

Issue 35 | Michaelmas Term 2024

# Brazen *Notes*





# 1974-2024: Celebrating 50 Years of Women at Brasenose

In this edition we celebrate 50 years since women first joined Brasenose for undergraduate study, in Michaelmas 1974. To mark the occasion, we look behind the scenes at how this momentous change came to take place at Brasenose, one of the first five men's colleges to go co-educational (along with Hertford, Jesus, St Catherine's and Wadham Colleges). We'll also be highlighting some of the notable Brasenose Women's 'Firsts' that have been recorded. There will be additional events at Brasenose to celebrate the anniversary – please note the following dates for your diaries.

## Save The Date: Anniversary Events

### Brasenose Women In The Humanities And Social Sciences

With Brasenose Fellows Masooda Bano, Carole Bourne-Taylor, Anne Davies, Banu Demir, Sos Eltis, Abigail Green, Ashwiny Kistnareddy, Sonali Nag and Katerina Tertychnaya.

Wednesday 29 January 2025,

5.30pm – in College & Livestreamed via Zoom.

### Brasenose Women In Media, Business and Finance

With Brasenose alumnae **Hermione Davies (Modern History, 1978)**, **Victoria Fea (English, 1989)**, **Jane Johnson (English, 1987)** and **Lucinda Riches (PPE, 1980)**.

Wednesday 5 March 2025,

5.30pm – in College & Livestreamed via Zoom.

### Women And The Unions: Challenging Inequality

A discussion between Brasenose alumna **Narmada Thiranagama (Modern History, 1996)** and Diana Holland, former Assistant General Secretary of Unite the Union.

Wednesday 7 May 2025,

5.30pm – in College & Livestreamed via Zoom.

### Principal's Conversation: The Windrush Scandal

With The Guardian reporter and author Amelia Gentleman, who will discuss her work on the Windrush scandal with Principal John Bowers KC.

Wednesday 28 May 2025,

5.30pm – in College & Livestreamed via Zoom.

### 50 years of Women at Brasenose

A day of celebration in College to mark the 50th anniversary of Women at BNC (further details TBC).

Saturday 7 June 2025

## What It Means To Be A Brasenose Woman

On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the College going co-educational, editor and alumna **Jane Johnson (English, 1987)** considers what it means to be a Brasenose woman.



Jane Johnson: Now and at her graduation  
(Photos: Heini King [left] George Johnson [right])

An old friend sent me some of the letters I'd written to her in my first year at Brasenose, back in October 1987.

They betray my naivety, but also my desire to be an observer and a commentator (I was a journalist-in-waiting), trying to make sense of what was happening around me, in a place completely alien to a teenage girl from a North-West seaside town.

Reading the letters today, I wonder what I expected from life at Brasenose, which I chose largely because of its northern links and because I'd heard you got your own, rather nice, room.

This is what I wrote aged 18, on October 18<sup>th</sup>, just days after arriving. I promise I have not changed a word:

*"I have not quite worked out what it means to be an undergraduate yet.*

*So far it has been a combination of ludicrous tradition and piles of work. Where is the fun and the social life? I have been to a few drinks' parties, but they have all been very sedate affairs – we stand and make polite conversation with a fixed smile.*

*We did have a JCR disco, but it was rather a flop and finished at midnight."*

When I arrived at Brasenose it was predominantly male (105 men and 43 women in 1987) and independent school.

Coming from a mixed sixth form college, and before that an all-girls comprehensive, I remember finding this intimidating, and it took me a while to find my tribe. Quoting from my letters again:

*"The Oxford myth at times seems to be real. There are several little cliques of pretentious students – men who will insist on wearing cravats and sporting jackets and others who look like deep intellectuals with their sloppy clothes and glasses. Then of course there are the rigger players and the rowers – burly men who could crush dons underfoot. They also insist on wearing sweatshirts with 'BRAZEN' written on them."*

In rebellious response, a female friend and I had our own T-shirts printed, emblazoning them with the words 'BRAZEN WOMEN'.

Over three and a half decades later – on the 50th anniversary of Brasenose becoming co-educational – I wanted to consider what it means to have been a woman at Brasenose.

Personally, I was acutely aware that I was in a minority. All you had to do was look round the Hall at dinner to realise that.

And back then the bar wasn't very welcoming, even for a woman who wanted a better social life than the JCR 'sweaty bop' could provide.

As I worked on overcoming those feelings of intimidation (it took a while), I struck out and tried to find my role in the college.

I edited the College prospectus – my first proper editing gig. I coxed the women's second boat. I am afraid to say it sank on my watch after the rudder jammed and we collided with an overhanging tree.

Thankfully I hit my stride when I became Target Schools Officer – trying to help redress the state / independent school imbalance. Although I do remember visiting a comprehensive school in Liverpool to tell students they shouldn't be put off applying because of its Brideshead image – and finding that was exactly the problem: they didn't want to go punting and attend formal drinks parties.

In my final year I discovered the university paper *Cherwell*, back then in what was little more than a shed in the grounds of Frewin.

As co-Woman's Editor with my friend Thea, I reviewed actress Emily Woof's plays and interviewed shoulder-padded Fleet Street female executives – including the Features Editor of the *Daily Mail*, who generously gave me shifts at the paper which I fitted around my studies (kind of).

I had found my people. We shared our hopes and dreams of getting a job at one of the 'nationals'. And our love of writing stories, and quite a few parties.

Many of those people, amongst them Brasenose alums, are still my dearest friends today.

And, indeed, I went on to become a journalist, reprising my role as Women's Editor in the late 90s, this time at *The Mirror*, and going on to be a senior exec at several of those nationals.

When I went back to College for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations this September it was wonderful to stand in the quad sharing memories with so many fascinating women and men, from every decade.

There were just 28 women in that first pioneering year. **Liz Padmore (née Woolley)**, who studied PPE and Jurisprudence and is now Chair of the Red Cross, was in that first cohort of 1974 women.



Liz Padmore: Now and at matriculation  
(Photos: Rob Pinney/British Red Cross [left]; Gillman & Soame\* [right])

She describes how comfortable and accepted she felt.

And that wasn't just because the College – in its wisdom – decided the first female undergrads needed full-length mirrors, bathrooms on their staircase (so they didn't have to walk across the Quad), floral bedspreads and soft lavatory paper.

She recalls: "Most of the male undergraduates were very warm and welcoming. There was a minority who didn't think going co-ed was the right thing at all. Some were concerned it might affect the atmosphere in College."

"But certainly, the guys who read PPE in the year above us looked out for us – this was the tradition then. Many of them are still my friends now, 50 years on. I believe our unique experience helped us form a deep bond."

She remembers how, after a traditional first night dinner, the second years took them to the 'men-only' bar at the King's Arms. When the bar manager said the women had to leave, their hosts said, 'They aren't women, they are Brasenose men.' They still had to leave.

In terms of their academic life, she feels they were treated equally, saying: "The College really took their stewardship duties seriously and wanted us to be successful and happy, the dons frequently checking we were ok."

"In fact, as someone who'd come from a girls' boarding school and who was more interested in the library than Lacrosse, I'd never felt so at home. I could be myself."

Ultimately, she believes 1974 were a 'very special year group', summing up her time at the College as: "A privilege...and the biggest privilege we got was the education, the fun, and being an equal part of the BNC family."

**Sarah Jackson** – a trailblazer for flexible working and maternity/paternity rights – arrived to study Classics and Modern Languages three years later, from 1977 to 1981.

"As a comprehensive school Scot, it was weird and strange to be in a place like this. But it was welcoming. In fact, I loved it before I came here," she says, explaining how she visited a friend at Brasenose the October before she applied. "I thought it was the most beautiful place I had ever seen. The sun was out – we have all seen those golden Oxford autumn days. It was irresistible."

One of Sarah's highlights was co-founding, in 1979, the College's second all-women dining society – with her friend Pippa Leslie-Jones.

\* This photograph has been reproduced by kind permission of Gillman & Soame photographers and can be ordered online at <https://www.gsimagebank.co.uk/bnc/>



Sarah Jackson: Now and at BNC  
(Photos: Working Families [left]; Richard Jackson [right])



It was called The Redgrave, named after the actress Vanessa, to signal how different they wanted it to be from a traditional Oxford dining society

"We had a summer drinks party in the grounds of Rhodes House," recalls Sarah. "Were we glamorous? We were glamorous. We were floating around in fantastic frocks, smoking San Moritz – white menthol cigarettes for those unfamiliar with 70s and 80s brands. The sun shone and everybody felt like we were going to rule the world."

The first all-women dining society had, in fact, started a couple of years before and been called The Somerset Society, after one of the College's female benefactors.

After the last big celebration for Oxford women – at the 40th anniversary – myself and my friend **Amanda Holland**, a PPE graduate (1988 to 1991) and lecturer at London Metropolitan University, founded the College's Women's 1974 Network.



Amanda Holland: Now and at BNC  
(Photos: Jane Johnson [left]; Emma Judge [right])



We wanted to capture and continue the mood of an inspiring day attended by so many brilliant women – lawyers (lots), writers, campaigners, parents and pioneers.

I wish I had known Amanda when I was at Oxford. For me she is the epitome of what it means to be a Brasenose woman. Brave,

intelligent, and fun. An academic who wears her knowledge lightly. A friend who has helped me navigate the sometimes-choppy waters of having two daughters as a solo parent.

