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St Cross Rowers:
A Success Story

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25 Years of Purple: How
St Cross got its Colours

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Preventing Parkinson's: Interview
with Ricardo Márquez Gómez

CROSSWORD

2025-2026



St Cross College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
1965-2025



ST CROSS COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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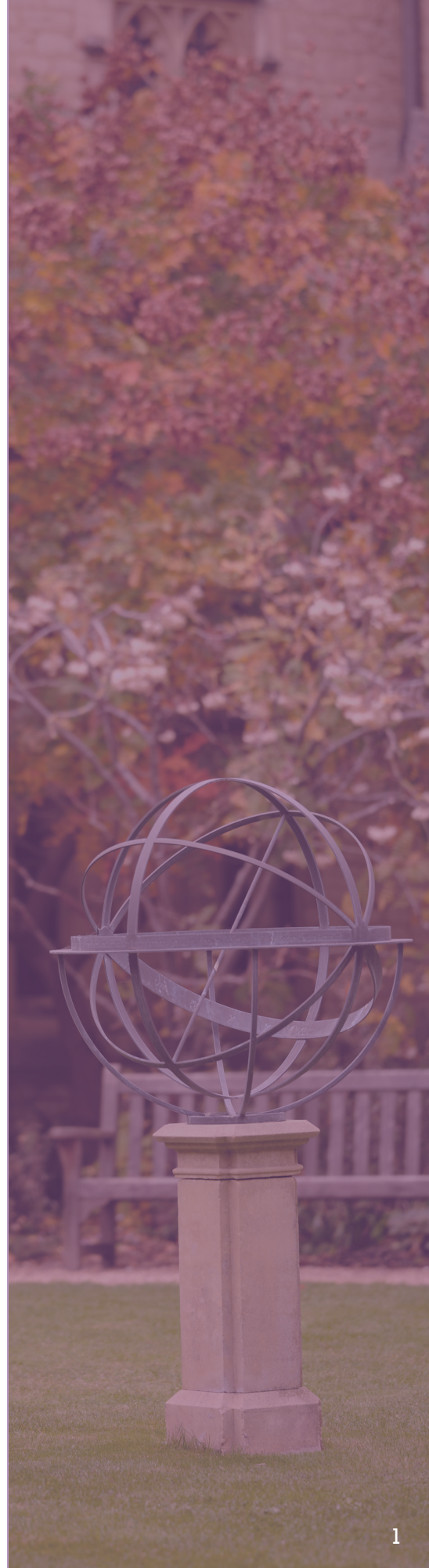
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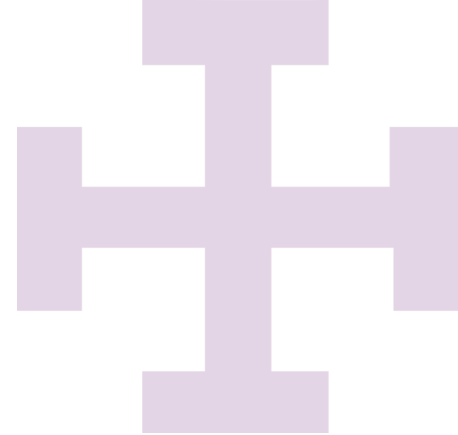
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ST CROSS FACTS & FIGURES



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Books in the
St Cross Library



206

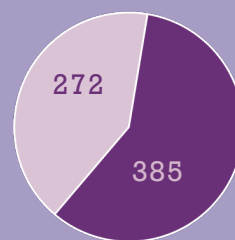
different
degrees

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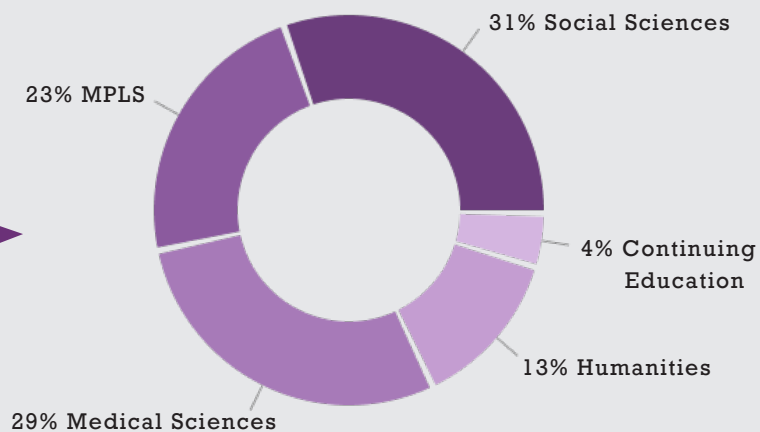
current
students

70

different
countries



DPhil Masters



MASTER'S FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this 60th anniversary edition of *Crossword*.

This academic year marks sixty years since St Cross was founded in 1965. It is a moment to take stock of how the College began, how it has grown, and what has remained distinctive about it throughout. St Cross was established with a clear idea: a graduate college with an interdisciplinary spirit founded on conversing across boundaries of nation and discipline to create a truly unique community. Those principles continue to shape the life of the College today.

In this anniversary year, it feels fitting that this edition of *Crossword* brings together past and present: the College's early story, the symbols and traditions that have given it identity, and the life of the community as it is now. To look back is not simply to revisit origins, but to understand more clearly the character that has endured.

Anniversaries also sharpen our sense of what sustains a college over time. St Cross has been built, quite literally, by generosity — visible every day as we walk through the College inspired by our many spaces and scholarships named in honour of our benefactors. That spirit has been renewed powerfully this year. I am delighted that the target for the matching pledge from David Scrymgeour and Career Essentials Inc. has been met, and I offer my warm thanks to David and to all our wonderful donors who took part. The impact is immediate: support for scholarships and bursaries and improvements to facilities that strengthen daily College life.

And there is more ahead. Our 60th Anniversary Campaign continues, and with it a rare opportunity: the potential development of buildings in nearby Wellington Square, enabling us to add around 100 student rooms almost on our doorstep. For a graduate college, accommodation is not a luxury; it is the bedrock of community. If we can secure this, it will shape St Cross, and the experience of our students, for decades to come.

Wherever you are reading *Crossword*, thank you for staying connected to the College, and for the many ways you support it. I hope you enjoy this anniversary edition, and that it brings you close to St Cross at sixty.



Kate Mavor CBE, Master of St Cross College

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Mavor".

