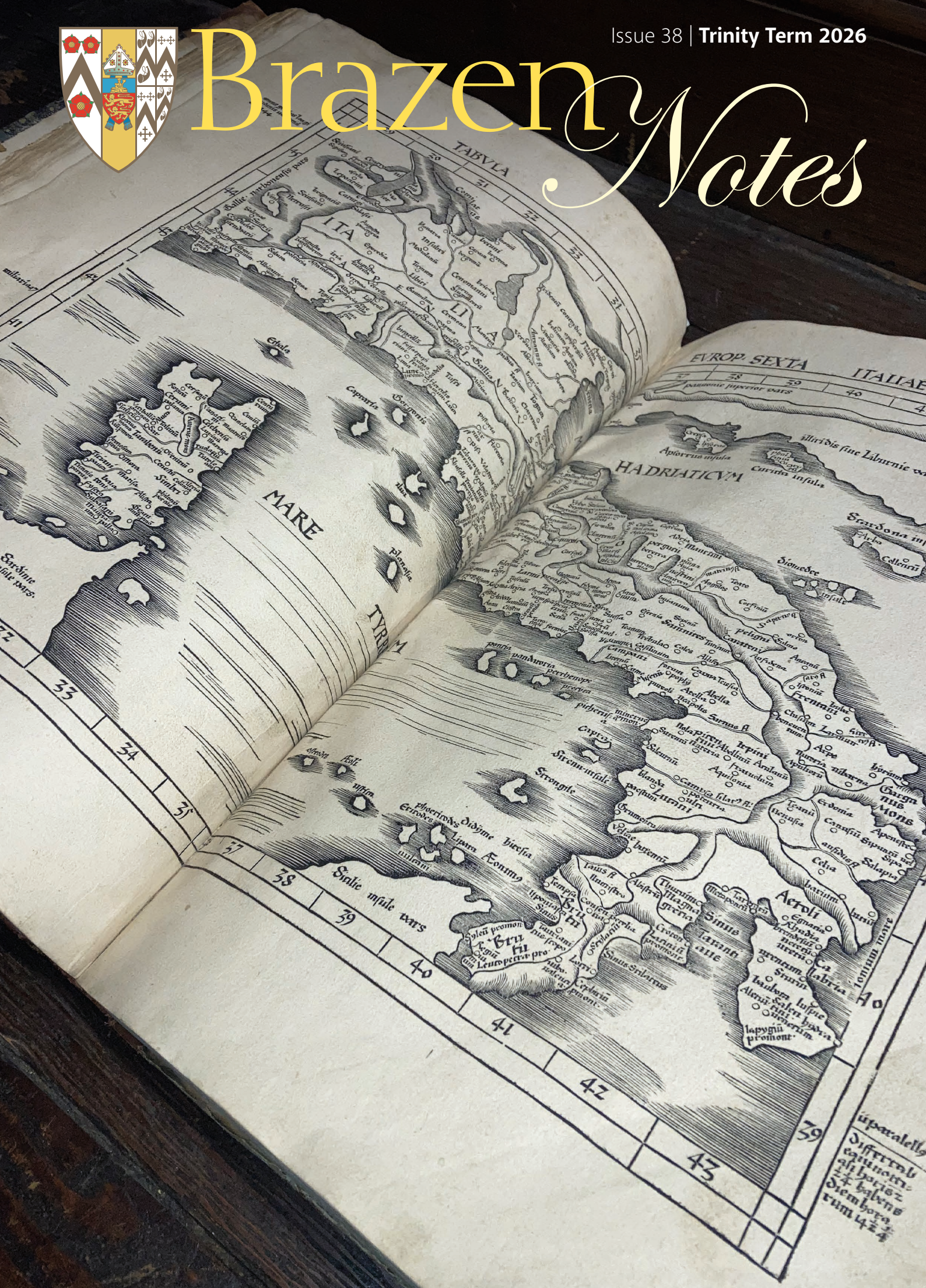




Brazen Notes



A Change of Principal Brings A New Era

Goodbye To John Bowers KC

College bids a fond farewell to Principal John Bowers KC at the end of this academic year; he will be much missed in the Brasenose community. Here he expresses some thoughts about his impending departure.



John Bowers in the Principal's Lodgings (Photo: Ian Wallman)

'Gladstone, four times Prime Minister, used to recall the two moments of joy of taking up office; the ideal joy when he kissed hands and received the seals of office from the Queen, and the real joy of handing them back again. I feel the opposite. It has been the greatest privilege of my life to serve this College.'

'It is such a wrench to leave this warm inclusive and diverse community. I hope that we leave it in a good shape to pass on to my successor, Alyson King who will be the first female Principal of the College and will I am sure uphold the essential Brasenose values we hold dear.'

'I would not say I have enjoyed every minute here because Covid was not enjoyable at all, and the sudden loss of a student, which tragically happened three times whilst I was Principal, convulsed our community; but I have always cherished the fraternity, openness, quirkiness and sheer vibrancy of the institution. They have indeed come to the fore during those periods of difficulty. I want to thank all of you who make this community special and especially my wife Suzanne. I will always be a "nostril" and will feel part of this special community.'

'I actually leave at the end of September so hope to see as many of you as possible personally to say goodbye or really au revoir.'

– John Bowers KC



Alyson King OBE (Photo: Begina Cox)

Hello To Our Next Principal: Alyson King OBE

As we say goodbye to John Bowers, we welcome Alyson King OBE who has been elected as the next Principal of Brasenose. She will take up her new post in the Autumn of 2026.

Alyson brings distinguished leadership experience from a senior career in diplomacy and public service, and has most recently served as His Majesty's

Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Her career has combined principled governance, inclusive leadership, and a sustained commitment to education, mentoring and public service. Her first degree was in Jurisprudence at Brasenose.

'Brasenose shaped both my intellectual outlook and my commitment to public service. I am honoured to return to lead a college defined by friendliness, openness and academic excellence; to help ensure that all who study and work here flourish; and to sustain and celebrate the enduring bonds that define the Brasenose community.'