For Amanda, Brasenose is also a place that has given her lifelong friends, in fact, most of her best friends.

Asked to define a Brasenose woman, she gives the most wonderful description: "Obviously everyone's smart, but I think it's that there's a liveliness and an interest. I notice lots of Brasenose women's eyes sparkle when they are talking."

At the celebration in September, I met English undergraduate Chloe Smith, who is in her final year.

She and her friend Imogen Edmundson have resurrected the College arts magazine *NoseDive* and were kindly inviting alumni to contribute to the next edition.

I was keen to know how things have changed in the 37 years since I arrived at Brasenose.

In their English year women outnumber men by 5 to 1, and she is glad there is a male tutor to help even out the gender balance a bit.

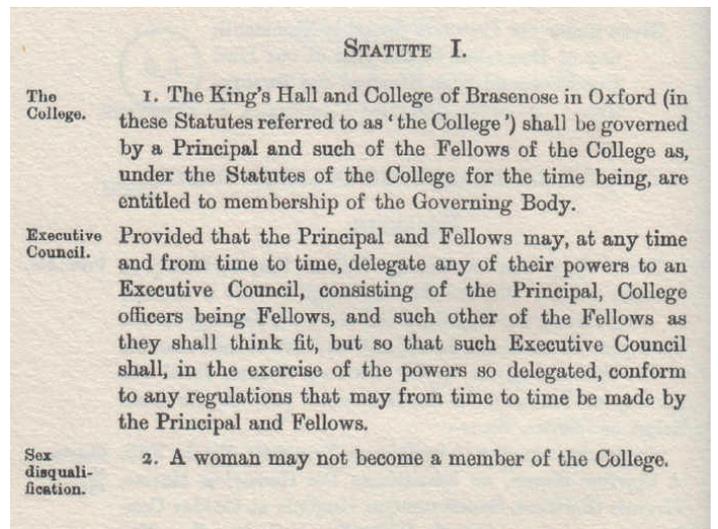


Chloe Smith: Current student

But, most wonderfully of all, she says: "I don't feel very conscious of being a woman" and "certainly my BNC-ness isn't changed by my woman-ness."

And really, that's just great, isn't it?

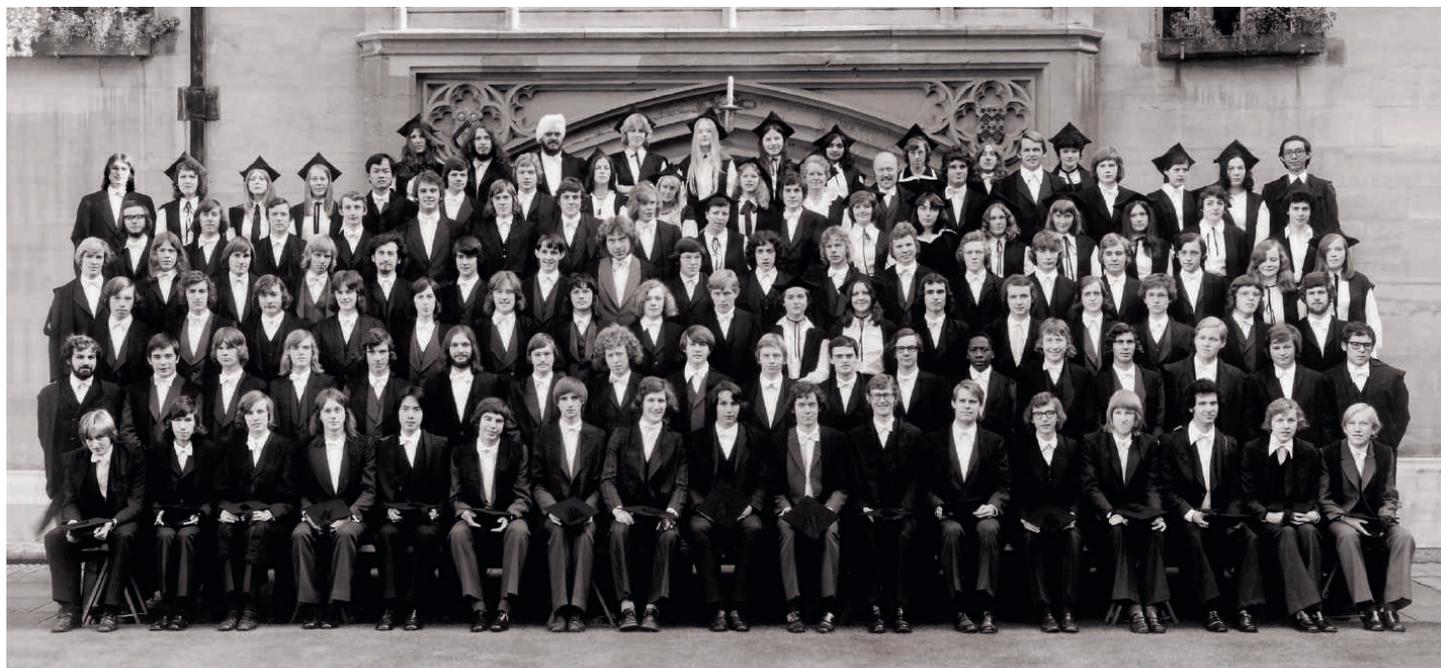
On this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary (yes only 50, but that's another story), that's pretty much the best anniversary gift Brasenose women, past and present, could wish for.



The College Statute with sex disqualification clause prior to 1974

# Degrees of Change

As we celebrate 50 Years of Women at Brasenose, **Emeritus Fellow Professor Graham Richards (Chemistry, 1958)**, who was a Fellow in Chemistry in 1974, introduces the story behind *The Admission Of Women* in an article he originally published in *The Brazen Nose*.



J. Mole C. Chablo P.S. Sahni R.M.S. Merfield S. Rayner A.D. Piantkiwskyj R. Shah D. Toft J.P. Evans J. Reid-Kay  
 A. Kenber R. Arnold A.J. Kelly N. Thorpe D. Koh S. Baudouin A.M.F. Todd R. Beddington C. Collier A. Whittaker M.B. Goodchild M.E. Taylor J.R. Monroe C.J. Craig A.J.P. Borrell E.G. Walkington S. Mahon G.S.K. Yu  
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 J.T. Spendlove N.P. Johnson P. Russell P.K. Newland P. Heywood A.S. Grant G. Churchhouse P. Hall C. Peters C.R. Coughlin D.J. Hertzell D.J. James D.C. Jeary J.E. Flynn R. Fentiman S. Fisch E. Tynan S.J. Raymond  
 J.R. Crosby S.J. White-Thompson H.R.S. Crawford P.E. Yea P. Massey D. Wallace J.A. Herbertson P.A. Lewis F.B. Ley S. Woodward E. Gallagher M.J. Kerry R. Peel D.C. Pusinelli S. Moriarty R.H. Rosa S. Dismore  
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 N.B. Brims C. Boardman C.G.L. Hall G.J. May K. Liu C. Fitzgibbon N. Broad P.A.B. Jackson A. Tyler T.J. Pashley C.P. Wood W.S. Rasmussen G. Bothamley G.D. Blower K.J. Landsman P.C. Walton G.D. Garlick



Brasenose College Freshers 1974



Gillman & Soame

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## PREFACE

The 50th anniversary of Brasenose accepting women has to be a real source of pride for the College. As the article reproduced below makes clear, we were by a wide margin the first College in Oxford or Cambridge to achieve the required two-thirds majority of the Governing Body in 1967, but were stopped by the Women's Colleges. When the issue arose again, having the required majority already enabled us to push for the actual change involving five Colleges which made the admissions process viable and not preventable by the then Women's Colleges who agreed to a trial five-year trial period.

By every standard the 'experiment' was a huge success at the undergraduate and graduate student level with no downside or problem. Not surprisingly at the next opportunity almost all the Colleges followed our lead.

It is however worth appreciating the wider picture. Why were the Women's Colleges so opposed? They were quite open that the reason was that they feared that the Colleges going mixed would damage the prospects of academic posts for women. Indeed this proved to be true in the short term and it took years for the male / female ratio to

become more balanced. This is not surprising since although a whole cohort of undergraduates are selected in one year, academic posts only become open when someone leaves or retires.

Has the balance been completely achieved? Probably not quite for academic posts. The higher up the scale one goes the longer it takes to achieve parity, but we are nearly there (after 50 years!). If we take my own subject, Chemistry, two of the three superstars in the Department are now women.

Colleges going mixed was inevitable, but it would have taken much longer without Brasenose taking the lead.

Prof Graham Richards CBE FRS  
 August 2024

## THE ADMISSION OF WOMEN

*By Graham Richards, originally published in The Brazen Nose 1994*

It is now 20 years since the first women were admitted to Brasenose. With hindsight, as might have been expected, one finds it hard to understand what all the fuss was about. It is however worth recording,

while the players are still *compos mentis*, how this came about and the fact that Brasenose played a pacemaking role in the process.

The beginning of the story was in 1967. The College, under Noel Hall, was considering how to redevelop the Frewin Hall site. One young Fellow disturbed the considerations by suggesting that any reconstruction ought to take cognisance of the fact that the accommodation provided should be equally suitable for male or female undergraduates. The topic was in the air since New College had been considering a move towards coeducation but had been rebuked by Lord Franks in 1965 and had anyway failed to secure the required two-thirds majority to change its statutes. Making rooms and ablutions suitable for women forced the College to consider admitting women.

