing them as the players on a football pitch – or perhaps imagining what an alien, unfamiliar with the sport, might observe watching a football match from above. However, there are notable differences: a football match follows patterns and is less random. This raised important questions: To what extent do these patterns influence duels between players? And how can we effectively model these dynamics in a gas-like simulation?

I wanted to determine whether past data could be used to create a sufficient description of individual players and establish a set of rules that define a round particle in a two-dimensional gas simulation, with two 'teams' of 11 particles on a rectangular 'pitch'. Ultimately, we sought to count the number of collisions between particles as a prediction for players' duels in a match. This required identifying significant metrics to summarise individual players and determining what parameters in our model could effectively be used to simulate these interactions.

The most obvious and important parameter is the size of a particle, as it strongly relates to the frequency of a player's duels. However, this left the model still too unpredictable, and I found we needed to incorporate a player's position, which ultimately has a bearing on their number of duels and, in particular, on which opposing players are involved in these duels. Phew! Still there? Here comes the exciting part: By adding a restoring force to the particles, similar to a spring anchored at a specific point on the pitch, we create three new degrees of freedom for each particle: the stiffness of the imaginary spring acting on a particle and the two coordinates of its anchor point.

Next came weeks of investigating and establishing mathematical relationships mapping the frequency and spatial distribution of a player's duels to a particle's size and spring stiffness. I won't delve into the laborious details, but from this process emerged a piece of code that, given the starting lineups of two teams, predicts every duel likely to occur during a match. It's important to note that this project was made possible by an extensive and meticulously compiled dataset provided by Wyscout, which made this research both feasible and robust.

'But Sam', I see you dying to ask, 'couldn't you just take a player's average number of duels from past matches to predict the next game, instead of going through all these needlessly complicated steps?' While that approach is certainly feasible, I had a 50-page dissertation to write, and that would hardly fill five pages. Nonetheless, this is an important question, and to actually evaluate the success of my model, I conducted hypothesis tests to compare it against a simple averaging approach. And it didn't do that badly! But it still left much to be desired. My main conclusion is that while my pseudo-physical approach shows promise, it's not yet refined enough to win any prizes (or outsmart the bookies). The real advantage of the method is the insights it provides into the nitty-gritty of an actual football match, opening avenues to predict other aspects of the game that simple averages barely touch.

So there we have it: I set out to see if I could predict the outcomes of football matches and joined the long list of people who have discovered it's no easy feat – and I'm honestly relieved to be in that company. After all, where's the fun in having all the answers?



# Stranded behind enemy lines

For Exeter student **Nick Lim** (2019, Paediatrics), Modern Pentathlon's variety was alluring and its military history fascinating. But as a Singaporean athlete in Oxford, he often found himself isolated and lacking support. His DPhil supervisor changed that, and competing as a professional athlete came to define who he is and give him some of the best experiences of his life.

It's a common misconception to think cycling is part of Modern Pentathlon, but the sport is more unusual. Though it has faced its share of controversies and a decline in popularity, its origins are fascinating. Created by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, Modern Pentathlon was designed to simulate the skills of a 19th-century cavalry soldier stranded behind enemy lines. The event tests a competitor's versatility, with five distinct disciplines: running, swimming, fencing, shooting, and horse riding—though after the Paris 2024 Olympics, horse riding will be replaced by obstacle racing.

Modern Pentathlon made its Olympic debut at the 1912 Games. With deep roots in military history—boasting competitors like the renowned WWII general George S Patton—it wasn't until 1956 that a civilian claimed victory for the first time. The sport's military legacy is still evident, particularly during the riding component, where competitors don various military uniforms, reflecting the tradition and honour associated with its origins.