– Alyson King OBE

The Vice-Principal, Professor Anne Davies, said 'We are hugely looking forward to welcoming Alyson as our next Principal. The selection process has been competitive and thorough, and at every stage Alyson has impressed with her vision, her ability to connect and her desire to understand what the College means for all its members. We are also thrilled that she will be the first woman in the role.'

Look out for a more in-depth article about Alyson King in the next edition.

The John Bowers Opportunity Fund: A Lasting Legacy

For more than a decade, Principal John Bowres has championed a vision of Brasenose that is ambitious, welcoming, and open to talent in all its forms. During his tenure, the College has strengthened its commitment to ensuring that exceptional young people can see Brasenose as a place where they belong, regardless of circumstances. With the generosity of some of John's many supporters, the College has set up a new endowment fund. The John Bowers Opportunity Fund is intended to uphold and advance the values of opportunity, equity, and excellence by providing resources to support outreach initiatives, and provide support for current students to ensure they can thrive academically and personally during their time at College. More information can be found here: www.bnc.ox.ac.uk/support-brasenose

Making The Most Of Every Minute

Thanks to the generosity of those who donate to the Annual Fund, the College is able to support a wide variety of enrichment activities, assisting with travel, equipment and other expenses. A few students share their stories.

Fencing

Matilda Seaton (History, 2025)

I'm a member of the Blues fencing team for sabre and we've had a busy term of BUCS and individual matches. Brasenose's support has enabled me to have 1-1 coaching this term, which has really improved my technique and my confidence, as well as helping to cover the costs of competitions. Being on the team is one of my favourite parts of university and this is made much easier by your kindness! We will shortly face Cambridge in the 118th Varsity match and it's great to go into this from such a strong position – I can't thank Brasenose enough.



Matilda Seaton with improved fencing skills

Ultimate Frisbee

Benjamin Tilley (Geography, 2024)

Having just started the 'Brasethrows' ultimate frisbee team last term, I'm hopeful that our new kit will help to get more Brasenose students into the sport.

We have one match every weekend in MT and HT building up to a really fun one-day tournament in TT to end the season. On behalf of the team, thank you very much for funding our kit, I'm very thankful that the cost of it is not a barrier to playing with us and being part of the team, and I'm hoping we can continue to provide kit to new players when they join!

Just before going to press, we were delighted to learn that the Brasethrows won the Ultimate Frisbee Cuppers – more about this elsewhere in this issue.



Swimming and Athletics

James Smith (Inorganic Chemistry DPhil, 2024)

I was awarded an Amalgamated Club Funding grant for Blues swimming & athletics. We recently won the swimming varsity match vs. Cambridge on 28th February (Win for the Men and tie for the women, overall win for Oxford). I achieved a Blues standard in the 100m backstroke twice at Varsity, once in the individual event and once leading off the 4 x 100m medley relay. I swam a personal best of 56.12 seconds – beating the blues standard by 1.66 seconds. I have achieved a Blues standard in the 50 and 100m backstroke at the friendly gala in October, and then the 50m butterfly / 100m freestyle at long course BUCS on February 13–15. I made the finals in the 50 butterfly and the 4 x 100 freestyle relay. There are a variety of costs associated with competitive swimming, and this year they were mainly equipment (racing suit, racing goggles), warm weather training camp in Lanzarote (flights, accommodation etc.), and accommodation/race entries for BUCS.



James Smith with the Varsity swimming trophy after the team's win against Cambridge.

Running: the Teddy Hall Relay

Maia Broughton (Geography, 2023)

Luckily the sun was shining for a perfect afternoon for the Teddy Hall Relays on Wednesday 11 March. Our Brasenose mixed team, which won fastest college mixed team last year, returned to defend our title. Maia Broughton was the first runner before passing over the baton to Ella Vaughan, followed by Levi Berger and Sam Day. Unfortunately, due to some new, very speedy mixed college teams, we did not retain the title. Considering we were fitting in our runs around tutorials, as well as some members of the team competing later in the week and some returning from injury, we put out a strong performance representing Brasenose, regardless. As always, the event was lots of fun and was followed by tea and awards. We are grateful for the support of College in covering our entry fee for this fantastic event!



Isobel Cammish (above and right) at the National Student Psychiatry Conference (Photo: members of Kent and Medway Medical School Psychiatry Society)

National Student Psychiatry Conference

Isobel Cammish (Preclinical Medicine, 2023)

My student support was used to attend the National Student Psychiatry Conference in Kent. I met a lot of researchers and clinicians, and other students passionate about psychiatry, which was amazing. I also did my first oral presentation on research I had done, which won best oral presentation.

Pottery Course

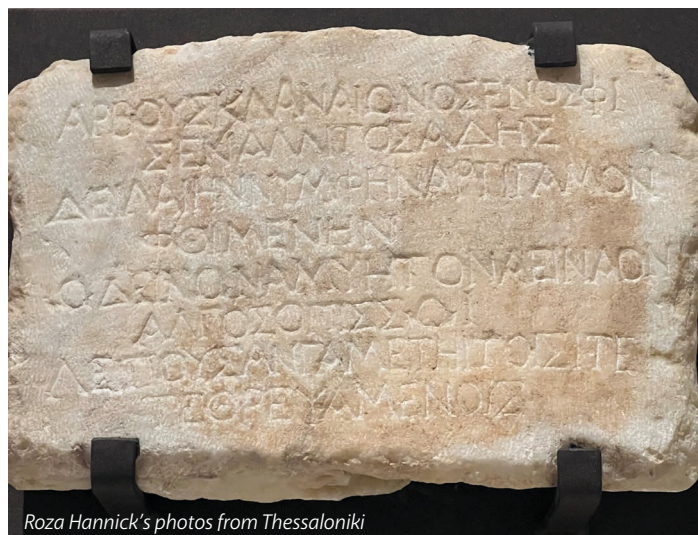
Veronica Corielli (Lit Hum, 2022)

Thanks to the Brazen Arts Fund, I was able to fund a 12-week intermediate pottery course at City of Oxford College. I attended lessons regularly during term and the vac, and this really helped me relax under the stress of 4th year exam preparation. I improved my skills a lot and recreated the Foundry Cup. As a Classics student with a focus on classical art history, it was very interesting to experience making a classical vessel and decorating it myself with ancient techniques. I also made a set of plates for my mum, some to-go coffee mugs, and several other useful items to decorate my flat when I move out of Oxford next year. I am going to continue practicing my pottery skills and will take courses in Oxford until I graduate in July.