So hot a topic did this seem to be that secrecy was demanded and the committee which was set up went under the title of "Membership of the College". Firstly the College officers produced factual reports about the consequences of admitting women. John Barltrop as Bursar provided a very detailed analysis and concluded that "there are no serious difficulties in providing accommodation suitable for accommodation by women undergraduates and the costs of making such provision will be small so long as a sufficient number of women are admitted fully to occupy the rooms provided."

David Stockton, then Tutor for Admissions, provided strong encouragement using figures from UCCA. In 1965-6 Oxford and Cambridge had 9492 male applicants of whom 47% were accepted and 2442 women with an acceptance rate of only 28%. With the help of a sympathetic Somerville don, he also enabled us to mark the scripts of their rejected entrance candidates. Brasenose tutors were convinced that well-qualified women were missing out.

After a series of quite cunningly worded motions and votes, before the end of 1967 the College had more than two-thirds of the Governing Body prepared to vote to change our statutes. Now came the major step. Such a change could only happen with the agreement of the then five all-women colleges. They could oppose our statute change and, more practically, any admission of women required their cooperation in the entrance examinations. No schoolgirl would apply if not also considered by the women's colleges. The Principal had to write to the heads of the five colleges inviting them to meet our committee for a discussion. In reply some Principals expressed the view that they could not come to such a meeting or be represented without consulting their Governing Bodies, which would take time. The difficulty about prior consultation was overcome by the Principal of LMH, Dame Lucy Sutherland, who invited her four colleagues and the Brasenose committee to dinner.

From the outset of the discussion it was made plain that the women's colleges would strongly resist any change in our statutes. Their main argument was that of 'unripe time'. However, they also made the point that a main purpose of women's colleges was to create posts for academic women. They seemed less interested in women students. It was clear that we could make no immediate headway, but the promise was extracted that were the issue to arise again, and clearly it would, then Brasenose should be among the first to be allowed to make the change to coeducation or, as the women preferred to describe it, to 'coresidence', as Oxford University was already coeducational.

The issue did arise again in 1970, provoked by The Queen's College. In their Governing Body a majority voted in favour of admitting

women, but not a large enough majority for them to institute a change of statutes. They did, however, by a simple majority, instruct their Provost, Lord Blake, to invite all colleges who wished to take part to an exploratory meeting. Sixteen colleges were represented with, at that stage, some eight colleges prepared to look further into the question. The Brasenose Governing Body voted 19 to 3 in favour of proceeding, so with a comfortable two-thirds majority we were able to force the pace.

Provost Blake was keen to avoid chairing the group as his College could not muster enough votes to go forward so the remaining interested parties met first under the Warden of Wadham, Stuart Hampshire, who was strongly in favour, along with St Catherine's.

Brasenose was able to lead what were becoming lengthy discussions of details by getting agreement that only those colleges who could get the required two-thirds majority by a set date should be allowed to continue in the discussions: a necessary step since some colleges had strong supporters of change who attended the meetings but no hope of making the change. By the set date only Brasenose and St Catherine's had passed by the requisite majority amendments to their statutes, Wadham and New College staying in on grounds of their intention to vote. Jesus remained in the game since their Principal, John Habakkuk, was now chairing the group and Hertford said that they could not vote, being without a Principal at the time, and hence remained in contact. To the mild irritation of BNC the group of six colleges who were to go forward became known as the 'Jesus Group' by virtue of its chairmanship.

A group of five colleges (Brasenose, Hertford, Jesus, St Catherine's and Wadham) all had voted to change their statutes to admit women undergraduates by the end of 1971 and some others to open their fellowships or graduate common rooms. The Jesus group then had to negotiate with the University and with the women's colleges. A working party was set up, and a wide public debate ensued.

In the Oxford Magazine, David Stockton quoted the immortal Cornford: "There is only one argument for doing something: the rest are arguments for doing nothing. The argument for doing something is that it is the right thing to do". Mary Warnock opposed the admission of women in the same issue, saying that it would do harm to the cause of women.

At the crucial final debate in Congregation, perhaps the most telling speech came from the Principal of St Hugh's, Kathleen Kenyon, supporting a motion to permit the five men's colleges to admit women, so long as it was only five colleges and for a five-year trial, after which there would be a review. She placed great emphasis on the fact that after five years the 'floodgates should not open' and hoped that no men's college would be ungentlemanly enough to go forward ruthlessly over the collective dead bodies of the women's colleges. Alas she was wrong, as after the five-year period virtually all the colleges admitted women and were unwilling to accept any restriction. However, for five years Brasenose was one of the five mixed colleges with the percentage of women undergraduates reaching 50%. Perhaps surprisingly for a college not renowned for radicalism, Brasenose led the way to one of the major changes in the University during this century.

*This article was first published in The Brazen Nose 1994, Vol. 28.*

# Milestone achievements by BNC women

Brasenose Alumni Society Committee members **Drusilla Gabbott (English, 1982)** and **Sarah Jackson OBE (Classics, 1977)** have scoured back issues of The Brazen Nose to identify what appear to be 'firsts' achieved by the women of Brasenose. As the Nose is an incomplete record, we invite you to get in touch to let us know of any earlier 'firsts' that should be included. This page shows just a small selection of the firsts; a more complete list will be available on the BNC website.

Mary Stokes



**First elected female Fellow (1976):**

Mary Stokes.

**First female JCR President (1982-83):**

Lucinda Riches.

**First BNC woman Visiting Fellow (1976-77):**

Susan Treggiari.

**First HCR women (1975):**

6 joined the HCR, a year after undergraduates.

**First female HCR President (in the College record) (1989):**

Miss C E Martin.

**First BNC woman to get a first-class undergraduate degree (1976):**

Rosa Beddington.



**First BNC women's first eight to win Blades (1985):**

Bow S. E. Holman, 2. K. Sparks, 3. J. S. Smith, 4. K. L. Cross, 5. C. L. Richens, 6. S. Williamson, 7. A. J. Bailes, Stroke C. L. Taylor, Cox. S. Shekleton.

**First Brasenose Secretary of OUWBC (1984):** Claire Richens (O'Neill) – also the first BNC woman MP and Govt minister.



Claire O'Neill

**First woman cox of the BNC boat (men's first Eight) (1975):** Jane Reid-Kay.

**First woman to Cox both University Blues Boats (1993):** Samantha Benham.

**First Brasenose president of OUWBC (1989):** Andrea Hadfield.



**First women's Blues and Half Blues**

**Swimming (1975-76):** Miss K Child.

**Badminton (1977-78):** H V Russell.

**Tennis (1978-79):** Miss H Russell, Miss D Williams.

**Netball (1978-79):** Miss L.D. Kingston

**Hockey (1978-79):** Miss V A Seitz.

**Fencing (1978-79):** Miss J. Alexander.

**First ever Women's team to get a Cuppers victory and supper (1977-78):** Women's Tennis team.



**First recorded all-Women's Dining Society (1977):** The Somerset.

**First woman Bible Clerk (1980):** Sue Matthews.

**First woman Organ Scholar (1998):** Catherine Brindley.

**First woman Honorary Fellow (2003):** Dame Julie Mellor.

**First woman Dean (1987):** Mary Stokes.

**Longest serving woman Fellow at BNC (since 1994):** Dr Anne Edwards.

**First woman Lodge Porter (1998)**

**First woman President of the Brasenose Alumni Society (1995 & 2007-8):** Alexandra Marks.



Dr Anne Edwards.

*These are just a selection of the many 'firsts' recorded in The Brazen Nose; a more complete list will be available on the BNC website. We warmly invite alumni to contribute any suggested amendments, as the official record may omit some achievements.*

# 1509-1974: The Women Who Shaped Brasenose

Women have long had important associations with Brasenose, in spite of the fact that they were not admitted as students until 1974. Here we look at some noteworthy examples, sought out by Brasenose alumna and Research Assistant **E. Howes**.

## Women as College Benefactors

A number of women held prominent roles as founders and benefactors of colleges in Oxford. In the case of Brasenose, women provided some of the College's most important early benefactions. Joyce Frankland, for example, became a generous benefactor of Brasenose in the 16th century. This came about in 1581 when Frankland tragically lost her only son in a riding accident. The Brasenose Principal of the time, Alexander Nowell, was an acquaintance of hers and went to express his sympathy. Responding to her inconsolable weeping, Nowell said: 'Comfort yourself, good Mrs Frankland, and I will tell you how you shall have 20 good sons to comfort you in these your sorrows which you take for this one son.' Nowell went on to explain that, if Frankland created fellowships and scholarships to support poor students at university, her memory would be honoured 'for ever and ever' by the scholars helped by her benefaction. Frankland must have decided Nowell had a point, as Brasenose received a considerable donation from her when she passed away in 1586. She left two portraits of herself to Brasenose, one of which hangs in the Hall. In this painting Frankland is holding a watch – she is said to have been the first woman in England to wear one.