My introduction to Modern Pentathlon came through

a friend on the Pentathlon GB team while I was pursuing my DPhil at Oxford. Having competed at a high level in swimming within the US NCAA collegiate system, I sought a sport that offered more diversity, and Modern Pentathlon was the perfect fit. A series of serendipitous events at local pentathlon competitions in the UK eventually led to my recruitment for the Singapore national team. I was lucky enough to qualify as Singapore's sole representative for both the World Cup and the World Championships.

One of my most significant challenges during this time was balancing my academic research with the rigorous training required to compete at a high level. Typically, this involved two or three training sessions each day, ensuring I maintained proper nutrition and recovery to prevent injuries. As a foreign athlete in Oxford, I lacked access to the physiotherapists, coaching, and equipment subsidies that other national teams often provide. This meant that any necessary gear or support had to come out of my pocket, which added another layer of difficulty to my already demanding schedule.



*The modern pentathlete: Nick Lim pictured competing across four of Modern Pentathlon's five disciplines*

Unlike pentathletes in countries with established training institutes and full-time professional teams, I often found myself training alone. The relentless cycle of eat, sleep, train, work meant that I began to neglect spending time with friends and family. Pair this with balancing funding, training and academics and it began to take a toll on my mental health.

I have to credit two people who helped me regain my footing during this challenging time. A conversation with Professor Paul Klenerman, who qualified for the 1984 Olympics while at Oxford, inspired me to do the same. Additionally, my supervisor, Professor Philip Goulder, was incredibly accommodating, allowing me to work remotely and seek a more conducive training environment. With just six months to go, I set my sights on qualifying for the 2023 Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, and securing a top-five finish and with it a place at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

One of my favorite things about competing at an international level in sport is how closely knit the community is. Despite the fierce competition, I've found that athletes from various countries have been remarkably kind and generous, often welcoming 'stranded' athletes like me. Thanks to these connections, I've had the opportunity to train in incredible locations I never dreamed I would visit, such as the Olympic training facility in Tata, Hungary, the Akbulak Olympic Center in remote Kazakhstan, and the Pentathlon GB facility at the University of Bath, where I practised alongside world champions and Olympic medallists, gaining invaluable experiences and forming lifelong friendships.

With subsidised training and a new environment structured around pentathlon performance, I accumulated enough ranking points around the World Cups to secure an Asian Games quota. This achievement made me the

first Singaporean to qualify and compete in this sport at the Asian Games, the second-largest sporting event in the world after the Olympics. Fast forward to September 2023: despite my best efforts to avoid illness and injury, I unfortunately succumbed to both just weeks before the Games and narrowly missed out on Olympic qualification by one spot. It's difficult to articulate the emotions tied to dedicating countless hours to prepare for a single 90-minute competition, only to see those efforts slip away as I watched a competitor finish just four seconds ahead of me. However, it's something I think I've gradually made peace with over the last year.

Was I envious as I saw my friends compete at the Château de Versailles in front of 15,000 cheering fans? Was I teary-eyed when I saw Japan's Taishu Sato stand on the podium, knowing how much he had sacrificed? And did I wish I could sample the chocolate muffins from the Olympic Village that were so loved by athletes that they went viral? Absolutely. Yet I can't help but feel blessed to have been able to experience at least a small part of the journey with them, from small things like pin trading with other athletes in the Asian Games village to the highs and lows of representing your country whilst staying in dingy motel rooms in Turkey or eating in Soviet-era cafeterias in Drzonków, Poland.

Whether I pursue a career or strive for a spot in the LA 2028 Olympics remains uncertain. However, competing as a professional athlete on the pentathlon circuit will forever be some of the best times of my life and they have been integral in defining who I am today.



# Jack Leslie – The Lion Who Never Roared

A life-long Plymouth Argyle fan, Exeter alumnus **Matt Tiller** (1991, Modern History) was astonished to discover that the first black footballer selected for England was a Pilgrims player, Jack Leslie, called up over half a century before Viv Anderson famously earned his first cap. Here he shines a light on this little-known chapter in English football history.