Due to circumstances beyond my control, I was unable to travel to Vergina as originally planned. Instead, I visited the monasteries of Meteora, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This proved to be an invaluable experience, expanding my understanding of the preservation and transmission of classical material into the modern era. For example, the Monastery of St Stephen houses a sixth-century AD papyrus in its museum.

Thank you very much for the funding. I would not have been able to undertake this trip without your support, and it has been immensely beneficial to my studies.



Roza Hannick's photos from Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki Trip

Roza Hannick (Classics, 2023)

This fund enabled me to travel to Thessaloniki in northern Greece, a region often overlooked by British classicists. The Archaeological Museum houses an excellent collection of inscriptions and studying them in situ provided valuable preparation for the Greek Historical Linguistics paper I will be taking in Trinity. The museum's many other artefacts also helped me consolidate the archaeological material I studied for Mods. In particular, the temporary exhibition on caves offered a fascinating insight into the intersection of geology and human history.

From A Telephone Call To A Year Of Activities

Thank you for sharing your stories, for offering guidance and encouragement, and for supporting today's students through conversations, advice, and donations during this year's Telethon. Together, the Brasenose community raised an additional £125,000+ to support the College and its students over the coming year.

During the Easter vacation, a team of twelve students set about connecting with alumni across the world during the annual Brasenose Telephone Campaign. Over a two-week period, many engaging conversations took place, and all of the student callers came away inspired for the future, with fresh ideas for potential career paths having had enjoyable exchanges with you. To everyone who answered the call: thank you.

The power of one conversation, one phone call with a current student, reaches far beyond that moment. Similarly, every gift to the Annual Fund has a meaningful impact on College life. Your support provides emergency funding, maintains the fabric of Brasenose, and protects the tutorial system, the heart of an Oxford education. You ensure that Brasenose continues to be a vibrant, welcoming, and intellectually

engaging home: a place where students can thrive, grow in confidence, and create memories that last a lifetime.

Your Gift Is Far Reaching

It could help set up a new club or society. This year, students have formed a new bouldering society with your support.

£200 could cover the travel costs for a student to attend a conference or field trip allowing them to expand their academic understanding of their subject.

£700 could provide a student with a hardship grant, should the unexpected happen.

£6,270 provides a fully funded means-tested bursary so a young person can take up their place at Brasenose.



Your Donations Support The JCR

Your generosity also sustains another vital part of student life: the JCR. The annual cost of running the JCR is entirely funded by alumni donations. Being part of the JCR enriches the student experience, and provides a strong sense of belonging within College.

Over the last year, the JCR has been as busy as ever. Your support has helped them organise Arts Week, BOPs, weekly social events, and important welfare support. They arranged a coffee machine, new seating at Frewin and helped celebrate everyone's successes at the end of Trinity Term. Thank you for helping Brasenose students flourish.

'Brasenose is renowned for being the friendliest College and the JCR plays an important role in maintaining that reputation for current and future students. We couldn't do all we do without the support of Alumni and every one of us is so grateful you choose to continue to take part in College life. Thank you.'

– Ellen Taylor, JCR President



The Brasenose JCR (Photos: Ian Wallman)

James Bobin: Creative Career Insights

As the latest in our series of *Frankland Visitor* artists in residence at BNC, writer and director **James Bobin (Modern History, 1990)** has been running a programme of events to inspire Brasenose students with creative possibilities. How did he find the experience of sharing his insights with the College community?



Highlights from the Frankland Visitor Sessions 2025–2026

James Bobin in conversation with Jesse Armstrong:

Discussion with the award-winning writer and showrunner Jesse Armstrong (*Peep Show*, *The Thick of It*, and *Succession*) about his career, early influences, writing process, and the changing landscape of film and TV, offering insight into the craft of screenwriting today.

Student Masterclass: From Page to Screen – Craft,

Collaboration & Career Pathways: James Bobin spoke to students about his experiences and offered pointers for anyone interested in starting a creative career.

James Bobin in conversation with Iain Morris: Creator of *The Inbetweeners* and director of Netflix's *My Oxford Year* (2025), Iain also contributed to iconic shows like *What We Do in the Shadows* and *Peep Show*.

Screening and Q&A with Joanna Bobin – *Alice Through the*

Looking Glass: Following a viewing of the film, which was directed by James and starred his sister, actress Joanna Bobin, students had the opportunity to discuss it with them.

‘His masterclass dissected the backstage of an industry that is not only opaque but constantly changing too. An industry insider would pay thousands for that session.’

– Frederick Gifford, HCR

‘From my point of view it’s been brilliant and has gone really well. The whole point of this was to come back to College because when I was here, I had aspirations towards a creative career, and it’s quite a difficult path to tread, because there’s not the usual help you may get from the careers service or the normal routes of finding a future job. A lot of it can be quite solitary and you need to use your own self drive and determination to make connections. So I came back here with the purpose of trying to inform people that if you do have those kinds of ambitions, it is possible to have a creative career. It’s not easy, but it is possible – because that alone is a starting point, and I think once you have a sense of what it is you want to do, then you have something to aim for.’ – James Bobin

What Did The Students Learn?

‘One of the most transformative aspects of attending an event like this is seeing how Brasenose alumni have flourished in their careers years after their Oxford experience. So often, as students, we are in a bubble of peers our age. We can become an echo chamber, all facing

the same problems and the same uncertainty of what post-grad life will look like – yet without any of us having the experience to truly provide sound advice to one another. As the saying goes, we really can become the blind leading the blind.