**“ Anniversaries
sharpen our sense
of what sustains a
college over time ”**

TO THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD



SABA ISHRAT
ST LOUIS, MISSOURI, USA

DPhil, Psychiatry, 2022
Postdoctoral Research Associate at Washington University School of Medicine, developing AI-driven neuroimaging biomarkers for Alzheimer's disease.



SUSANA OJEDA HUERTA
LONDON, UK

MSt, Diplomatic Studies, 2023
Diplomat, Head of Economic and Investment Affairs at the Embassy of Peru in the United Kingdom.



JIEUN BAEK
WASHINGTON, DC, USA

DPhil, Public Policy, 2016
Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council whose research examines authoritarian systems and elite dynamics in North Korea and Burma, resulting in multiple book projects with leading academic presses on the internal vulnerabilities of closed regimes.



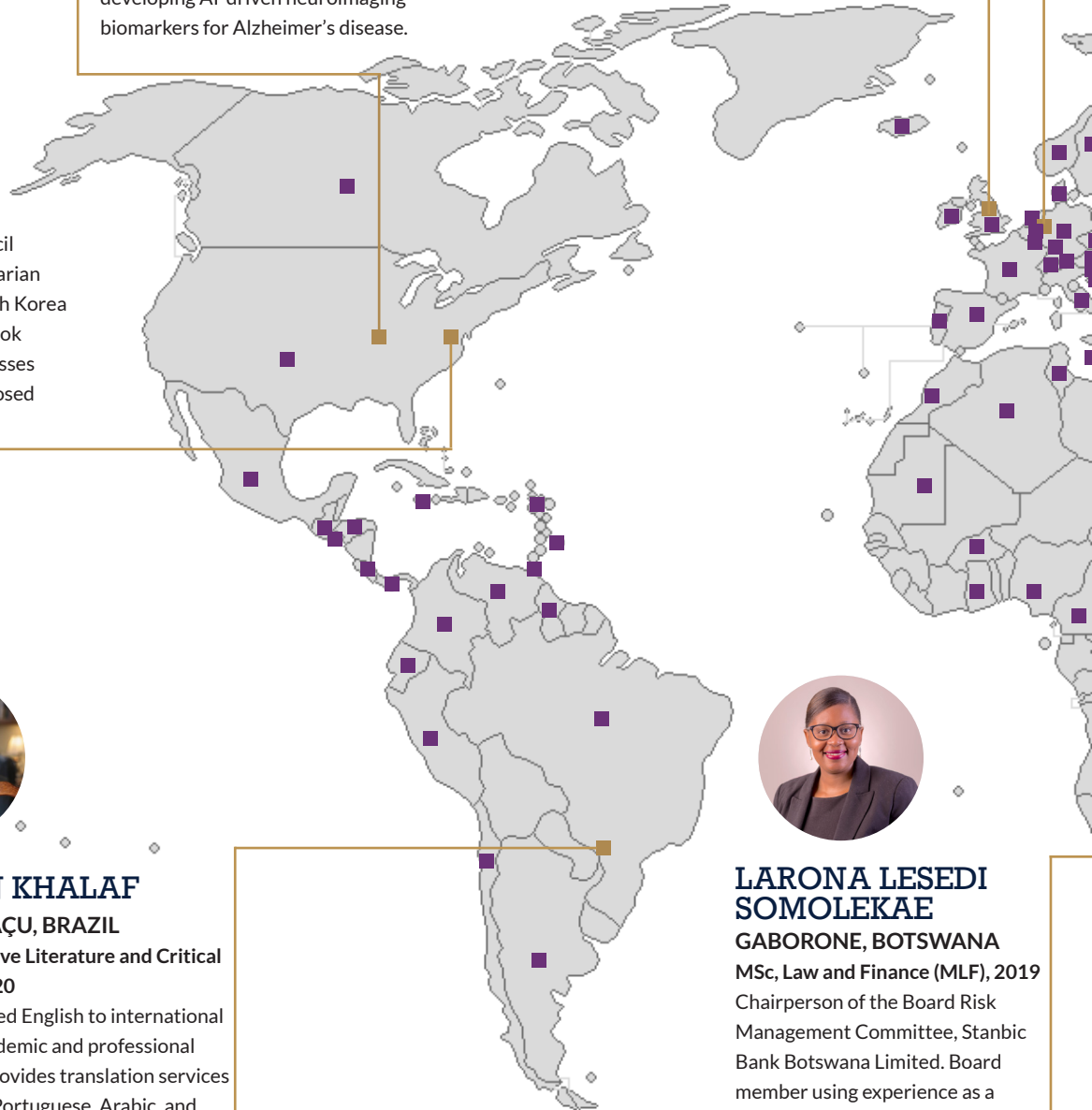
NESSRYN KHALAF
FOZ DO IGUAÇU, BRAZIL
MSt, Comparative Literature and Critical Translation, 2020

Teaches advanced English to international learners for academic and professional purposes and provides translation services across English, Portuguese, Arabic, and Spanish.



LARONA LESEDI SOMOLEKAE
GABORONE, BOTSWANA
MSc, Law and Finance (MLF), 2019

Chairperson of the Board Risk Management Committee, Stanbic Bank Botswana Limited. Board member using experience as a banking and finance lawyer, in a pan-African Bank.



6552

St Crossers

133

Countries

6

Continents



SANDRO WIGGERICH

UNNA, GERMANY

MJur, 2016

First Deputy Mayor and Chief Digital Officer, dedicated to shaping a more connected, sustainable, and culturally vibrant city through digital innovation, climate action, and strategic urban development.



WEI WAN

BEIJING, CHINA

MSc, Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition, 2017

Founded and leads Deying Education, which supports teachers in China to meet internationally recognised standards in English language teaching.



MICHELLE C. LANGLEY

BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

DPhil, Archaeology, 2011

Associate Professor of Archaeology in the Australian Research Centre for Human Evolution (ARCHE) at Griffith University, working on the evolution and diversity of human behaviour through investigating artefacts made on antler, bone, ivory, and shell.



ELVA ZHOU

SINGAPORE

DPhil, Materials Science (Solar), 2008

Regional strategy and operations leader in the platform technology and superapp ecosystem across Southeast Asia, and Adjunct Associate Professor at Nanyang Technological University (Singapore).

Time, Judgment, and the Speed of the World

What happens to diplomacy when the pace of politics accelerates beyond the capacity for reflection? In conversation at St Cross College, Fellows Richard Makepeace and Corneliu Bjola explore time, technology, and the quiet value of thinking slowly in a fast world.