In the seventeenth century, a prominent benefactor of Brasenose was Sarah Seymour, Duchess of Somerset, whose portrait also hangs in Hall. Her first husband had studied at Brasenose, and possibly due to this she decided to leave a benefaction to fund 'Somerset Scholars' at the College. At one time, every Somerset Scholar was expected to buy a print of a portrait of the Duchess. In fact, we know of a box of 150 prints of her portrait being delivered to Mr Smith, the Brasenose butler, in 1751.

## Women as Social Reformers

Elizabeth Gilbert (1826-1885) was the daughter of Ashurst Gilbert, Principal of Brasenose College in the early 19th Century. She grew up within the Brasenose Principal's Lodgings (then a grand house on High Street) along with her seven sisters and three brothers. When a child, Elizabeth became blind due to illness. Her parents, however, determined to allow her the same opportunities as her sighted sisters. Elizabeth's strong character comes out in an anecdote from her childhood. One of Elizabeth's early pleasures was ringing the bell on the front door of the Principal's Lodgings after her daily walk. On one occasion, an undergraduate, intending to be helpful, rang the

bell for her, whereupon she stamped her foot and complained: 'Why did you do it? You knew I wanted to ring.' While Elizabeth spent much of her time within the Principal's Lodgings, during the Long Vacation she and her siblings would play on the grass in Old Quad, especially hide-and-seek around an imposing statue that stood there until 1881. The children would also sometimes dine in the College Hall during vacation, where they would chat with the College fellows.

Elizabeth went on to become a trail-blazing advocate for people with impaired vision. In 1854 she and William Hanks Levy founded the Association for Promoting the General Welfare of the Blind, which ran an innovative educational programme for men, and later women as well, with visual impairments. She also became involved in the creation and work of the Royal Normal College for the Blind (now known as the Royal National College for the Blind).

Another woman reformer who frequented Brasenose in the nineteenth century was Mary Augusta Ward (1851-1920). Her BNC connection is through her husband, Thomas Humphry Ward, who matriculated at Brasenose and then went on to become a BNC fellow and tutor. Mary Ward had lived in Oxford before marrying, and had become an expert in Spanish history through her studies in the Bodleian library. She went on to become a highly successful novelist, publishing under the name of Mrs Humphry Ward. She was also very committed to social causes. She helped to found the Association for Promoting the Higher Education of Women, which called upon the University to admit women. Another member of this Association was Clara Pater (c.1841-1910), sister of the famous essayist and tutor at Brasenose, Walter Pater. Both Clara and Mary were involved in the creation of Somerville College (then Hall). Paradoxically, given her support for women's education, Ward was against the enfranchisement

of women. This stance alienated her from many of her peers. In 1919, Mary Ward was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her work as a war journalist during World War I. She died the following year, 1920, which was also the year that women were admitted to degrees at Oxford for the first time. It would be over half a century more, however, before women would finally be able to study at her husband's college, Brasenose.

Find out more about other notable women at Brasenose at <https://www.bnc.ox.ac.uk/about-brasenose/history/214-college-life/422-brasenose-women>



Joyce Frankland



Principal's daughter Elizabeth Gilbert

# What Does It Take To Skin A Robot?

Brasenose Tutorial Fellow **Professor Perla Maiolino** is an Associate Professor at the Department of Engineering Science, and a member of the Oxford Robotics Institute, where her research is focused on providing robots with a sense of touch.



During her PhD at the University of Genoa, Professor Perla Maiolino carried out research on the development and integration of distributed tactile sensors for robots, developing new solutions for artificial robot skin (CySkin), which was shown at the *Robots Exhibition* at the Science Museum in London.

In the 2023 Royal Society Christmas Lectures on the subject of AI, Perla demonstrated a robotic arm equipped with a 'soft hand' which can shake hands with someone – the integrated tactile sensors provide it with a sense of touch, and enable the arm to adjust the way it responds to a human interaction.

According to her colleagues, 'Perla is very dedicated to the pastoral and academic support of the researchers in her group. She ensures that no student is left behind.' Her caring and approachable manner 'fosters a warm and open atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable expressing their thoughts.' And as one nominator explains: 'Prof. Perla Maiolino is a supervisor of unparalleled dedication, knowledge, and compassion, who has consistently demonstrated quality supervision.'

Some of her latest research is intended to help occupational therapists to train themselves, using robots that can mimic particular patient profiles. This enables them to respond to interactions with the trainee therapists, and express when they are affected by 'pain' (by sound and / or on a display screen) – without requiring a human to be subjected to unnecessary discomfort.

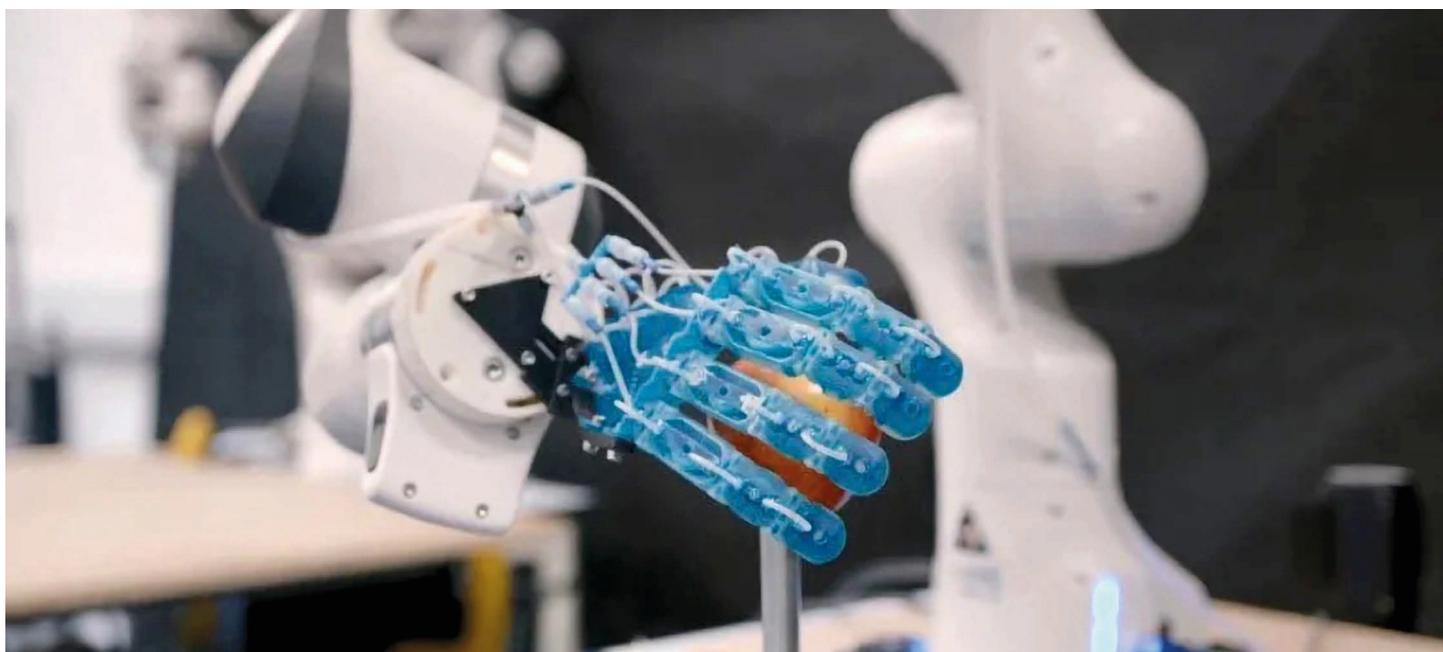
Perla was a winner of the 2023/24 MPLS Awards for Outstanding Research Supervision – these awards are designed to celebrate staff and academics who excel in their everyday supervision of research colleagues and their professional commitment to people development.



'Mona' the robot used by occupational therapists for training.  
(Photo: Perla Maiolino)

Find out more about Perla's work at the Oxford Robotics Institute here: <https://ori.ox.ac.uk/people/perla-maiolino/>

A robotic arm featuring a 'soft hand' (Photo: Oxford Robotics Institute)