Events like these provide students with much needed perspective. It allows us to see how people have grown

and navigated their careers five, ten, fifteen years down the line. It allows us to ask people what life outside of the ivory tower is like – the mistakes they made, the freedoms they have had.

James and Joanna Bobin’s workshops gave us access to people who are not only thriving in their careers, but also kind enough to share their unfiltered thoughts on how they built them. The workshops were not just lovely to attend with jokes and lighthearted stories, but also deeply grounding with insight into what it takes to build a meaningful life and career in the arts. A truly lovely experience.’

– Aidan Gurung, HCR



A Selection of James Bobin's Career Highlights

The 11 O'Clock Show: Topical news comedy series, in which James helped played a pivotal part in bringing Sacha Baron Cohen's satirical 'youth TV' reporter 'Ali G' to our screens for the first time. 'We would go out and film pre-recorded segments like 'vox pops', asking stupid questions to get funny answers.'

Da Ali G Show: Groundbreaking parodic 'edu-tainment' show hosted by Ali G. 'If you're interviewing somebody, it's quite rude to talk about yourself a lot – so we thought it'd be funny if he started asking very serious people about his own personal life issues.'

Flight Of The Conchords: 'Because no-one had told us how to do it, we had done almost all the jobs ourselves – I'd been the show-runner, director, producer and writer; they (Bret McKenzie and Jemaine Clement) were in it, wrote all the songs, and were the musical group performing the songs. So by the end we were all absolutely exhausted!'

The Muppets (2011) / Muppets Most Wanted (2014): 'I had great knowledge of the Muppets already as I had been a big fan of them as a kid. And of course the 1970s Muppet show was made in the UK – so as director, I thought it would be good to stay true to the Anglo-American theme of the original, which had a nice tone. The puppetry element of the made it much more difficult to shoot than a normal movie – it's really a whole other discipline – and it was quite a learning curve.'

Alice Through The Looking Glass (2016): 'Working on a movie with strong visual effects is a huge undertaking because the amount of design is enormous, and it's shot on giant bluescreen stages, which is a complex thing. And it's a very different tone (to the Muppets) – it's got moments of comedy, but it's still a story about a person trying to save their best friend from dying, so it's quite a serious thing.'

'As somebody who took a BTEC in filmmaking, I was naturally interested in the process of production. However, I had not appreciated the complexity of translating words to the screen!

While I had produced my own short films both in stop-motion and live action, I had never adapted from source material before and thus never appreciated the difficulties of pleasing both the directors and the author.

I appreciated how James guided us step by step, from one page of a book to a script, to a storyboard, to a basic render, to film. This one single scene was an excellent snapshot into the herculean task of film production, but James succeeded in explaining it thoroughly.

Most of all, I came away wanting to watch the new Percy Jackson series, although, as a classicist, I'm not sure minotaurs are usually depicted with underwear...'

– Alex Massie, JCR



'I really enjoyed the Masterclass 'From Page to Screen' with James Bobin. It was fast-paced and engaging. I found it very interesting to learn about the process of turning a concept on the page into a scene for a series, particularly coming from someone with Bobin's experience. The session also gave me a greater appreciation for how many people and skill sets contribute to film and television productions.

As an engineer and musician, I found the artistic insight into set and sound design fascinating, especially the way it combines old and new methods. I was already a fan of the story Bobin was discussing, so it was really interesting to look behind the scenes.'

– Charlotte Reed, HCR



Jesse Armstrong and James Bobin (Photo: JP Clough)



James Bobin and Joanna Bobin (Photo: JP Clough)

Rehoming A Very Special Collection

The Brasenose College Library is blessed with an extraordinary collection of rare books and manuscripts. However, keeping them both safe and accessible is an ongoing challenge, requiring an innovative solution.

Picture the scene: you climb to the top of a twisting stone staircase in an historic Oxford college, to find a beautiful panelled room, seemingly untouched for hundreds of years. As the door creaks open, you are greeted by an array of rare and priceless leather-bound books as far as you can see. What a perfectly romantic setting for such a fine collection, just like a storybook; surely this is exactly how such beautiful books should be housed, isn't it...?

The room in question is Brasenose's Latham Room, at the top of the High Street tower; the books are Brasenose Library's pre-1640 collection. Numbering more than 2,500 items, including 83 printed before 1501, the collection represents an important resource for the study of early printed books. The earliest dates from 1470, and the collection contains notable editions of scientific and historical texts printed during the 16th century and up to 1640. Many of these volumes were left to the College by its Fellows and students and, as such, trace the development of scholarship at Oxford.

The collection contains an absolute treasure-trove of literary riches. Among its treasures are early printed works by Euclid and Aristotle from the late fifteenth century, a second edition of Copernicus's heliocentric arguments, and one of the rare surviving copies of Shakespeare's Third Folio. You will also find the writings of Thomas Hobbes, Albrecht Dürer, Ben Jonson and John Donne.



Entering the Latham Room, before the relocation of the collection (Photo: JP Clough).

'I felt a tiny vertiginous thrill. These works were reaching across centuries, connecting minds that had walked these very cloisters.'

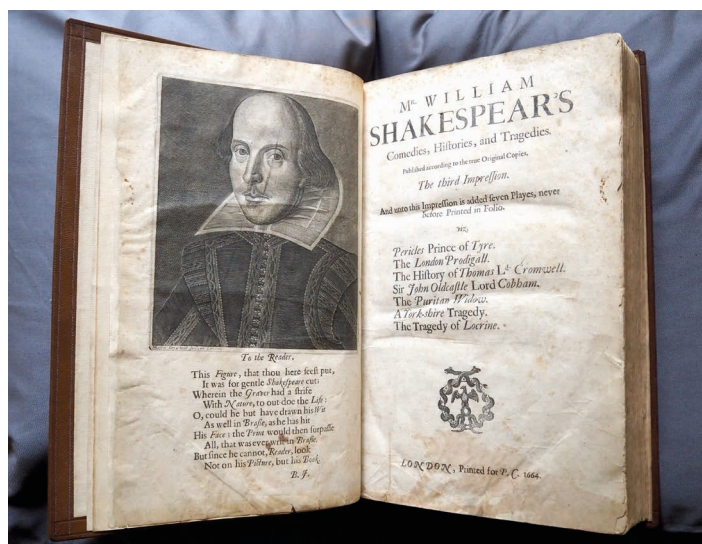
– Professor Simon Palfrey, Fellow Librarian

The collection has been housed in the High Street Tower since it was built. Some will have memories of this room with its impressive bolted door at the top of a narrow spiral staircase. Whilst charming, the collection is awkward to reach and, despite best efforts, the room has been increasingly affected by climatic changes which risk future damage to the collection. Keeping them there is no longer sustainable.