Diplomacy has always been shaped by time: by patience, delay, and the careful sequencing of words and gestures. What happens when those rhythms are compressed—when decisions are demanded instantly, opinions formed publicly, and technology accelerates faster than institutions can adapt? This question sits quietly beneath a recent conversation between Richard Makepeace (Former Registrar, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies) and Corneliu Bjola (Professor of Digital Diplomacy), both Fellows of St Cross College. Richard brings decades of experience as a senior British diplomat, much of it spent in the Middle East. Corneliu approaches diplomacy from a scholarly perspective. As the world's first Professor of Digital Diplomacy, he specialises in the political and ethical consequences of new technologies. Richard & Corneliu's exchange offers a vivid example of intradisciplinary dialogue between practice and theory—one made possible, and perhaps more relaxed, by the collegiate setting they share at St Cross.

Both are acutely aware that diplomacy is built for deliberation. As Corneliu observes, “diplomacy is an institution designed to take things slowly”—a feature, not a flaw, when the stakes are high and judgment matters. Yet digital technologies—social media, artificial intelligence, and what may soon follow—operate at a very different tempo. Over the past decade, he suggests, ministries of foreign affairs have absorbed a series of “cognitive punches”: moments when events online abruptly reshape realities on the ground. The Arab Spring marked a decisive shift, challenging the assumption that online activity could be ignored as marginal. The lesson, as Corneliu puts it plainly, was that “what happens online doesn't stay online”.

Richard recognises this pressure from the practitioner's side. In his earlier career, the gap between event and response gave ministers and officials time to test assumptions, consult advisers, and decide what should be said—or left unsaid. Later technologies narrowed that gap. Communication with London became instantaneous and public reaction followed immediately. Paradoxically, this sometimes strengthened the authority of diplomats on the ground, even as it reduced the space for quiet reflection. What concerned him then, and still does now, is how difficult it has become to protect time for serious decision-making when the expectation is instant response.

The conversation repeatedly returned to the dual nature of technology. Both men acknowledged its bright side: wider



Richard and Corneliu discussing the state of diplomacy in the Saugman Common Room

“ *Diplomacy is an institution designed to take things slowly - a feature, not a flaw, when the stakes are high and judgment matters* ”

access to information, greater transparency, and new channels for engagement.

But they are equally attentive to its darker dimensions. Richard reflects on how social media can become a trap for activists, making dissent visible and therefore punishable in authoritarian contexts. Corneliu widens the lens, pointing to the falling costs of mass surveillance and the rise of cognitive warfare—efforts to distort perception, erode trust, and overwhelm democratic institutions with manipulated information. The deeper problem, as both see it, is not simply speed, but truth: the growing difficulty of sustaining any shared sense of reality.

Publicity is another pressure point. Diplomacy has become more visible and more participatory, yet also more ex-

posed to the emotional economy of online platforms, where outrage travels faster than restraint. Diplomatic language—carefully calibrated and deliberately sober—sits uneasily in spaces optimised for immediacy and entertainment. Civility, Corneliu notes, rarely performs well under algorithmic incentives, even though it remains essential to diplomatic work.

That these reflections unfold not in a policy seminar, but over a college conversation, matters. Both Richard and Corneliu speak warmly of St Cross as a place where such exchanges happen informally: over lunch, across disciplines, and between generations of practice and scholarship. The value lies not in resolving tensions between theory and experience, but in holding them together—allowing ideas to be tested, complicated, and enriched by conversation. In a world that increasingly demands instant conclusions, the College offers something quietly countercultural: time to think together.



ROWING TOGETHER

The shared story of St Cross and Wolfson College Boat Club

In an Oxford rowing world defined by fierce rivalries and long-established traditions, the Wolfson–St Cross Boat Club stands out for a different reason: it is a shared endeavour. Founded in 1969 with St Cross students involved from the start, the club brings together rowers from both colleges to compete each year in Torpids and Summer Eights – and to build something that feels, in the words of its current President, like “one big family of St Cross and Wolfson.”

The story begins in 1969, when the club first competed at Summer Eights. A few years later, in May 1976, Wolfson was among the founding competitors in the first women’s Summer Eights division – an early marker of how closely the club’s history tracks the wider development of Oxford rowing.

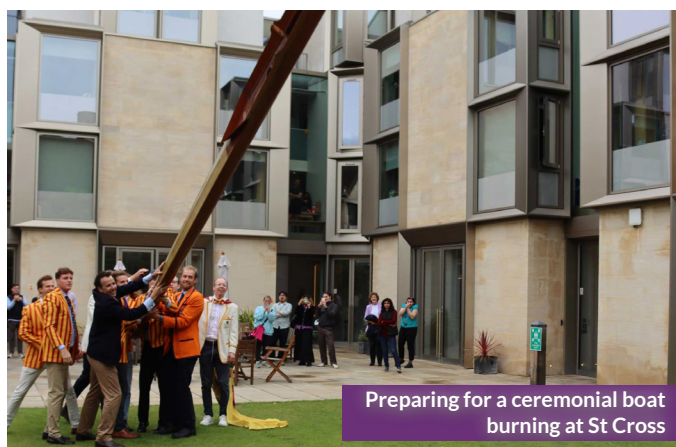
Like many on the river, the club has also had to rebuild. In 1999, the University College boathouse used by Wolfson was destroyed by fire. When the new boathouse opened in 2007, it provided the modern shared base from which the club continues to row today.



If the long view is defined by steady progress, the recent story is defined by momentum. The women’s first crew secured the club’s first ever headship at Summer Eights in 2019, before confirming the club’s top-end competitiveness by holding Torpids headship and defending it the following year.

And then came 2025: a season that felt like a statement. At Torpids, the club’s top open crew took headship for the first time in history. A few weeks later, at Summer Eights, they surged to claim Summer Eights headship for the first time – a landmark week capped by headship blades and celebrations back at St Cross, including a ceremonial boat burning.