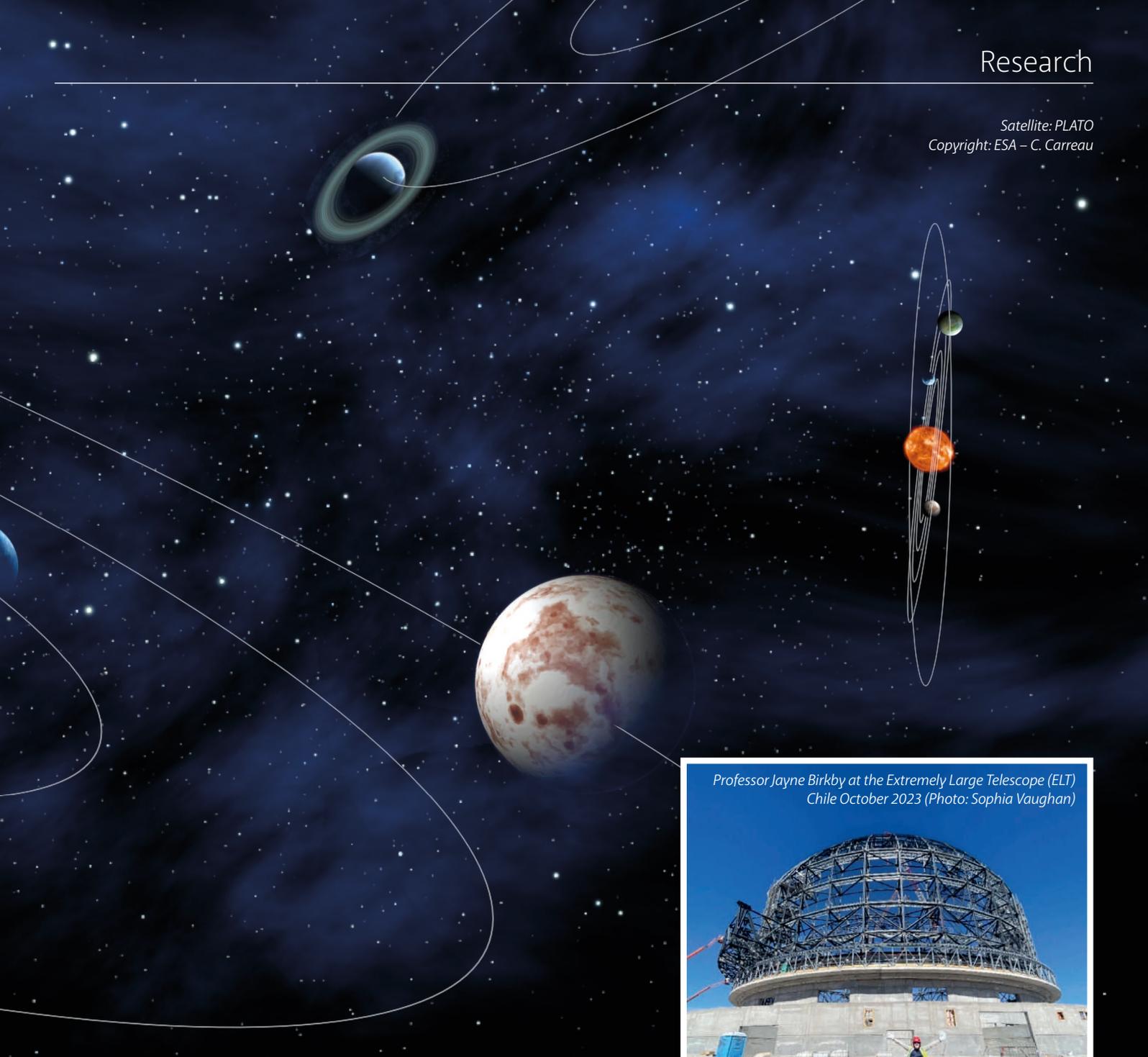


# Exploring Worlds Beyond the Solar System

Brasenose Tutorial Fellow in Physics, **Professor Jayne Birkby** explores strange new worlds in the depths of space, using some of the largest telescopes on the planet.

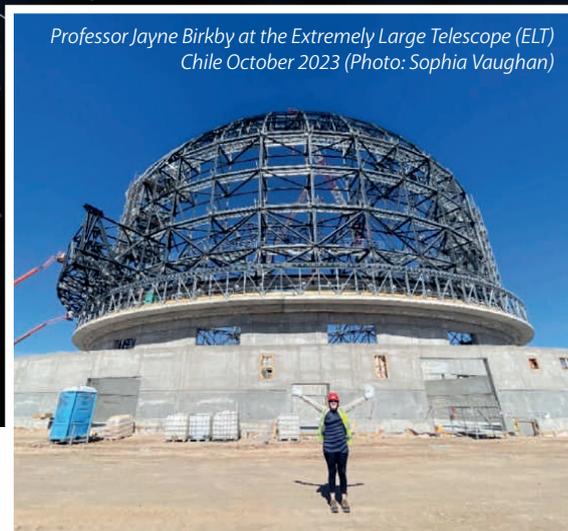
The ongoing search for a second Earth has revealed an astounding diversity in planets orbiting other stars. This eclectic zoo of other worlds shows little similarity with our own solar system. From its roasted gas giants to its rocky lava worlds awash with magma oceans, the exoplanet zoo points to a vast wilderness of outcomes from the same planet formation process that also led to the emergence of life on Earth. My research looks to these extreme worlds to better understand our place among the cosmos, to know the prevalence of habitable worlds throughout our galaxy, and to study how the atmospheres of this rich plethora of worlds evolve and diverge. Ultimately, I seek the detection of biosignatures, the telltale combination of molecules (e.g. oxygen, methane, water, and carbon dioxide) that could signal life on the nearest rocky exoplanets. The end of this decade will see first light with the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT), a 39-m class ground-based observatory that for the first time in human history will have the technological power to detect such biosignatures on nearby exoplanets. My research career to date has forged a path to enable this game-changing discovery.

In 2013, I helped pioneer the high resolution spectroscopy (HRS) cross-correlation technique for exoplanets by making the first unambiguous detection of water in the atmosphere of a planet outside our solar system (Birkby et al. 2013). This success with ground-based 8-m class telescopes was a great leap forward for exoplanet research, signifying that the ELT will allow us to finally search for biosignatures and signs of habitability in the nearest rocky worlds. It may be our only avenue in the near future to do this, with suitable direct imaging space missions still decades away. The success of HRS opened a floodgate to entire new areas of exoplanetary science. I helped show that by combining HRS with high contrast imaging (HCI), we unlock a new fundamental observable, planetary spin rate, by measuring the length of an exoplanet day, highlighting how planets gain angular momentum as they accrete from their protoplanetary disks. Furthermore, I helped demonstrate that HRS can measure high altitude winds in exoplanet atmospheres, blowing at ~ 4,500 mph, as well as their 3D nature, probing the extremes of planetary climate physics. I published the first graduate-



level textbook chapter on HRS, solidifying it as a key observational tool for exoplanets. I now use HRS for exoplanet archaeology, connecting their present-day atmospheres to their formation in protoplanetary disks to reveal the physical mechanisms that drive the extreme diversity of the exoplanet population and Earth's place among it. My team is leading the demonstration of using HRS in reflected light as the only way to reveal the key oxygen biosignature at visible wavelengths for the nearest rocky exoplanets. This work has rapidly accelerated the timeline for determining the habitability of the nearest rocky exoplanets by driving key instrument design for the ELTs to ensure they are biosignature-enabled.

Alongside searching for biosignatures in the very nearest rocky exoplanet, Proxima b, my team and I are also working towards using HRS to make maps of gas giant exoplanet atmospheres, and search for their transiting exomoons for the first time. We are also investigating the outgassed atmospheres of lava worlds, reminiscent of the very early hot Earth, to understand their interior compositions and how their atmospheres cycle materials around the planet.



Professor Jayne Birkby at the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT)  
Chile October 2023 (Photo: Sophia Vaughan)

Oxford's departments in Astrophysics, as well as Atmospheric, Oceanic, and Planetary Physics, and Earth Sciences constitute the ideal environment for these studies to flourish as we work towards an integrated planetary science centre that seeks to understand the diversity of rocky exoplanets, understand the origins of life on Earth, and ultimately the prevalence of life throughout our galaxy.

The study of exoplanets itself is a young and rapidly advancing field in which the UK exoplanet community is a thriving success. Its discoveries are driven by the talent and hard work of many early career researchers, and I am especially thankful to my students, my team, and collaborators throughout the world, without whom none of this would have been possible. I am so thankful to be on this incredible adventure with them, knowing that there is so much more discovery ahead of us. It is a privilege and a joy to be able to explore these strange new worlds every day.

# Norman to Net Zero

Brasenose is ushering in a new era with the remarkable redevelopment of Frewin Hall, a project that is as bold as it is reverent of history. This transformative undertaking is reimagining the historic space, creating a sophisticated modern facility which will encourage the sharing of ideas by providing elegant community living. Leading this project is an architect **Tim Lee (Modern History, 1990)**, whose innovative approach marries cutting-edge sustainability with a meticulous restoration of the Hall's original character. In this interview with Tim and **Kris Sadler**, the Domestic Bursar, we delve into this ambitious project that is shaping the future of the College.

Frewin Hall boasts a rich and storied past. Its undercroft, dating back to the 11th century during the Norman period, whispers of centuries gone by. In the 15th century, it was part of the now 'lost' St Mary's College, where Erasmus of Rotterdam once stayed, perhaps drawing inspiration for his celebrated work, *Adagia*. It then housed a series of the Regius Professors and other significant Oxford characters. Since the 1940s, Frewin has housed generations of Brasenose students, though over the years it has endured the effects of unsympathetic modernisation. Now, it stands on the cusp of a sensitive and forward-thinking transformation.

**Could you explain the strategy for transforming Frewin Hall into a sustainable building while maintaining its historic character?**

**Tim Lee:** Achieving a sustainable building fabric requires a holistic approach, as the effectiveness of individual interventions depends

on others. The goal for Frewin Hall is to become net-zero compliant when the national grid reaches carbon neutrality, while significantly reducing carbon usage in the meantime. This involves more than simply replacing gas with electricity, as a like-for-like swap would increase demand and hinder national decarbonisation efforts. The focus must instead be on reducing overall energy consumption.

The building's heating and hot water systems are being transitioned to ground source heat pumps, which are 400-600% efficient. However, limits on heat transfer from the ground require reducing building loads through insulation, air-tightness measures, and heat recovery ventilation. These interventions must blend with the historic fabric, being discreet, sensitive, and reversible.