Jack Leslie was the first black footballer to be selected for England. Fifty-three years before Viv Anderson won his cap, this son of a white woman from Islington and a black sailor from Jamaica was picked for the national side to face Ireland in Belfast. It was 1925.

I first encountered the tale via the medium of boozy chat with a fellow Plymouth Argyle fan and thought it must be an apocryphal tale spun by wishful thinking Janners (*colloquial term for Plymothians*). But it turned out to be true. Argyle's inside-left Jack Leslie was the only black professional at the time, and he had been called up for England. I shared the story with other members of the Green Army including my friend, Greg Foxsmith. Greg lived two doors down when we were kids and is now a campaigning lawyer, which was handy. We resolved to raise money to erect a statue of this forgotten pioneer and in 2019 The Jack Leslie Campaign was born.

When the senseless, racist murder of George Floyd was followed by Black Lives Matter protests and the Colston statue toppling into Bristol Harbour, attention turned to Leslie. We had put our launch on ice due to Covid, with football matches postponed and then played, not in silence, but to the weird echoes of players' expletives bouncing around the empty stands. However, in the isolated yet febrile summer of 2020, with national coverage secured, our campaign to raise £100,000 to put up a statue began.

The touch papers of the culture wars were lit by flag-waving statue huggers and applauders of knee-taking footballers (that's us, obviously) but here was a positive story that everyone but the most ardent racist could get behind. As statues came down, one of a truly deserving figure was going up. We hit and passed our target within the six-week deadline with the support of thousands from

Plymouth and the football community, across the UK and beyond.

When I won my place at Exeter to read Modern History, I had a plan. I was going to be a history professor. I loved history and I got into Oxford. That made sense, didn't it? But, despite my love of the subject, that idea was abandoned sharpish. Nothing to do with my bog-standard 2:1, honest.

Finally, nearly thirty years later, here was a way to reignite and use that passion in a constructive way. And one of the most exciting elements of the campaign has been the impetus to research Jack Leslie's life, career, and that injustice of 1925.

If you don't know the story, then you probably have the same questions I did. Before setting up the campaign, I read enough to discover the truth and significance of it. Since then, that evidence has been augmented by further research and testimony, particularly that of Jack Leslie's three granddaughters, Lesley, Lyn, and Gill, who carry their grandfather's torch with the integrity he had both on and off the pitch.

Jack Leslie was a promising young footballer from Canning Town in East London. Born in 1901, he regretted being too young to serve his country in the Great War. He didn't know then that he would be denied the chance to serve his country on a different field. In 1919 Leslie began playing for Barking Town (now Barking FC) and it is said he scored 250 goals in two years. That is not verified and does sound a little exaggerated, but the legend is an indication of how good he was. Barking won silverware and Leslie also represented Essex and the London League at home and in France.

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In 1921 well-connected Plymouth manager Bob Jack, whose son would captain England, signed three Barking Town players, including Jack Leslie. The big London clubs, Chelsea, Spurs and nearby West Ham wanted him, but according to Leslie, 'Plymouth was crafty... I got home from work one day and this man was in the front parlour. He'd got postcards spread all over the table and mantelpiece... Plymouth Hoe, the sea, the hills.' I grew up a stone's throw from The Hoe and it is a wonderful place, but those postcards certainly did not depict the annual precipitation stats.



*Leslie's statue (left) was unveiled in October 2022*

One element of this story I love is how Bob Jack showed faith in his young signing. Leslie did not make an immediate impact, but in 1924 Plymouth Argyle travelled to South America where Leslie became a first team regular. He even scored twice against Uruguay, firstly in a 4-0 win and again in a 1-1 draw. From then on Leslie cemented his place and he would become a true club legend, playing 400 times and scoring 137 goals before the lace of a heavy old leather ball struck him in the eye, bringing his career to a premature end. Leslie is the club's fourth highest scorer of all-time.