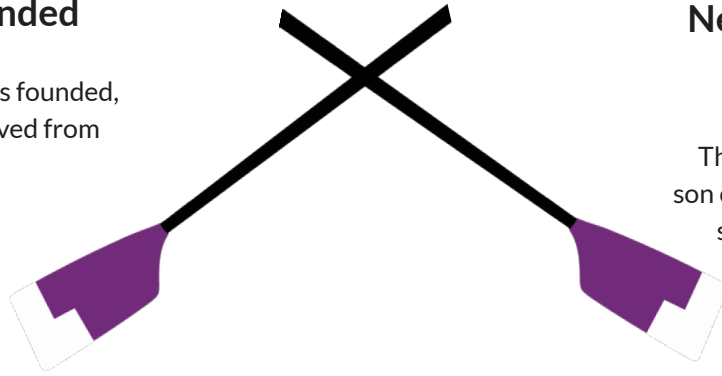
Club membership figures over the past decade show St Cross students consistently make up around half of the rowers across women’s and open squads – and in the most recent seasons, including the breakthrough year, St Cross formed a clear majority overall. Put simply: the club’s winning crews are also a story of shared success.



1969

A shared club is founded

Wolfson College Boat Club is founded, with St Cross students involved from the start.



2007

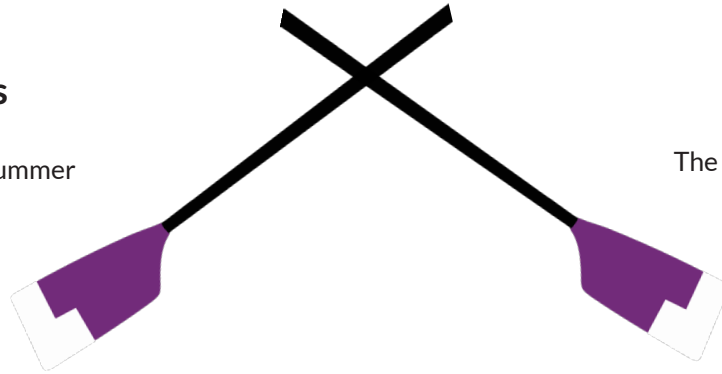
New University College Boathouse opens

The new boathouse opens; Wolfson continues to row from facilities shared with University College.

1969

First Summer Eights

The club first competes at Summer Eights.



2019

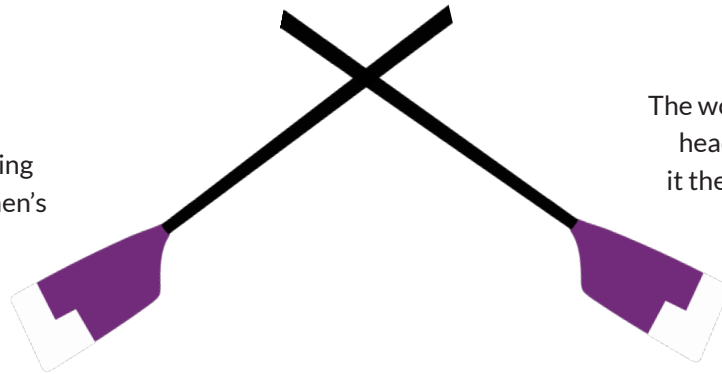
First club headship

The women's first crew secures the club's first Summer Eights headship.

1976

Women's Summer Eights begins

Wolfson is among the founding competitors in the first women's Summer Eights division.



2021

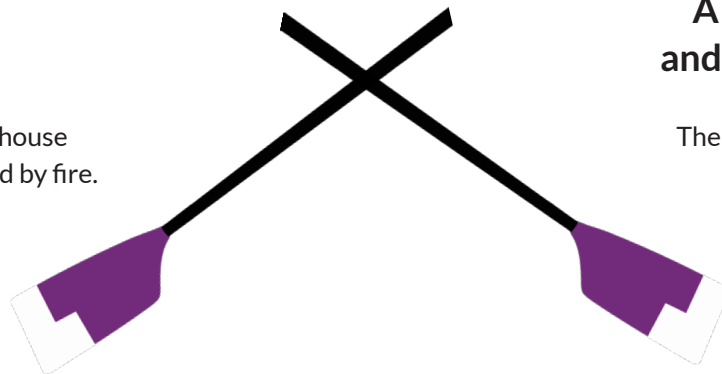
Women set the pace

The women's first crew holds Torpids headship and successfully defends it the following year, confirming the club's strength at the top of the charts.

1999

Boathouse destroyed by fire

The University College boathouse used by Wolfson is destroyed by fire.



2025

A breakthrough double and St Cross celebrations

The club's top open boat crew took headship in both Torpids and Summer Eights.

Interviews

LAKSHANIE WICKRAMASINGHE

ST CROSS KNOOP RESEARCH FELLOW OF OPHTHALMOLOGY AND
KENNEDY TRUST TRANSITION FELLOW OF RHEUMATOLOGY

Dr Lakshanie Wickramasinghe's research explores how inflammation develops within the eye – and how it connects to inflammatory disease elsewhere in the body – in the search for more precise, steroid-sparing treatments. The St Cross Fellowship she holds is funded by the Hung Cheng & Baroness Olga Knoop Trust for Ophthalmic Research, named in honour of former Fellow, and distinguished eye surgeon, Hung Cheng and one of his patients.



Inflammation, Lakshanie Wickramasinghe argues, is rarely confined to a single organ. It signals imbalance – a disruption in the regulation that keeps tissues functioning as they should. Her work begins from the premise that the eye is not isolated, and that to understand disease within it, one must look beyond it.

Raised and educated in Melbourne, she completed her undergraduate and doctoral training at Monash University, studying immunology in preterm infants. Even then, systems overlapped: babies treated for underdeveloped lungs could also sustain retinal damage. The body does not divide neatly into specialities.

She arrived in Oxford at the end of 2021 as an Oxford Janssen Fellow at the Kennedy Institute of Rheumatology. In 2024 she became the Knoop Research Fellow of Ophthalmology at St Cross, and she is now also a Kennedy Trust Transition Fellow of Rheumatology. Her research focus is on anterior uveitis, characterised by inflammation affecting the front of the eye.

Anterior uveitis accounts for approximately 75% of uveitis cases, and often affects people of working age. Steroid eye drops suppress inflammation quickly, but repeated use can lead to complications including glaucoma and cataracts. The condition is managed, yet our understanding of the biology of this disease is limited. Parts of the eye were long considered relatively immune-privileged, and access to diseased tissue is rare. Basic questions persisted: which cells are present, how is homeostasis maintained and which cells are driving inflammation in some people's eyes?