Transforming Access, Teaching and Preservation

The College and the Librarians have therefore embarked upon a carefully considered project to relocate the Collection to a newly refurbished, ground-floor space at the centre of College life, alongside the Library. Designed both as a dedicated reading room for the collection and as a flexible teaching space, the new space will allow students, under supervision, to work directly with original early printed texts more easily, enriching their studies through engagement with the physical books.

This is not simply a change of location. It is an important step forward to preserve the collection going forward. The new space will provide the optimal environment for fragile materials, while minimising environmental impact. Bespoke conservation cabinets, developed in consultation with specialists, will provide a stable internal environment while allowing full visibility of the volumes.



William Shakespeare's Third Folio: One of the most significant and complete editions of Shakespeare's works (Photo: JP Clough)



De Historia Stirpium UBS III 36 (Photo: Joanna Mills)



Pages from *Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium* UB S III 62 (Photo: Joanna Mills)



The intention is not only to preserve – though that remains essential – it is also to encourage an increase in active use with students and researchers more easily able to explore these books. Scholars will gain improved access to a collection of primary sources that continue to inform research across disciplines.

Bringing the collection into the centre of College life reflects the College's enduring responsibility for the care and use of its intellectual heritage.

It is with great pleasure we are able to share that the majority of funding for the project has already been secured through the generosity of alumni and friends, with the building work scheduled for the summer of 2027.

'As the incumbent custodians it is our duty to safeguard the future of this remarkable collection'

– Liz Kay, College Librarian

Be Part Of The Next Chapter

We invite you to help support the preservation and relocation of the College's Collection of pre-1640 books.

Support the project with a gift of £3,000 (or £2,400+Gift Aid), and your gift will be recognised within the Collection itself.

Your contribution will be celebrated with a personalised dedication printed on a bookplate which will be permanently housed within a volume from the Collection and form part of its catalogue description.

This offers a meaningful way to contribute to the life of the Collection and to its availability for future generations, whilst being recognised in a novel way.

Those who take part will be welcome to join a special gathering to mark the opening of the new space.

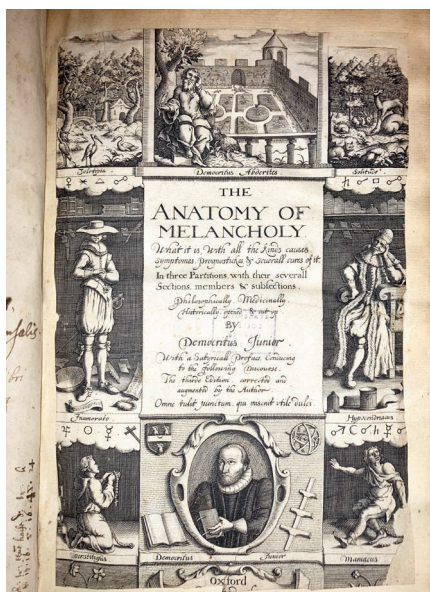
Bookplate support: £3,000 (£2,400 plus Gift Aid)

Limited to 100 volumes.

www.bnc.ox.ac.uk/support-brasenose/the-rare-book-collection

Or contact us at donations@bnc.ox.ac.uk

Volumes will be allocated by Brasenose from a curated list and will remain part of the College's Special Collections, cared for according to best practice in conservation and access.



Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (first edition, alongside other copies – one gifted by Burton himself): A pioneering medical-philosophical work that provides profound insights into the human condition and mental health.

Clinical Psychology: Professor Cathy Creswell

Senior Kurti Research Fellow **Professor Cathy Creswell's** work in the Departments of Experimental Psychology and Psychiatry focuses on finding solutions to common mental health problems in children. Here she explains more about her background and her research.

Can you tell us about your journey to becoming a Fellow at Oxford?

I started my academic journey as an undergraduate studying PPP here in Oxford and then returned as a Professor of Developmental Clinical Psychology in the Departments of Experimental Psychology and Psychiatry. In between I completed my professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy) and PhD at UCL, while working as a practising child clinical psychologist. I then worked in clinical research at the University of Reading before returning to Oxford in 2019. In 2023 I joined Brasenose as a Nicholas Kurti Senior Research Fellow, which has been a fantastic opportunity to get to know students and staff from across disciplines, and join lots of fascinating events. I have thoroughly enjoyed it, and Brasenose has certainly lived up to its reputation as the 'friendliest college'.



Professor Cathy Creswell (Photo © John Cairns Photography)

It is often said that there's a mental health epidemic amongst young people – do you think that's accurate?

My background is in clinical psychology and my work is particularly focused on the development and treatment of common mental health problems in children. As such I keep a close eye on the prevalence figures on youth mental health problems, and I think we can say with confidence from the data that we have seen an increase in these issues (particularly anxiety and depression) in children and young people over the last decades. The precise reasons for this are less clear, with many complex and interacting influences. However, it is clear that much needs to be done to both address the causes of these increases, and also to make sure that those young people who develop problems get the support they need when they need it. While not to undermine the strength of that argument, it is also really important not to lose sight of the fact that the majority of young people do not have a mental health problem. For example, during the pandemic we conducted research to track children and young people's mental health over time, and it was clear that many of them were remarkably resilient in the face of considerable challenges.

Does it make a significant difference in terms of improved mental health outcomes if you engage with young people earlier on, before they become adults?