Balancing environmental goals with heritage preservation is crucial for Frewin Hall, but with careful design, significant environmental

Architect Tim Lee (right) and Domestic Bursar Kristian Sadler (left) discuss how the Frewin Hall project preserves historic wood panelling while applying the AECB Retrofit Standard for energy efficiency. (Photo: Begina Cox)





*Frewin Hall is a central element of the larger Annexe master plan, which focuses on restoring and enhancing the surrounding courts and gardens. (Visuals: Lee/Fitzgerald Architects)*

improvements can be made without compromising its historic integrity.

**What is the significance of applying the Association for Environment Conscious Building (AECB) Retrofit Standard to the Frewin Hall redevelopment, and how does it address the challenges of working with historic structures?**

**TL:** The AECB Retrofit Standard, developed by the UK's Association for Environment Conscious Building, sets clear, realistic, and cost-effective targets for improving energy efficiency in buildings while maintaining comfort, health, and safety. Its aim is to reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption, promoting the shift toward low-energy homes.

The Frewin Hall project is a pioneering test case for applying these standards to historic, listed structures. It follows Passivhaus principles, particularly the EnerPHit standard for high energy efficiency. While the building nearly meets the AECB standard, some historic features, especially parts of the 16th-century ground floor, couldn't be fully upgraded without risking damage. Despite these limitations, the project will still significantly reduce energy use.

The standard requires meticulous work, with historic elements like wood panelling and stone floors carefully removed and reinstalled. The team works with environmental experts, archaeologists, and historians to ensure that upgrades respect the building's natural ability to "breathe" and maintain its structural integrity over time. This approach contrasts with Frewin Hall's 1970s modernization. Advances in understanding historic buildings and better assessment tools allow the team to be more sensitive to its original design, with much of the work now focused on undoing previous alterations.

**The Frewin Hall redevelopment is part of a wider approach to redesign the entire Frewin Annexe. Were any measures taken to enhance or protect local wildlife or plant life and positively impact local biodiversity?**

**TL:** Frewin Hall is a central element of the larger Annexe master plan, which focuses on restoring and enhancing the surrounding courts and gardens. Although the Annexe's size limits full-scale rewilding, biodiversity remains a core priority, with efforts spanning from large to small scale. A key goal is to increase tree canopy cover by over 30% through careful tree selection, a process initiated during new construction and continuing with the current project.

Hard surfaces are being converted back into gardens, and features like swift boxes and bee hotels are incorporated into new structures. New planting areas are introduced, with species selected to provide year-round variety for both visual appeal and biodiversity. These

efforts have already led to a noticeable rise in insect and bird populations within the Annexe.

**How does the sustainable redevelopment of Frewin Hall fit into the long-term vision for the College's infrastructure and its role in fostering a greener future?**

**Kristian Sadler:** The redevelopment of Frewin is a key component of the College's long-term vision, serving as a test case for pushing the limits of sustainable upgrades. It provides critical data to inform an assessment of the entire College estate and contributes to the broader estate strategy, including the College's roadmap to net zero. The refurbishment of Frewin Hall is yielding valuable insights into managing other historic buildings, helping to shape a realistic and financially viable future strategy. Additionally, the project is building important relationships with statutory bodies, whose support will be essential for the successful decarbonisation of the estate.

**How does Brasenose define the relationship between sustainability and its educational mission, and what specific impacts do you hope to achieve through this project for both the College and the wider community?**

**KS:** Brasenose College benefits from diligent budget management and a dedicated network of alumni and volunteers, whose contributions are essential to our success. Our aim for this project is to be for our community, supported by our community and friends; to remain competitive in the rapidly changing global higher education landscape, we depend on fundraising.

Implementing advanced sustainability measures is not merely about compliance or cost, but an investment in our planet's future. Sustainable infrastructure, like energy-efficient buildings and waste reduction, can lower long-term costs while reducing our carbon footprint. Sustainable practices in education address environmental concerns and set a precedent for future generations.

Supporting this project creates meaningful change within the College and beyond. By prioritising sustainability, we foster a culture of environmental stewardship that resonates with our international community of researchers and students. This approach integrates the preservation of historic spaces with modern amenities, creating an educational environment that values heritage while embracing innovation, and preparing students to become leaders equipped to tackle global challenges and inspire others to act sustainably.

**If you're interested in learning more about how you can make a difference, please reach out to the Development Team at [development.office@bnc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:development.office@bnc.ox.ac.uk).**

# The Power of Conversation

## Brasenose Telethon 2025

As preparations for our 2025 telephone fundraising campaign begin, we spoke to recent BNC graduate and three-time Telethon caller, **Joel Bassett (History, 2021)** about this annual fundraising campaign. Read on to find out what to expect when you receive a call, how just one conversation can have a lasting impact at BNC, and why Joel chose to come back three years in a row...

The Telethon is Brasenose's annual telephone fundraising campaign which aims to update as many former students as possible about what's been going on at the College, and to raise donations to help sustain the teaching, learning, and overall student experience at Brasenose. As a caller, and current student at BNC, our job is to help you understand what life at Brasenose is like today, and to build interest in current events and projects.

### **Can you tell us why you applied to be a Telethon caller in the first place?**

It felt like a really good way to give something back to the College. I think all of us owe so much to the opportunities we were offered at Brasenose, and taking part in raising money to allow future students to have the same experience I did at BNC was incredibly satisfying. I got paid to chat to some really interesting people, and helped those I spoke to understand more about the difference they can make.

### **Talk us through a typical Telethon call – what can someone expect when they pick up the phone?**

Callers are assigned to alumni based on their subjects and any known shared interests, so the student caller will start a conversation with you about your time at College, what you've been up to since leaving, and there's the opportunity to hear about student life as experienced today. The caller will take the opportunity to see if you might be interested in supporting student life at Brasenose financially, with an affordable monthly direct debit.

### **Any Telethon myths you would like to bust, or common misconceptions you have come across?**

The Telethon is about maintaining a connection between Brasenose and its former students, as well as raising funds. The College hopes that alumni stay involved and interested in Brasenose life, and as

*"What makes giving during the Telethon so special is that you are able to talk to someone who will directly benefit from your donation"*



*"It is incredibly important that we do what we can to give a little back to the place that, for many of us, transformed our lives completely."*

a caller my focus was always on having a good chat and building a good relationship with the alumni I got to speak to.

### **What did you enjoy the most about being part of the Telethon, what kept you coming back?**

I was able to speak to some people who had also read History who have gone on to take part in groundbreaking historical research in areas I am interested in. One alumnus that I really connected with also offered me a summer internship, which I was incredibly grateful for. Overall though, what kept me coming back every year were the relationships I was able to form with fascinating people, some of whom I'm still in touch

with. I think the Telethon was also really useful in that it helped me build confidence in approaching people I didn't know, and with networking. I also received some excellent career and life advice from some highly inspirational people, which I feel has helped me navigate life after university.

### **Why do you think alumni should give to Brasenose? What do you think is unique about making a gift during the Telethon?**

I think it is incredibly important that we do what we can to give a little back to the place that, for many of us, transformed our lives completely. What makes giving during the Telethon so special is that you are able to talk to someone who will *directly* benefit from your donation. The College truly does rely on your support to function day-to-day, and year-to-year, and any amount can make a deep and lasting impact. Without the generosity of alumni, Brasenose wouldn't be able to provide such a world-class, transformative educational, personal, and social experience to future generations of students.

### **Why should someone pick up the phone in 2025?**

Just go for it! It really is a great way to stay connected with Brasenose, to understand the challenges students face today, and to give back to your college.

Mark your calendars!

The 2025 Telethon will run from 22 March – 3 April 2025. Remember to look out for our call.



# Principal's Blog Highlights

To read Principal John Bowers KC's blog in full, please visit [www.bnc.ox.ac.uk/about-brasenose/princblog](http://www.bnc.ox.ac.uk/about-brasenose/princblog)

## Trinity 2024

### Frewin Hall's cultural reawakening

As many of you will already be aware, Frewin Hall, a building with deep historical roots dating back to the eleventh century is currently undergoing redevelopment, with a planned reopening in October 2025. Once integral to St Mary's College, Oxford's 'Lost' College, the Hall's cultural significance (including a notable connection to Erasmus) has not been matched by its current facilities, which are no longer adequate for the needs of modern students.

The revitalisation of Frewin Hall marks a significant milestone for Brasenose, transforming a historic structure into a state-of-the-art hub for academic and social engagement. This ambitious project highlights the College's strategic commitment to creating an advanced educational environment that benefits both students and the wider community. It will introduce modern areas that enhance the student experience, improve connectivity, and stimulate interdisciplinary collaboration, while respecting the unique heritage of the Grade II\* listed building.

The first phase, completed in 2023, involved constructing a new student accommodation building, while the final phase will modernise the Annexe buildings surrounding the main garden, aligning them with contemporary standards and accommodating Brasenose's expanding student body. This project, along with the others, is financed entirely by the College through careful budget management and strategic allocation, with ongoing support from our generous donors, whose contributions are essential to our success.

### Congratulations

I want to pay tribute to all involved in our late June Open Days. There was a massive turn out and our student ambassadors were amazing. This has translated into an excellent number of applications enabling our academics to have first pick of the best candidates.