Her group has mapped the cellular landscape of the uveal tract using advanced genetic sequencing and imaging. The work identified not only immune cells but fibroblasts – structural cells now recognised elsewhere as active regulators of inflammation. The importance of this research has been recognised by Fight for Sight UK and RoseTrees Trust charities. In joints and skin they play established roles; in the eye, they remain understudied.



Given that anterior uveitis co-presents in 7-20% of patients with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, she is investigating whether fibroblasts across these tissues share functional traits, and whether mechanical forces contribute to what she describes as mechano-inflammation. “Interdisciplinarity gives me the space to be creative and look beyond existing paradigms”, she reflects. The aim is measured: to develop treatments that reduce reliance on steroids and act more precisely on the cellular drivers of disease, while moving gradually towards more personalised approaches.

At the Kennedy Institute she describes a culture of collaboration and openness. College life offers a different register: as a Fellow of St Cross, she has found a setting that extends her experience of Oxford beyond the laboratory.

That extension is most visible in Dr Wickramasinghe’s role as Dean of Degrees, overseeing matriculation and graduation ceremonies for St Cross students. The responsibility is formal, but she approaches it with care and enthusiasm. Matriculation marks entry into the University; graduation marks completion. In both, she represents the College at moments of transition for students.



At lab microscope looking at eye fibroblasts

Although she may not have directly supervised all those whose hands she shakes, she understands what these occasions signify. Having completed a PhD herself, she recognises the mixture of relief and reflection that accompanies academic milestones. The role requires time – many Saturdays in subfusc – and steadiness. For her, the ceremonies are acknowledgements of labour and resilience, situating research within a wider academic life, and moments to wish students the very best – whether at the start of their Oxford journey or at its close, as they begin the next chapter.

Engaging with patient partners is an integral part of her research, ensuring that scientific discoveries are aligned with patient needs and translated into meaningful improvements in care. The objective remains constant: to prevent avoidable vision loss and preserve sight for longer.

For Dr Wickramasinghe, the eye is not peripheral but a point of convergence – where immune regulation, mechanical force and cellular balance meet. By studying that convergence carefully, she hopes to shift not only how inflammation is treated, but how it is understood.

If you would like to learn more about anterior uveitis research, please feel free to contact Dr Lakshanie Wickramasinghe at lakshanie.wickramasinghe@kennedy.ox.ac.uk or via LinkedIn.

“ Interdisciplinarity gives me the space to be creative and look beyond existing paradigms ”

SYMBOLS OF ST CROSS FEATURE

Rooted in Flight: 25 Years of St Cross' Colours

For much of its early life, St Cross College existed by habit rather than heraldry. Founded in 1965 as a deliberately informal and interdisciplinary graduate college, it long preferred practice to pomp. By the late 1990s, however, the absence of a recognisable emblem was increasingly jarring: other new colleges had been granted arms, while St Cross appeared in the University Calendar with a conspicuous blank space where its shield ought to have been.

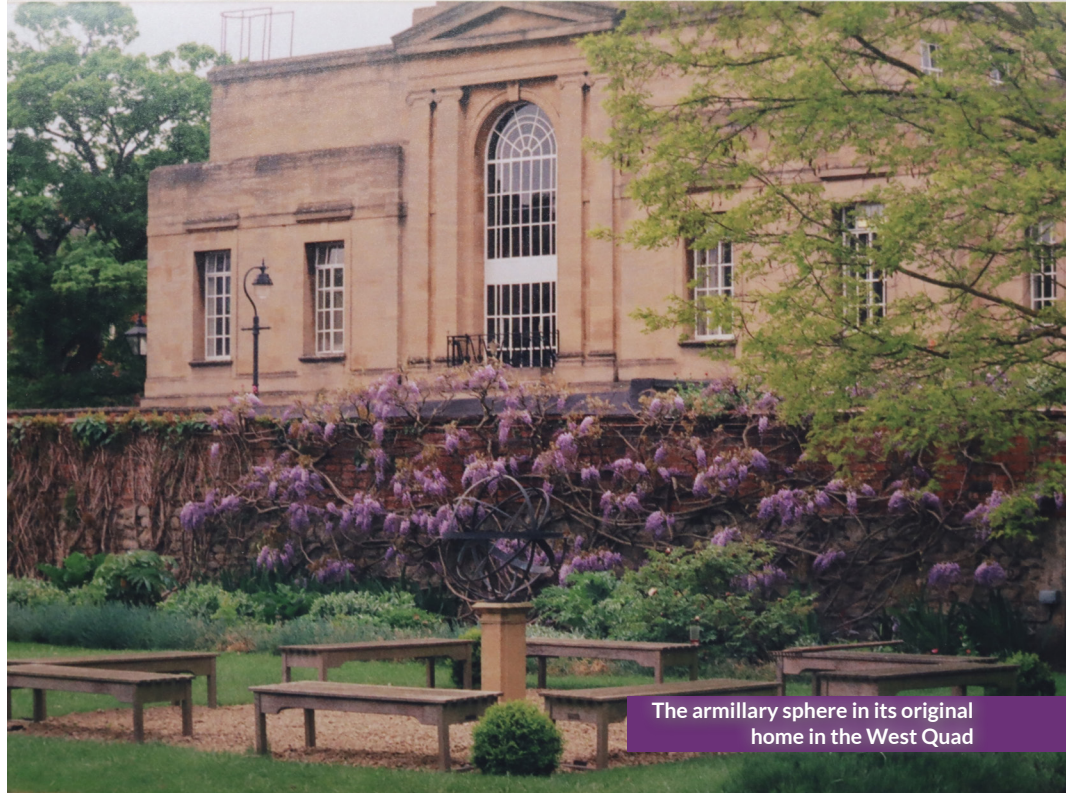


The successful application to the College of Arms (the official body conferring coats of arms) was completed in 2000, thanks in large part to the persistence of Fellow John Tiffany, who guided a design process rooted firmly in the College's material history. Central to the shield was the familiar purple cross potent on a silver ground, a form already in informal use and derived from architectural details associated with the original St Cross Road site. Purple was chosen deliberately: rare in heraldry, it conveyed dignity without hierarchy, and also echoed the deep hue of mulberries long associated with the College's earliest home.



Early proposals for College sporting attire and equipment, made by John Tiffany, ca. 2000

The crest drew together symbols that were both local and outward-looking



The crest drew together symbols that were both local and outward-looking. Its armillary sphere was modelled on the one forged by David Harper and installed in the College garden in June 1999, a gift in memory of former student Ronald Hurst. Quickly adopted as a focal point of College life, the sphere gave visual expression to St Cross's international outlook and naturally informed the motto *Ad quattuor cardines mundi* – “to the four corners of the world”.