I would argue strongly that it does. I particularly focus on anxiety disorders in children, which are common and have a particularly early age of onset. There is substantial evidence that shows anxiety disorders early in life increase the risk of, not only, ongoing anxiety problems, but also other mental and physical health conditions as well as having negative impacts on educational outcomes and employment. It makes sense that if we can treat these problems early in life, when they first occur then we have the potential to change

these trajectories for young people, so they can realise their full potential without being held back by poor mental health. Just yesterday I was speaking to a parent who took part in one of our treatment trials five years ago when her daughter was eight years old. In that trial we provided parents with a remote, brief intervention in which they are supported to apply cognitive behavioural therapy based strategies in their child's day to day life. She emphasised how transformative it had been to receive that support at that time, and to see her

daughter's anxiety problems go and her confidence grow before she moved into her teenage years. Unfortunately, we lack the studies that allow us to test these longer-term effects of treatment directly – as these are often costly and challenging to run – however we can now use wider data sets to model the longer-term impacts of early intervention and also draw on, for example, national educational and health data to examine longer term impacts of treatments. This is something we are actively pushing forwards with our Oxford health economics colleagues now.

How does your group's research transition from experimental work to methods which may be adopted more widely?

I am the Director of a new research centre that sits between the Departments of Experimental Psychology and Psychiatry called the Oxford Centre for Emerging Minds Research. One thing that sets our centre apart is the breadth of our work from experimental work to identify the mechanisms that underpin youth mental health, to translation of those findings into interventions, to intervention evaluation and implementation. One example is the work we have done to increase access to effective treatment for child anxiety problems. This started with experimental and longitudinal work which helped us identify key targets of treatment; we then used that knowledge to develop a brief, accessible treatment that could be supported by a range of child mental health professionals. Through randomised controlled trials we have shown that this treatment is clinically and cost-effective, both in its original and a more accessible digital form, and this is now being rolled out widely within the NHS. This example shows that adoption of this sort of work can happen, but we have also learned a huge amount about the conditions that are necessary for this along the way. A major factor is effective co-design of solutions with meaningful involvement of families and the professionals who would need to deliver the programme. Across our group we are now expanding this approach to address a wider set of common mental health problems among children and adolescents, both in the UK and globally.

New Interpretations Of Familiar Works

Departing DPhil student **Paul Norris (English, 2022)** reflects on his time and studies at Brasenose, and how 'Theory' in English Literature is a way of looking at texts in the wider context of social, political and cultural history.

What does research in English Literature actually involve? This is something I've been asked throughout my DPhil, often with implied quotation marks around 'research'. It's an understandable question, not only because literary scholarship does not yield much in the way of practical results, but also because there is some disagreement within the subject on what 'literary scholarship' should be. English research can be essentially a branch of history: researching writers' biographies or manuscripts, and working out who influenced their style and ideas. It can also be more a matter of interpretation: undertaking ever more acute 'close readings', and finding new ways of understanding familiar works. Many critics since the 1980s have also, and controversially, used literature to reflect on wider contemporary social problems, often with a particular focus on power relationships, an approach broadly termed 'Theory'.

My own doctorate has fallen squarely within the second category. I haven't made any archival discoveries, and I'm still a bit baffled by most Theory. Instead, my thesis attempted to reinterpret a range of writers from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, in light of their use of architectural language, especially metaphor. The popularity of buildings as a metaphor at the time is quite striking. I argued that images as a metaphor are especially useful when describing complex, abstract ideas, defining poetry, religious doctrines, and royal power.

A good example of the latter is James I's ceremonial entry to London in 1604. The event was postponed from the actual year of his accession, 1603, due to plague, so writers and artists had plenty of time to plan. What they produced was an extravaganza. James processed through seven triumphal arches, built just for the day, along a route from the Tower of London to Westminster, and heard music, drama and speeches as he went. James was undemonstrative in his appreciation, most likely bored by the whole thing. My chapter on the event pointed out that the pageant texts are notably keen to assert that literature is a better means of expressing the king's majesty than the architecture of the arches.

Other chapters were on how writing a poem was often compared to constructing a building, and the use of architectural metaphor in the



sermons of Lancelot Andrewes and John Donne. A sixteenth-century sermon might not sound like a thrilling read, but in their time these preachers attracted large audiences, who stood outside for as long as three hours to listen. What drew the crowds was not only religious fervour: these works contain much of the best prose in the language.

My final chapter was on Brasenose alumnus Robert Burton, who wrote *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. This gigantic book continues to attract attention as a compendium of writing about the causes, symptoms and cure of melancholy, an affliction from which the author himself seems to have suffered. Architecture has been dismissed as 'incidental' to Burton's book, but my chapter aimed to show that he saw it as an important means of fostering the appropriate environment for melancholics, as well as an inspiring subject for his own writing.

Aside from the Burton connection, Brasenose has proved a highly congenial place to pursue these studies. I've appreciated the beauty of its library, chapel and quads, and the variety of events on offer here. Most of all, the staff have been wonderfully helpful in everything from finding tutorial rooms last-minute to applying for my Irish passport.

The latter has proved invaluable as I now have in-laws in Italy. In my penultimate year, I married a fellow DPhil student in early modern literature, and our son was born in March. My examiners kindly scheduled my viva for well before my wife's due date, so I was glad to have the DPhil finished before becoming a father. As I leave Oxford, I am hoping to continue using the skills of interpretation and argumentation I learned in a career as a barrister.

Funding for the Humanities

The humanities help us make sense of a rapidly changing world. They foster critical thinking, deepen our understanding of different cultures and perspectives, and provide the ethical insight needed to navigate today's most pressing challenges, from global conflict to artificial intelligence. At a time when funding for the humanities is under increasing pressure, sustained support is essential to ensure that this vital scholarship continues to inform public debate, inspire new generations, and enrich society.

Summer Sporting Successes

Boat Race 2026

In April 2026, Boat Club captain **Flo Brooke (Physics & Philosophy, 2023)** was selected for the OUBC Women's Reserve Crew boat, Osiris, we spoke to her soon afterwards, to ask for her thoughts about the experience.