## Michaelmas 2024

### The new organ

An organ is a truly wonderful instrument. With thanks to the tremendous generosity of Honorary Fellow, **Gerald Smith (Philosophy, 1984)** and Margo Smith, we now have a terrific new organ. This was inducted at a concert on Friday of Week 3 by Polina Sosnina our Director of Music. Polina was joined for one piece by Margo on violin. The event provided a wonderful opportunity to meet the Belgian craftsmen of Orgues De Facto who were behind the construction of the organ.

### Tim Mitchell

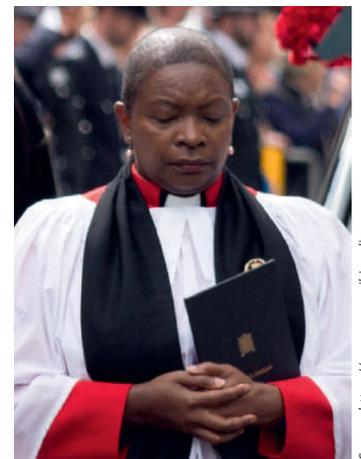
The first Principal's Conversation of the New Academic Year was with **Tim Mitchell (Physiological Sciences, 1983)**, President

of the Royal College of Surgeons. Tim trained in otolaryngology in Oxford, London, Cambridge and Sydney. He was appointed Vice President of the RCS in 2020 and President in 2023.

A packed audience heard him give a comprehensive talk about his career and his views on the health service, including the recent Darzi report on the future of the NHS. I found it an inspiring occasion not least because notwithstanding all the problems in the NHS, he clearly loved his profession and encouraged our students to go into it.

### Celebrating 50 years since the admission of women

On 3 November Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin, the Bishop of Dover, gave a sermon at the service to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first undergraduate women to be admitted to the College. She spoke on All Saints Day and weaved this into the sermon so as to relate the passage that all are called to be saints. It was a spirited sermon punctuated with laughter. We look forward to the launch of her book, *The Girl from Montego Bay*.



Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin  
(Photo: Katie Chan, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

Thanks to **Sara Jones (English, 1974)** for penning this account of the lunch to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the admission of women undergraduates which I could not attend as I was clearly not one of that select band:

"Among the many events being held to mark the arrival of women in college half a century ago was a lunch just for us, the originals on Saturday 26 October. Sadly in the end only 6 of us could attend. As well as me, Sara Jones, there were **Ros Arnold, Katy Child, Anne Edwards, Amanda Kelly** and **Nancy Thorpe**. We had a short wallow in nostalgia but spent most of the lunch catching up on our present lives, and, thanks to Anne being a fellow at the College, finding out about life at BNC 50 years on. Tempting though it might have been

to fall into the 'In our day you had to scrape the ice off the inside of your window / do two essays a week written by hand!' and so on, we were all actually more interested in hearing that now students not only have better living conditions but are also much better supported in both academic and pastoral ways than in 1974. We were very grateful to the College for hosting the lunch and look forward to the other events in the coming year".



Brasenose Chapel organ, 1 November 2024  
(Photo: JP Clough)

# Graduate Study At Brasenose

Graduate students are a hugely important part of academic and social life within the College Community, and currently make up over a third of the student body. Brasenose was one of the first colleges to set aside facilities specifically for graduates in the 1960s. **Shoba Laxmi (Inorganic Chemistry, 2022)** is one of our current graduate students and is also HCR President.

BNC's Hulme Common Room (HCR) eschews the 'MCR' moniker used by many other colleges, and is named after a 17th century benefactor who bequeathed property in Manchester to the College.

Our post-grad students study and research a wide range of subjects, including renewable energy, healthcare systems, climate change, mathematical modelling for transport and finances, dementia, and artificial intelligence.

Some of them are the fortunate recipients of full scholarships: funding awards which cover all tuition fees, and also provide a modest stipend for living expenses. Brasenose funds graduate scholarships currently totalling around £270,000 per annum, much from generous benefactions.

Shoba Laxmi is one of our full-funded graduate scholarship students. Here she explains how a generous donation to the College drastically changed the course of her life.



*I am a third-year PhD student in inorganic chemistry (bioinorganic chemistry to be specific) under the supervision of Prof Kylie A. Vincent & Dr Stephen B. Carr.*

*My PhD or as Oxford likes to say, DPhil, focuses on the intricate field of metalloenzymes with a specific emphasis on structure-function-activity studies of nitrogenases. A key facet of my current research involves employing an amalgamation of various spectroscopic techniques with electrochemistry and protein crystallography to comprehensively characterize the elusive redox intermediates in nitrogenases and related metalloproteins.*

*This multifaceted approach aligns with my passion to elucidate mechanisms of metalloenzymes and translate the fundamental knowledge obtained to develop bio-mimetic/biocatalytic systems for more sustainable catalytic processes with respect to oxidation and small molecule activation as well as energy production.*

*Due to the nature and demands of my research, I am based out of Oxford City Centre during the week. You will find me playing with my protein crystals at the Research Complex at Harwell and shooting X-Rays at them at Diamond Light Source, both situated in the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus at Didcot. Outside of my research commitments, I am the current HCR President for the academic year 24-25 and Chair for Oxford Women in Chemistry.*

*Some fun-facts about me; I am from Singapore, and obtained both my BSc and MSc in Chemistry at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. I have a growing collection of plants in my Hollybush Row room, am a big fan of Formula 1 (TeamLH), and I was US bound for my PhD until the very last moment when I was offered the Jeffrey Cheah Graduate Scholarship, which frankly changed my life forever.*

*It is quite the unusual tale. I had several fully-funded offers in the States, and just an academic offer from St. Peter's College in Oxford to do my*

*DPhil. After waiting as long as I possibly could, I regretfully turned down Oxford and decided to head to Johns Hopkins. I was about to depart for the US in three weeks, and had literally just signed the housing lease the day before I received an email from Oxford, stating I had been nominated for a fully-funded scholarship. Talk about a beautiful plot twist! It took me two weeks to finally make up my mind, as I was weighing the financial burden that I would incur by changing this late; I believe it was worth it.*

*I am ever so grateful for the Jeffrey Cheah Graduate Scholarship providing this unexpected opportunity to study at Oxford, and for fate to intervene and allow me to call Brasenose my second home. Through my time here at Brasenose, I have met numerous talented and amazing students, staff and Fellows alike from various backgrounds, a one-of-a-kind opportunity and experience that I will treasure forever.*

**If you are interested in supporting graduate study at Brasenose, please get in touch with the Alumni & Development Office by emailing: [donations@bnc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:donations@bnc.ox.ac.uk)**

## The Jeffrey Cheah Graduate Scholarship

Honorary Fellow Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Sir Jeffrey Cheah, AO has generously endowed the 'Oxford-Jeffrey Cheah Graduate Scholarship' at Brasenose for qualifying DPhil students. In order to meet the criteria, students must be ordinarily resident in an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) country, and studying a Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS) subject. The scholarship is financed in partnership with the University of Oxford.

# From A Conflict Zone To A College Home

**Dr Naemi Araya (International Health & Tropical Medicine, 2023)** was living in Sudan when she was accepted for a postgraduate course at Brasenose. Things seemed to be going well, but then civil war broke out and she suddenly found herself stranded in a conflict zone. What happened next?

I was always naturally curious and enjoyed learning, which helped me to do well at school, and I was fortunate to finish at the top in almost every grade. I completed my medical education and was later assigned to work at Dekemhare General Hospital, a placement outside the Eritrean capital city that provided invaluable experience. Studying at the University of Oxford has always been a dream of mine, though I often doubted whether I was good enough to be accepted. That changed when I learned that two other Eritreans had been admitted to Oxford. Their success inspired me, so I decided to go for it.

My journey to Oxford began in Sudan. I had been living there for just over a year when suddenly a military situation escalated. One night I had heard that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) had surrounded Khartoum; the next morning, the gunfire started. The onset of war was incredibly sudden, and no one saw it coming. The atmosphere quickly turned into one of panic. I watched as people rushed to their homes, seeking shelter from the violence. At first, many of us thought the conflict might die down, but we soon realised how mistaken we were.

By this time, I had already received my admission to Oxford and was waiting to hear about my scholarship. With my job and everything else I had being lost to the war, the possibility of studying at Oxford kept me going.

When the airstrikes got close and there was serious danger, I decided to leave Sudan. After waiting for the airstrikes to settle, civilians were allowed to leave Khartoum, but we had to pay to board the buses. Many people sold whatever they had to afford a ticket.

A month into the war, with the cost of food skyrocketing, the situation became dire. A kind Sudanese man, who owned a raksha (taxi), took it upon himself to get us to the buses safely. The bus ride to Gallabat took around 12 hours, with multiple stops at checkpoints controlled by the Sudanese army and RSF forces.

We finally arrived in Gallabat and went through Sudanese immigration the next morning; some people had to pay their last bit of cash just to cross the border. When we reached Ethiopia, at Metema, we saw UN tents; but they were all full, with a waiting list of at least two weeks. Those who could afford it were renting rooms. Fortunately, I had documents to apply for an entry visa, but even so I wasn't allowed in immediately – while people of most nationalities were granted entry with an on-arrival visa, Eritreans were an exception. I ended up waiting almost two months at the border.