Above the sphere stands a white dove carrying a sprig of mulberry – a deliberately layered image. As John Tiffany later observed, the dove can be read as a sign of peace, but it was also intended to suggest movement or “flight”, recalling the College's transition from its modest beginnings in a hut on St Cross Road to its present home on St Giles. The mulberry sprig deepens that symbolism.

It gestures not only to the much-loved mulberry tree that shaded the original hut, but also to a second mulberry tree that grew in the West Quad at the St Giles site that was lost during subsequent building works. In this sense, the crest binds together continuity and change: rooted memory carried forward across sites.

When the arms were formally granted in 2000, they did not mark a sudden turn towards tradition for its own sake. Instead, they gave lasting visual form to values St Cross had long embodied.

As the College marks its 60th anniversary alongside the 25th anniversary of its coat of arms, that pairing feels fitting: a reminder that St Cross spent its first decades discovering what it was, before choosing how to represent itself.

The symbols endure not because they were adopted early, but because they arrived at the right moment – earned, reflective, and quietly confident.



An embroidery of the College Coat of Arms made by John Tiffany and his wife Marie Nonnila Eynon Tiffany

Interviews

GUOPENG CHEN

DPHIL IN ARCHAEOLOGY; GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

From China to Central America, St Cross DPhil Student Guopeng Chen approaches Maya archaeology as a study of resilience, imagination, and alternative ways of being human. His work is grounded in fieldwork, theory, and the everyday life of a highly international graduate community.

On a field season in Belize, Guopeng Chen climbed the steep steps of Lamanai's High Temple before dawn. At the top, rainforest and lagoon opened out into a horizon that made time feel unusually large. "We climbed up to see the sunrise", he recalls. "It was an amazing experience". Then, with the dry candour of someone who has done real fieldwork, he recounted that the mosquitoes were "horrible". Howler monkeys called from the trees—"very curious, very loud"—as if supervising the archaeologists' early start.

That mixture of wonder and plain-spokenness runs through Guopeng's story. He is quick to describe his route into archaeology as "kind of an accident". As an undergraduate in Beijing, he scanned the usual humanities pathways—law, economics, politics—and found them "a bit boring". Archaeology, by contrast, sounded "fun". It was, and he "just kept doing it".

If the first step was accidental, his commitment has been deliberate: a sustained curiosity about how humans make meaning, organise society, and relate to the material world. What draws him most is archaeological theory—the way archaeology borrows from philosophy, anthropology, history and the social sciences, and uses those tools to ask bigger questions. He noticed early that theory sits differently in different places. In China, he explains, archaeological training is less centred on theoretical debate; the UK offered a richer home for that kind of work; it is "probably the only place that trains theoretical archaeology as a profession".



Guopeng also brings to the discipline a personal sensitivity to movement. He was born in Anhui province, grew up in Jiangsu, spent years in Beijing, and then moved to the UK; even his sense of "home" shifts with each return. "Every time I go back home it's a new home," he says. "I've been moving around different places. My thoughts move around." It sounds like autobiography, but it is also method: a readiness to think in transitions rather than fixed categories.

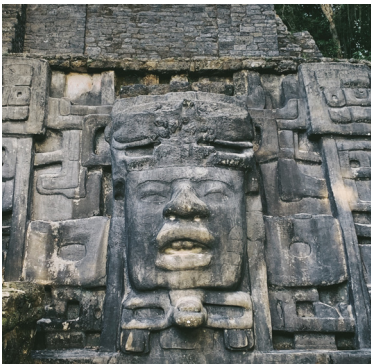
The Maya entered his work later, during his MPhil, when he began looking beyond a largely China-focused curriculum. Part of the attraction was the scale of difference and part was the thrill of unexpected echoes: shared aesthetic investments in jade and ceramics, and even the strange parallel of a “rabbit on the moon” in both Maya and Chinese traditions.

His DPhil focuses on the so-called Classic Maya Collapse (roughly the eighth to eleventh centuries CE), often narrated as a dramatic decline across parts of the lowlands. Guopeng is drawn to the limits of that word “collapse”. His key case study is Lamanai, a site in Belize with a remarkably long occupation history. While many centres experienced sharp disruption, Lamanai endured—through political upheaval, then through Spanish and British colonialism, and into the present as a lived landscape. “That’s the thing that excites me a lot,” he says: “how people can become resilient...with turmoil, with drastic social and political changes.”

“**Archaeology shows possibility: we can do things differently — and we have**”

Asked what the present should “learn” from this, he resists neat moral takeaways. “I wouldn’t view history and archaeology as a repository of lessons,” he says. Instead, the past offers something more honest and more useful: “It shows possibility...we can do things differently—and we have.”

At St Cross, that outlook finds a natural home. Guopeng speaks warmly of a “friendly and international community...where international students are the majority”, and where conversation becomes a daily seminar in other people’s worlds. For a researcher interested in how societies change—and how ideas travel—St Cross is more than a backdrop. It is, in miniature, part of the argument: intellectual life is richest when it is shared, multilingual, and unafraid of the unfamiliar.



Mask Temple, Lamanai



Madrid Codex Facsimile



View from the top of the High Temple

ST CROSS BEFORE ST GILES: LIFE AT THE HUT

Affectionately known as “the Hut”, St Cross’ first home was a prefabricated building tucked behind the Old Schoolhouse on St Cross Road, at the site of a former vicarage. Although only a temporary home, it has achieved an almost mythical status in the memory of the College’s earliest fellows and students.

“Our time in the Hut,” one early Fellow later wrote, “represents the childhood of the College.” It is an image that feels exactly right. Like childhood, those early years were close, intense and formative. From the College’s founding in 1965 until the move to St Giles in 1981, daily life unfolded at close quarters — and in doing so established habits of community that would long outlast the wooden building itself.

From the outside, the structure looked exactly like what it was: a prefabricated wooden building near St Cross Church, practical and unadorned. Inside, however, it felt warmer than its exterior suggested. The common room walls were lined with William Morris wallpaper; it was tastefully appointed with mid-century modern furnishings, and the adjoining Victorian schoolroom served as a library and meeting space. It was modest by the standards of medieval college common rooms, but it was warm and modern, and a space much beloved by Fellows and students alike.