Rowing with OUBC didn't seem in the realm of possibility a year ago, so being selected to row in Osiris for the Boat Race this year was incredible.

The motto of the women's side of OUBC is 'Yes We Can' and that embodies how it feels to be a part of the team. Some of the biggest lessons that I've learnt through my involvement in the club is about ignoring self-doubt and trying not to underestimate what I think I'm capable of. I have also learnt how as a crew we can bring so much more out of each other than we could do as individuals.

The Boat Race was probably the best, weirdest, and proudest day of my life. It is an event that comes with so much noise and publicity and our coach told us to enjoy that part of it but remember that when we get on the water to race, we just have to do exactly what we have spent the whole year training to do. I found it surprisingly easy to stay calm on the start line with the Cambridge crew, Blondie, only a few metres to our side. The calm didn't last too long as the race commenced and the conditions soon turned into the worst I had ever rowed, let alone raced in. Finishing the race behind Cambridge was gutting but to find out moments later that the Blue Boat had won, for the first time in 10 years, made it all so much better.

Rowing with BNCBC and OUBC has really made my time at university, and my experience with both clubs has shaped me a lot as a person.



Flo Brooke (Photo: AllMarkOne)

'The Boat Race was probably the best, weirdest, and proudest day of my life.'

– Flo Brooke

I loved being Captain last year and now President of BNCBC. Leading the club while not being able to be around day-to-day, due to OUBC training has been hard because it's such an awesome group of people, so I am looking forward to being more involved with the club (around my exams!) and work towards some hopefully very successful Summer Eights campaigns!

Summer Eights

Flo's comments above turned out to be very prescient, and the Boat Club put in a remarkable performance in the Summer Vllls – congratulations BNCBC! Flo explains why the results were so significant:

We have made BNCBC history with the best aggregate bumps movement ever for Brasenose in Summer Vllls: our crews went a cumulative +14. The next best BNCBC performance was +13, back in 1947. We qualified 3 boats on each side of the club for the first time since 2003, and every single crew went positive. Our Men's first boat moved up a division, establishing their position in Division 2, and our Women's first boat is close behind, ready to make the move up next year. Our Men's second boat secured blades with an unwaveringly strong performance throughout the week. It was an incredibly exciting week of racing to top off an awesome year for BNCBC.'



BNCBC 2025-26

Oscar Potts (Biology, 2023)

Flo was not the only BNC student to be involved in the Boat Race. BNCBC Captain of Coxes Oscar Potts was selected as a cox for the reserve pool.

This year I had the privilege of coxing the OUBC Men's 'Spare Four' during Boat Race week. I was thrilled to be selected to challenge Cambridge on the tideway and, having learnt to cox here at BNCBC, felt particular pride in representing our club on the university-level stage.

It has been a busy sporting year for me; beating Cambridge in the Blues Varsity fencing match was



Oscar Potts (Photo: AllMarkOne)

a particular highlight, and so the opportunity to 'shoe the tabs' once again was something I was immensely looking forward to. Unfortunately, Cambridge proved the faster crew on the day, but that didn't take away (too much) from an awesome season and an immensely fun week watching the eights battle the Light Blues down the Championship Course.

I look forward to trialling next year where I'll be hoping to once again fly the flag for our amazing club, and channel the spirit of the Childe of Hale to leave the other place in our wake. Here's to 2027!

Cuppers Victories

It's not just the Boat Club who've been making waves with their sporting successes. The Netball team have done fantastically in the Mixed Cuppers, College League Championship and Women's Cuppers, and the Ultimate Frisbee team have also tasted Cuppers victory.

Netball Team

Katie Ball and Gracie King (Co-Captains): 'Brasenose Netball enjoyed another outstanding season on court, building on last year's success with a series of impressive performances across Oxford's college competitions. The team successfully defended both the Mixed Cuppers title, overcoming St Hilda's in the final, and the College League championship, demonstrating remarkable consistency and depth throughout the year. In Trinity Term, BNC also made a fantastic run to the Women's Cuppers Final against Trinity, narrowly missing out on the title in a fiercely contested match. While the result did not fall our way, the squad's determination, skill, and team spirit were evident throughout the campaign. Reaching another major final while retaining two titles marks an exceptional season for Brasenose Netball and reflects the commitment of everyone involved both on and off the court. College netball continues to thrive at BNC, and the club looks forward to building on this success in the seasons to come.'

Brasethrows – Ultimate Frisbee Team

Benjamin Tilley (Captain): 'In their first proper year as a team, and for the first time in BNC history, the Brasethrows Ultimate Frisbee team fought against all odds bringing back the gold trophy from 2026 College Frisbee Cuppers! Following a heartbreaking loss 5-6 against Spades (The Chinese Society Team), we proceeded to go unbeaten for the rest of the day, with well fought wins against Worcester, Hertford, Balliol, Merton, and then Hertford again in the finals. Winning in our first year sets a high bar going forward but I'm confident with the passion in the team we'll have a good showing next year. We are very grateful for a grant which enabled us to purchase 13 personalised sports jerseys for the team.'



Above: The Brasenose Netball Team 2025-26, with Principal John Bowers KC and the new wall chalking to celebrate the netball team's recent successes. The wall artwork was created by Fine Art student Naia Searight (Photo: JP Clough)



Brasethrows Ultimate Frisbee Team 2025-26 (Photos: Leo Watts / Brasethrows team members)

Brazen News

Former Brasenose William Golding Junior Research Fellow **Jan Eijking** has had his first book published. Entitled *The Technocratic International*, it tells of how nineteenth-century Europe's technocrats and capitalists advanced major projects with the help of a new elite of technical experts.

Dr Eric Albone MBE (Chemistry, 1959) had an article published *Science in Parliament* about the UK-Japan Young Scientist Workshop programme that he's involved with as part of the Clifton Scientific Trust. It explains how the programme brought together 50 senior high school students from Japan and from the UK. They were introduced to the focus of their hosts' science/engineering research and given a related research challenge. In just a few days, students develop as globally-aware young scientists, developing teamwork and presentation skills in ways which they can then take forward in their lives.