The day after my arrival, I noticed an Emergency Medical Team tent just outside the Ethiopian Immigration Office. I introduced myself and asked if they needed help. They were glad to have extra hands on

board, especially since they didn't speak Arabic or Tigrinya. I began by translating, and gradually became more involved, eventually volunteering to see patients as well. The team were very welcoming, and I ended up making some good friends along the way.

Later on, I was introduced to the Samaritan's Purse aid organisation, where I provided psychological support to incoming refugees and handled cases of gender-based violence. After persistent inquiries at the immigration office, I was finally granted permission to enter Ethiopia.

I spent some time in Addis Ababa and then moved to Kampala, Uganda, as it was easier to apply for a UK visa from there. I also knew that if the scholarship didn't come through, I would have better job prospects in Uganda. Just before I arrived, I received the incredible news that I had been awarded the Oxford Refugee and

Brasenose Opportunity Scholarship. It was a dream come true, but I still faced challenges, as I didn't have the funds to cover my visa or plane tickets to the UK.

Fortunately, after discussing my situation with Brasenose, they graciously helped cover my travel expenses. I am deeply grateful to the College, and especially Dr. Felicity Shelley, who helped me navigate the many obstacles I faced on my journey from Uganda to the UK. Eventually, I made it to Oxford.

When I first arrived, it was a bit overwhelming, and it was both exciting and nerve-wracking to be surrounded by so many brilliant minds. However, the welcome events were warm and inviting, which helped me settle in quickly. The staff, from the office team to the porters and college advisors, were incredibly helpful and kind. The formals were memorable experiences, though the library became my favourite spot, especially during my thesis-writing days.

My long-term goal is to work with NGOs in Africa, particularly within the World Health Organization (WHO), but at the moment I am on an internship with the Pandemic Science Institute (PSI) in Oxford, where I hope to gain more experience in research.



## The Oxford Refugee and Brasenose Opportunity Scholarship / Academic Futures (Refugee)

This Brasenose scholarship combines with the University of Oxford's Refugee Academic Futures scheme to fully fund a 1 year MSc student.

Each scholarship covers the full course fees (University tuition fee and College fee), plus a stipend for living costs.

# Brazen News

Congratulations to **Baudelaire Welch (English Language & Literature, 2017)** who was one of the joint winners of both the Nebula and BAFTA award for video game writing this year, and was also nominated for the Hugo awards this summer.

**Dr David Roche (Music MSt, 2012)** composed an electric guitar concerto for Grammy-nominated guitarist Sean Shibe, which was premiered and toured by Sinfonia Cymru and Britten Sinfonia (who jointly commissioned the work). It was also recorded by BBC Radio 3 for broadcast in April 2024.

On 10 October 2024, a group of 1974 alumni got together for a reunion gathering, 50 years to the day since they came up to BNC in 1974. Thanks to **Peter Massey (Physics, 1974)** for the photos and updates.



Back row from left: Peter Massey (Physics), Colin Scoins (Eng. Sci.), Steve Rogers (Geology), Simon Casalis de Pury (Eng. Sci.)  
Front row from left: Gary Waring (Eng. Sci.) and Peter Rawles (Eng. Sci.)

**James Boyle (Mathematics, 2000)** writes: "I moved to Buckinghamshire with my family in 2015, and in July we had another baby, a younger sister to our eight year old boy and six year old daughter."

**Tim Benbow (PPE, 1987)** has been promoted at King's College London, and is now Professor of Strategic Studies.

**Professor Valerie Worth-Stylianou (Modern Languages, 1975)** has written to let us know about a volume of collected essays that she has co-edited has been published in honour of Professor Richard Cooper: *The Culture of Celebration in Early Modern Europe Essays in Honour of Richard Cooper*. The

A group of Brasenose lawyers from the 1964 cohort have kept up a fine tradition of regular reunions, starting in 1989 with their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary (including Barry Nicholas who was their tutor and was also Principal in 1989). The group originally arranged these meet-ups every five years, but have since shortened this to every two years. Thanks to **Robert Chick** and **John Gower-Jones** for these photos to mark the occasions.



2024 back row:  
John Gower-Jones, Lord Christopher Bellamy, Mark Hodgkinson, Humphrey Malins, James Edmiston;

2024 front row:  
Howard Nowlan, Bob Chick, Michael Darling, Sir Nicolas Bratza.



The volume's three editors presenting Richard with a copy of the volume (left to right: Emma Herdman, Valerie Worth-Stylianou, Richard Cooper, Lucy Rayfield). Photo credit: Graham Nelson

volume celebrates the early modern culture of celebration while also highlighting and questioning the purposes to which that celebratory culture could be put.

Brasenose is celebrating two Royal Society awards for members of its community. **Professor Sir Mike Stratton (Physiological Sciences 1976-1979 and Honorary Fellow)** has been awarded the Royal Society Medal (Biological), and Professor Philip Maini (Tutorial Fellow in Maths 1990-2005) has been awarded the Sylvester Medal. Principal John Bowers KC said, "We congratulate Mike and Philip on these extremely prestigious awards and the recognition for their leading contributions to science".

Professor Sir Mike Stratton is a senior group leader at the Wellcome Sanger Institute, where he was Director from 2010-2023. He has been awarded the Royal Medal for his transformative work in cancer genomics, including the discovery of cancer-causing genes and the identification of mutational signatures that have revolutionised understanding of cancer. He established the Cancer Genome Project in 2000, which systematically sequenced cancer genomes to identify driver mutations, leading to the development of targeted therapies, and mutational signatures which reveal the causes of cancer. His research also includes the discovery of the breast cancer susceptibility gene, BRCA2 and the sequencing of the first complete cancer genome.

Professor Philip Maini, from the Mathematical Institute at Oxford University, has been awarded the Sylvester Medal for his contributions to mathematical biology, especially the interdisciplinary modelling of biomedical phenomena and systems. He was Tutorial Fellow in Maths at Brasenose College from 1990 until 2005, when he moved to St John's to take up his Chair as Professor in Mathematical Biology.

Find the full list of the Royal Society's 2024 award winners here: <https://royalsociety.org/medals-and-prizes/>

# Save The Date

## Forthcoming Events



For more details of the events celebrating 50 years of women at Brasenose see page 2

**Bookings for these events will open a couple of months before the event dates.**

Go to [www.bnc.ox.ac.uk/alumni/events](http://www.bnc.ox.ac.uk/alumni/events) for an up-to-date list of our upcoming events, and to register.

Please note that any new alumni accounts will need to be verified (during normal College working hours) before making event bookings via the online service.

To update your contact details using our online alumni community, visit our alumni pages at: [www.bnc.ox.ac.uk/alumni](http://www.bnc.ox.ac.uk/alumni) and follow the 'Update your information' link.

### Brasenose Women In The Humanities And Social Sciences

Wednesday 29 January 2025

### Brasenose Women In Media, Business and Finance

Wednesday 5 March 2025

### Women And The Unions: Challenging Inequality

Wednesday 7 May 2025.

### Principal's Conversation: The Windrush Scandal

Wednesday 28 May 2025

### 50 years of Women at Brasenose

A celebration day in College to mark the 50th anniversary of Women at BNC (further details TBC).

Saturday 7 June 2025

### Golden Jubilee Lunch for 1966-1975 matriculands

Friday 28 March 2025

### Diamond Jubilee Lunch for 1965 and previous matriculands

Friday 11 April 2025

### Gaudy for 2008-2009

Friday 21 March 2025

### Gaudy for 1970-1972

Friday 27 June 2025

## Recent Events



Gaudy for 1963-1966, June 2024  
(Photo: Ian Wallman)



Gaudy for 1983-1985, September 2024  
(Photo: Ian Wallman)



50th Anniversary of Women at BNC, September 2024 (Photo: Ian Wallman)



Five @ 50 Panel discussion, September 2024  
(Photo: Charles Henderson Photography)



Brasenose Alumni Society Annual Dinner, September 2024 (Photo: Ian Wallman)



Brasenose Alumni Society Annual Dinner, September 2024 (Photo: Ian Wallman)

## Call for College Memories!

Have you stumbled across any BNC gems recently that you'd like to donate to the Archives? We'd love to see! Please do get in touch to let us know what you've found at [archives@bnc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:archives@bnc.ox.ac.uk).

### Contact Us

Alumni Relations and Development Office  
Brasenose College  
Radcliffe Square  
Oxford  
OX1 4AJ  
Tel: +44 (0)1865 287275  
Email: [development.office@bnc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:development.office@bnc.ox.ac.uk)

### Join us on social media

-  [www.twitter.com/BNC\\_members](https://www.twitter.com/BNC_members)
-  [www.instagram.com/brasenosecollege](https://www.instagram.com/brasenosecollege)
-  [www.facebook.com/brasenosecollege](https://www.facebook.com/brasenosecollege)
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-  [www.linkedin.com/groups/1807034/](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/1807034/)

Once a Member of Brasenose,  
Always a Member of Brasenose



Brasenose  
College  
UNIVERSITY (of) OXFORD

# Remember Brasenose in your Will

*Brasenose College would not exist without the generosity and vision of its benefactors. Over the centuries, philanthropic gifts have supported our students, endowed our scholars and provided our buildings. Legacies are an important part of Brasenose's history and you can make them an important part of its future.*

*If you would like to discuss including a gift to Brasenose in your Will, please get in touch [donations@bnc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:donations@bnc.ox.ac.uk)*