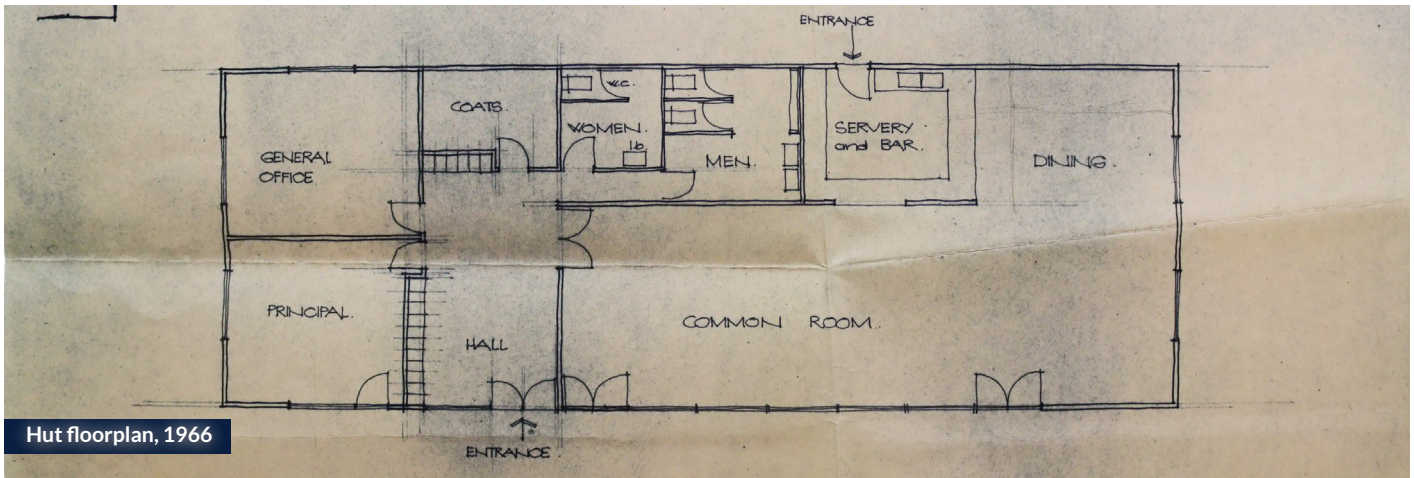
Common Room in the Hut, 1970

What defined life there above all was scale. In the early days there were only around forty Fellows and a handful of students. Everyone ate together and knew one another’s names, and friendships formed across disciplines with ease. Within its small boundaries, as one recalled, the Fellows were able to live “a most attractive collegiate life.” Proximity was not a strategy, it was simply how things were — and it drew people into a shared life almost without their noticing.

Lunch formed the centre of gravity. Meals were served from the kitchen door by Mrs Collins: soup, a hot dish, a cold table along the sideboard, and memorably, great wheels of Stilton into which spoons were freely plunged. Tables ran along the walls because the room allowed nothing more ambitious. Some gravitated to upright dining chairs; others preferred the easy chairs around lower tables — the affectionate divide between “dining chair addicts and easy chair addicts” was recalled fondly. Conversation drifted easily from research to University politics to the small comedies of daily life.



Fellows converse in the Common Room



Hut floorplan, 1966

Outside, the lawn provided its own quiet rituals. At its centre stood a mulberry tree. In season, fruit was gathered after lunch and sometimes transformed into much-remembered mulberry tarts. That same tree still stands today – and now appears on the College crest, a living emblem of continuity between those early days and the present. The St Cross Road site remains part of College life: buildings known as “The Annexe” were completed in 1996 to provide student accommodation, ensuring that this first home continues to house graduate scholars.

Although the architecture was provisional, something lasting took root there. The building was temporary. The instinct to gather – daily, informally, across difference – was not. Long before St Cross had a quad, it had the experience of living closely together. That, perhaps, is the Hut’s real legacy.



Outside the Hut before dinner



Inside the Old Schoolhouse

“ Like childhood, those early years were close, intense and formative ”

Interviews

JAID DEBRAH

DPHIL RESEARCHER IN BIOCHEMISTRY AND PRESIDENT OF THE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE (SRC)

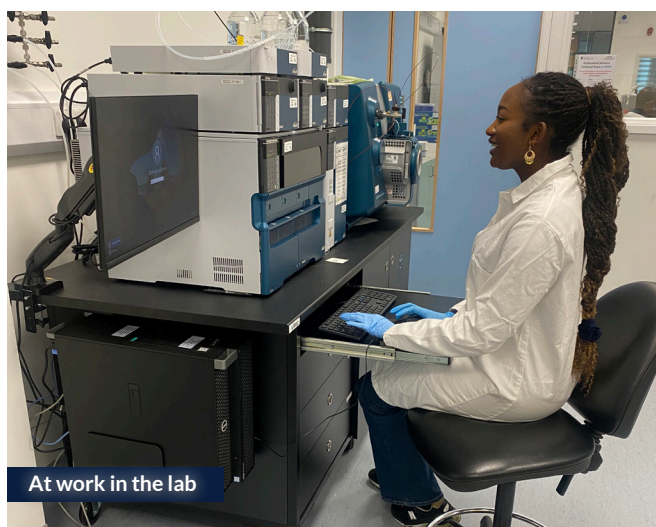
When Jaid arrived at St Cross, she had not chosen it. Allocated through Oxford's open system, she came to the College new to the University and having missed part of Freshers' Fortnight. What she encountered was a place that felt, almost immediately, liveable. It was, she recalls, "very homely": active and social, but not overwhelming; busy without feeling impersonal.

Originally from Clapham in south London, Jaid studied biochemistry at the University of Essex before completing a master's degree at Imperial College London, specialising in immunology. Between her master's and doctorate, she worked in academic publishing, an experience that sharpened her sense of what she wanted from her career. While she enjoyed engaging with scientific ideas, she found herself increasingly frustrated by the corporate structures surrounding them. "I needed to be on the science side", she says — to be generating research, not simply managing its circulation. That realisation led her back into academia and, ultimately, to a DPhil undertaken in partnership with NHS Blood and Transplant.



Her research sits at the intersection of public health, policy, and inclusion. Building on changes introduced in 2021 to blood donation rules for gay and bisexual men—moving away from decades-old blanket restrictions toward an individualised risk assessment framework—Jaid's work examines blood safety following this reform. Using unused plasma from ineligible donations, she looks for markers that could improve modern screening practices, particularly in relation to sexually transmitted infections and the use of the HIV prevention medication, PrEP. While technically complex, the work is grounded in human consequence. Jaid is acutely aware of the communities affected by policy decisions, and she describes herself as always seeing the person behind the data.