Jack Leslie deserves to be celebrated in Plymouth for his incredible career. At a time when only one club was promoted from each division, his team were runners up in the Third Division South six times in the 1920s before finally winning the championship in 1930. Leslie was then made captain, the first black skipper of a Football League club, and took them to their joint highest league finish to date, fourth in the Second Division. For all you fans of Premier League clubs, that is massive for Argyle.

Jack Leslie's talent, alongside his teammate and all-time top scorer for Argyle, Sammy Black, was lauded in the press and not just down in Devon. The *Daily Mirror* said their wing partnership was 'one of the most famous of post-war football.' In 1932 the *Daily Mail* called Leslie, 'a coloured genius' and the following year wrote, 'Had he been white he would have been a certain English international.' That Jack Leslie was never given the chance to represent the country of his birth was big news then and today.



Leslie had already received national newspaper coverage at the time he was called up for England

On 5 October 1925 the FA International Selection Committee met to choose the England players to face Ireland later that month. I believe that at least one or two of those suits must have known of Leslie's skin colour. Some committee members represented the Westcountry, and Leslie had already received national newspaper coverage. In the days to follow, Leslie's name was printed in several newspapers as one of two reserves to travel. He was one of only thirteen players to be picked for England. This was a well-trod route to winning a full cap. It was a big deal.

Bob Jack called his protégé into his office to give him the good news. Leslie told his story to the *Daily Mail* in 1978 at the time of Viv Anderson's selection, *'Everybody in the club knew about it. The town was full of it. All them days ago it was quite a thing for a little club like Plymouth to have a man called up for England. I was proud – but then I was proud just to be a paid footballer.'* And this is evidenced by local press coverage.

Within days, when injuries to other selected players occurred and pre-match coverage continued, Leslie was not elevated to the starting eleven as some newspapers suggested he might. Instead, his name simply disappeared. Leslie said, *'Then all of a sudden everyone stopped talking about it. Sort of went dead quiet. Didn't look me in the eye. I didn't ask outright. I could see by their faces it was awkward. But I did hear, roundabout like, that the FA had come to have another look at me not at me football but at me face. They asked, and found they'd made a ricket. Found out about me daddy, and that was it.'*

The typed FA minutes were signed off in ink after he'd been dropped, and Jack Leslie was written out of history.

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*"Everybody in the club knew about it. The town was full of it. All them days ago it was quite a thing for a little club like Plymouth to have a man called up for England. I was proud – but then I was proud just to be a paid footballer."*

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On 24 October 1925 the England team put in a paint-dry watch of a performance in Belfast and the game ended without a goal. On the same day, Leslie scored twice for Plymouth in a 7-2 victory.

In that England side, alongside those from the top tiers, were amateur and Third Division players. Leslie could have done no worse. Newspapers at the time and later said he deserved his place. There were no footballing reasons for his deselection.

In the *Daily Herald* on 28 October, a London reader wrote asking, *'Leslie, of Plymouth Argyle, was down as reserve (to travel), but for some reason, not made public, Leslie played for his club on Saturday while Earle, of West Ham United, travelled to Ireland instead.'* He goes on to lament the snobbery blighting first-class football. The *Herald* was a left-wing paper, so was this reader a proto-



Leslie was awarded a posthumous honorary England cap in 2023, with Viv Anderson and FA chairwoman Debbie Hewitt (right) presenting it to Leslie's granddaughters

woke virtue signaller? If so, I'm with them.

The paper followed up by phoning the FA and the Press Association. The FA denied Leslie had been picked while the PA was adamant he had. One reporter for Plymouth's *Football Herald* wrote, 'Unfortunately, my pen is under a ban in this matter, but I may say that a mistake was made in London and transmitted to me. Anyway, Leslie was at that time playing quite well enough to be chosen.'