Pianist and composer **Paul Drayton (Music, 1963)**'s debut novel *Ultramarine*, has been published, in which a young chorister enters a world of alchemy and betrayal. Paul can trace the idea to his first job, when he was teaching music in a choir school, which educates choristers for the chapel of New College, Oxford. He explains, 'The music sung by these young choristers, together with adults, is of an astonishingly high standard, an unbroken tradition of music and liturgy that seems to me very precious. I saw at first hand how young people from all backgrounds could have their lives enriched and formed by this specialised training. The novel imagines what that same experience might have meant for someone born in the very distant past.'

Congratulations to DPhil English student **Aditi Upmanyu**, whose story 'Bua' was shortlisted for the Oxford-BNU Creative Writing Award 2026. Aditi commented, 'I am delighted and honoured that my story has been shortlisted for the Oxford-BNU Creative Writing Award. Earlier this year, I won the Ale Verses at College for my composition, and now, with a university-wide shortlist, I feel encouraged to continue exploring creative writing. I continue to recognise the privilege of being part of the Brasenose community, and the university more broadly, where such creative ethos is fostered, and students get incredible literary opportunities.'

Aditi Upmanyu at the Oxford-BNU Creative Writing Award Shortlisting



Joe Irvin OBE (PPE, 1974) has been appointed inaugural Chair of the Trustee Board for the future Royal College of Pharmacy. On his appointment the Royal College explained that 'Joe has extensive senior level experience in the voluntary sector and government, serving as a Trustee and Chair at charities ACEVO and Voluntary Action Islington and CEO at national charities Living Streets and NAVCA. He was awarded an OBE for services to charities in 2020.'

Jim Ring (English, 1976) is writing a biography of Arthur Ransome, best known as the author of *Swallows and Amazons*. He comments 'I can't say what a privilege it is to be asked to write this new biography of a writer I have always revered. Ransome lived an extraordinary life, and his books still have a great deal to say to us today. As ingenious as Dorothy Sayers, as English as Flanders & Swann, as lyrical as Ted Hughes, and as unswerving as the King James Bible, they are the perfect antidote to the daily detritus in the news to which we're subjected. These clouds will pass. Arthur Ransome and all that he stood for will remain.'

Sir Michael Stratton (Physiological Sciences, 1976) was elected a Foreign Member of the US National Academy of Sciences. He is one of only 25 international members to be elected in 2026.

David Warriner (Modern Languages, 1996) visited College to donate a copy of Johanna Gustawsson's *Scars of Silence* to the Library, which he has recently translated from French into English.

Katelyn Ewart (MSc Law and Finance, 2022) and **Benjamin Cariss (MSc Theoretical and Computational Chemistry, 2022)** welcomed their first child in November 2025. Congratulations to you both!



Alumnus David Warriner and College Librarian Liz Kay

In Memoriam

Dr John Peach

We are very sorry to share the sad news that Emeritus Fellow Dr John Peach died on 17th December 2025. He was 89 years old. Dr Peach was a part of the Brasenose community for most of his life, as a Junior Research Fellow, Tutorial Fellow in Physics, Senior Dean, Tutor for Admissions, Senior Tutor, Vice Principal, and eventually an Emeritus Fellow. He was also Chairman of the University's General Board

of the Faculties. We offer condolences to his widow Dr Jo Peach on behalf of the College community.

Do you have memories of Dr John Peach that you would be happy to share? If so, please email Professor Jonathan Jones at jonathan.jones@bnc.ox.ac.uk

Dr John Peach (Photo courtesy of Dr Jo Peach)



Save The Date

Forthcoming Events

BNC Alumni Society Annual Dinner

Saturday 19 September 2026 | in College
Bookings are open.

Gaudy for 2014–2015 matriculands

Friday 25 September 2026 | in College
Bookings are open.

Classics Reunion

Saturday 31 October | in College
Bookings will open before the end of August.

Ellesmere Dinner

Saturday 14 November | in College
Bookings will open before the end of September.

Event Bookings

Visit www.bnc.ox.ac.uk/alumni/events for an up-to-date list of our upcoming events, and to register.

Please Note: we have recently updated our event bookings process to provide a better user experience. The new event registration forms are simpler to use than the previous system, and it is no longer necessary to log in to an alumni account to make bookings. If you encounter any problems with registering for an event, please contact alumni.events@bnc.ox.ac.uk. If you would like to update any of your details held by the College, please contact development.office@bnc.ox.ac.uk.

Call Out For Blue Books

Do you have old copies of the Brasenose 'Blue Book' of student information? The College Archive has some editions missing, and would be particularly interested if anyone would be willing to kindly donate the following Blue Books:

1960, 1961, 1963, 1964, 1967, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1990–1993, 1995–2005, 2007–2008, 2012–2013

Please do get in touch at archives@bnc.ox.ac.uk.

Contact Us

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Email: development.office@bnc.ox.ac.uk



Once a Member of Brasenose,
Always a Member of Brasenose

Recent Events



The Brasenose College Choir performed at Steeple Aston Church on 16 May 2026, in a concert entitled *Celebrating Dr Radcliffe*. This followed on from a talk earlier in the week by alumna **Charlotte Harris (Lit. Hum., 1995)** in honour of Dr Samuel Radcliffe, who as well as being Brasenose principal (1614–1648), also founded Dr Radcliffe's Primary School in the village of Steeple Aston in 1640 (see Charlotte's article in the *Brazen Nose* 2024–25 for further details). In addition to a fantastic performance by the Brasenose choir, conducted by interim Music Director Alex Flood, the audience were also treated to a charming performance by the school's own choir. (Photo: JP Clough)



Principal John Bowers with one of his leaving presents, Farewell Party, June 2026 (Photo: Claire Williams)



President's Summer Party, in the Great Hall at St Bartholomew's Hospital, June 2026 (Photo: Chloë Bossward)

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Remember Brasenose in your Will

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