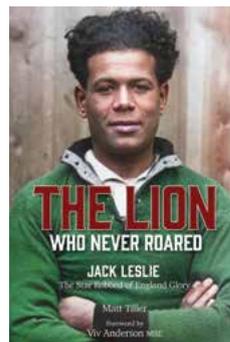
The FA committee either changed its mind internally or external pressure was brought to bear. This was only a few years after the race riots centred around immigrant communities in dockland areas, including Leslie's birthplace, Canning Town. And in the First World War the attitudes towards black British service personnel and those from the colonies varied greatly. Some recruiting offices would allow black men to join up, while others turned them away. And while there are reports of great comradeship, there are stories of overt racism and discrimination in the shadows. It seems that a similar variance in attitude and approach led to Jack Leslie being given this honour and then cruelly snatching it away.

A few people have called the campaign and me out for accusing FA selectors of racism without evidence. The irony is that, while it was a shameful and racist decision, at least one committee member must have proposed Leslie and a majority then backed him for his selection to have happened in the first place. His manager was a well-known football man who, it is believed, recommended Leslie for the national side. The FA was, like a silent teammate witnessing racist banter in the dressing room, complicit in what followed. The decision to deny Leslie the chance was

clearly due to his heritage and the colour of his skin.

The statue of Jack Leslie was unveiled on 7 October 2022 and stands outside Home Park in Plymouth where he once played. It is a celebration of his achievements and a reminder that racism should play no part in society and the game. It still does, of course. And that is why Jack Leslie's story is worth telling and his granddaughters Lesley, Lyn and Gill are proud that his story is being used in this way. And they believe he would be proud too. When the FA announced the awarding of a posthumous honorary cap, these three stoic women were blown away at this recognition at last. It was presented at Wembley in March 2023, 98 years after the FA denied Jack Leslie.

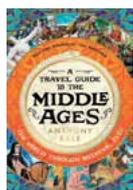
Leslie himself seemed to bear no bitterness through his life. He neither bragged nor complained. According to those who knew him and saw him play, he was a gentleman on and off the pitch, someone who didn't cheat or foul. But he knew the truth and when he was asked, he told it. He believed he deserved a cap, 'I think I was entitled to it. Honestly, I'm not a boasting man. But I was good enough.'



**Matt Tiller's biography of Jack Leslie, *The Lion Who Never Roared*, was released by Pitch Publishing in October 2023. You can read Jack Leslie's story in more detail and donate on the campaign website: [jackleslie.co.uk](http://jackleslie.co.uk)**

# Recommended reading

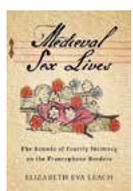
From Lenin to Bowie, the Middle Ages to D-Day, being eaten by the internet or by vampires, there has undoubtedly been an eclectic mix of books served up by members of the Exeter community in the past year.



## **A Travel Guide to the Middle Ages: The World Through Medieval Eyes**

Anthony Bale (1994, English)  
[Penguin](#)

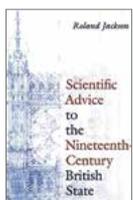
In *A Travel Guide to the Middle Ages*, Bale translates texts from across the medieval world, blurring the distinctions between real and imagined places to present the world as it was understood by the people who lived in it.



## **Medieval Sex Lives**

Elizabeth Eva Leach (Lecturer in Music)  
[Cornell University Press](#)

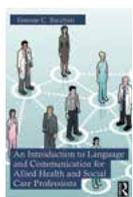
In a combination of the study of music and poetry, *Medieval Sex Lives* enquires after the lyric tradition of courtly love found in the Bodleian library's Douce 308 Manuscript.



## **Scientific Advice to the Nineteenth-Century British State**

Roland Jackson (1972, Molecular Immunology)  
[University of Pittsburgh Press](#)

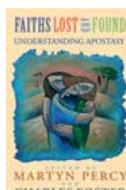
In the first detailed analysis of the provision of scientific advice to the state, Sir Roland Jackson highlights the ways in which the government of the nineteenth-century dealt with its unprecedented scientific and industrial advances.



## **An Introduction to Language and Communication for Allied Health and Social Care Professions**

Simone Bacchini (2000, General Linguistics and Comparative Philology)  
[Routledge](#)

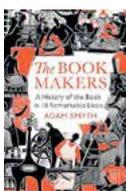
With tools to incorporate in the workplace, discussion points, and chapter summaries, *Language and Communication* is an accessible textbook for students or professionals in the health and social care fields.



## **Faiths Lost and Found: Understanding Apostasy**

Charles Foster (Supernumerary Fellow)  
[Darton, Longman and Todd](#)

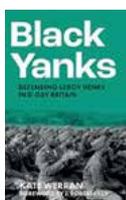
Co-edited alongside Martyn Percy, *Faiths Lost and Found* contains ten stories of apostasy from Christianity. These stories are accompanied by Foster and Percy's personal, theological, and spiritual reflections.



## **The Book-Makers: History of the Book in 18 Remarkable Lives**

Adam Smyth (1990, Modern History)  
[Bodley Head](#)

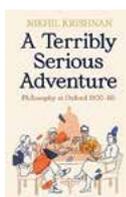
A celebration of the printed book, told through the lives of 18 people who took it in radical new directions.



## **Black Yanks: Defending Leroy Henry in D-Day Britain**

Kate Werran (1991, Modern History)  
[The History Press](#)

In 1944, Leroy Henry, a black American soldier, was falsely sentenced for raping a British woman at knifepoint. Werran brings to life the subsequent civil rights movement propagated by the tabloid press and the British public.



## **A Terribly Serious Adventure: Philosophy at Oxford 1900-60**

Nikhil Krishnan (2007, PPE)  
[Profile Books](#)

In the aftermath of the early twentieth century, Oxford philosophers drew on their wartime experiences to inform their thinking. Krishnan examines figures including Gilbert Ryle, JL Austin, Elizabeth Anscombe and Iris Murdoch as they nurture their self-awareness around language.

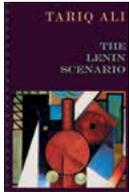


### Vote Vampire

Roger Bird (1991, PPE)

[Troubador](#)

In the city of Carceron, a demon-worshipping tourist city, Mercedes the vampire is running in an election for Archmayor. Follow Flaxen the sorcerer and three teenagers from our world as they run against him.

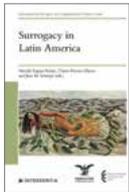


### The Lenin Scenario

Tariq Ali (1963, PPE)

[Verso Books](#)

The Lenin Scenario is the fifth in the Lenin Quintet, a series of works marking the centenary of Lenin's death. This latest publication is a screenplay of his life and times, interweaving his politics and his personal life.



### Surrogacy in Latin America

Nicolas Espejo-Yaksic (Visiting Fellow)

[Intersentia](#)

The first comprehensive engagement with surrogacy and surrounding issues in Latin America in English, Surrogacy illuminates the ethical difficulties of surrogacy through an examination of laws across the continent.



### Eaten by the Internet

Corinne Cath (2016, Information, Communication, and Social Sciences)

[Meatspace Press](#)

In fifteen chapters by a range of authors, Corinne Cath lays bare the political implications of the internet and those that control it.

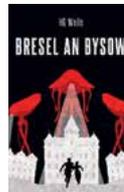


### David Bowie, Enid Blyton, and the Sun Machine

Nicholas Royle (1976, English)

[Manchester University Press](#)

Through a pairing you probably never considered, Royle's blend of memoir and cultural commentary explores the value of art, music, and literature, as well as the role of universities in society.



### Bresel an Bysow

Steve Harris (1988, Chemistry)

[Ors Sempel](#)

Bresel an Bysow is a Cornish translation of HG Wells's War of the Worlds. The text is the latest of Harris's translations into Cornish, which include A Christmas Carol, the first complete Cornish edition of a Dickens novel.

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