What surprised her most about doctoral research at Oxford was the level of trust she was given early on. Independence came quickly, alongside a culture of support rather than scrutiny. Mistakes were treated as shared problems to be solved, not personal failures. That environment, she says, gave her confidence — not only to manage her own pace of work, but to suggest new ideas and expand the scope of her project.



Outside the lab, Jaid threw herself into College life. Joining the bar team became an unexpectedly important step, offering a relaxed way to meet people across disciplines and degree stages. Sport followed, including rugby, where she helped build a visible St Cross presence within the University. Over time, the College became her default place of thinking and rest. “I always end up at St Cross”, she says. “When I need a break, I just go to the common room and someone I know will be there.”



That everyday sense of belonging underpins her role as President of the Student Representative Committee. Having previously served as Bar Manager, Jaid was drawn to leadership that focused on facilitation rather than direction: enabling representatives to succeed, and ensuring students felt heard across a diverse graduate community. Representation, for her, begins with listening – sitting in conversations, understanding different priorities, and working towards balance rather than quick fixes.

“ When I need a break, I just go to the common room and someone I know will be there ”

Looking back, Jaid hopes she will remember not just what she achieved at St Cross, but how she achieved it. The resilience she built, she says, was collective – shaped by staff, fellow students, and the informal rituals of College life. At St Cross, she found a community that placed few expectations on who she should be, giving her the space to grow: as a researcher, a leader, and a fully engaged member of a shared academic home.



Articles

SCHOLARSHIP IMPACT REPORTS



BASHA WAXMAN
MSc QUANTUM TECHNOLOGIES,
Anne Vandenaabee Scholarship
in Quantum Technologies

She is an MSc student in Oxford's new Quantum Technologies programme and part of the very first cohort. Her research interests focus on improving hardware for quantum computation, communication, and networking. Prior to Oxford, she completed her undergraduate education at Princeton, where she worked on device engineering for superconducting qubits and circuits in the de Leon group. This experience

continues to motivate her interest in addressing key challenges in quantum hardware, such as decoherence and scalability. Scholarship support from alumna Anne Vandenaabee has made it possible for her to pursue this transformative opportunity as she prepares to pursue a PhD and a career in quantum science and engineering. At St Cross, she values the College's vibrant and welcoming graduate community.



SEBASTIAN OLIVER ECK
DPHIL MUSIC,
Hélène La Rue Scholarship
in Music

His research sits at the intersection of historic musicology and artificial intelligence. With a Bachelor's in Musicology (Weimar) and an MSc in Digital Scholarship (Oxford), he is particularly fascinated by how Multimodal Large Language Models (MLLMs) can support historiographic research across disciplines. His DPhil focuses on the posthumous publication of two of Max Reger's (1873–1916) early compositions, examining the role of his teacher, Adalbert Lindner (1860–

1946), in this process. Receiving the Hélène La Rue Scholarship, established by a legacy from St Cross Fellow Hélène La Rue, has meant a great deal to him, providing the freedom to dedicate himself fully to his studies while also supporting digital scholarship initiatives in Oxford, including founding and leading Oxford's first Digital Scholarship Society (OxDSS). At St Cross, he values the mature, interdisciplinary community.



WENDPANGA BOUA
MSc EDUCATION,
St Cross for Africa & Mastercard
Foundation Scholarship

His academic interests lie in Comparative and International Education, with a particular focus on education policy, inequality, and the role of education in social and economic development. Coming from Burkina Faso, he is especially interested in how education systems in low- and middle-income countries can be strengthened to improve access, quality, and equity, particularly for disadvantaged communities and girls.

He describes the Mastercard Foundation and St Cross for Africa Scholarship, supported by the College's alumni and friends, as both practical and symbolic. It has significantly reduced financial pressures and, just as importantly, served as a strong vote of confidence in his abilities, strengthening his determination to pursue his academic and professional goals within the College's diverse and inclusive community.

Articles

ST CROSS AFRICA CONNECTIONS



Africa at St Cross

Engagement with Africa has long been part of St Cross College's intellectual life. Through publishing, partnership, and scholarship, the College supports work that spans disciplines and generations, connecting Oxford with scholars, institutions, and ideas across the African continent.



The James Currey Collection

One of St Cross's most distinctive resources is the James Currey Collection, a major archive of African Studies and literature, unique among Oxford colleges in its scope and focus. The collection includes every first edition published under the James Currey imprint – publications that have played a formative role in shaping the field of African studies – and continues to grow through an ongoing partnership with Boydell & Brewer. Far from being a static archive, it is an active centre of scholarship, used by students, Fellows, and visiting researchers, and featured in events and open days that engage with African histories, cultures, and contemporary debates.



AfOx and Partnership with Africa

St Cross also plays an active and growing role in the Africa Oxford Initiative (AfOx), the University's platform for building equitable research partnerships between Oxford and African institutions, and for expanding opportunities for African students and researchers. Thanks to the generosity of alumni and friends, the College is able to partner with the Mastercard Foundation in supporting scholarships – making it possible for outstanding African students to pursue graduate study at Oxford within a truly international College community. Scholarship recipients and Visiting Fellows are welcomed at St Cross across a wide range of disciplines, where they contribute immensely to the academic and social life of the College. In recognition of its impact, the AfOx team received the University of Oxford's inaugural Vice-Chancellor's Award for Outstanding Contribution in 2024.



Research about Africa

Africa features prominently in the work of many St Cross Fellows. Their research ranges across disciplines – from history and archaeology to economics, medicine, law, diplomacy, and public policy – and is shaped by close engagement with people, places, and lived experiences. This work reflects the College's interdisciplinary spirit: Africa is not approached from a single standpoint, but through many overlapping conversations, where different methods and perspectives inform and enrich one another.

Interviews

RICARDO MÁRQUEZ GÓMEZ

SENIOR RESEARCH SCIENTIST, DEPARTMENT OF PHYSIOLOGY,
ANATOMY & GENETICS, FORMER RESEARCH FELLOW OF ST CROSS



Ricardo in St Cross College

Listening to neurons

It is an oddly intimate thing, to watch neurons “talk”.

Not merely a metaphor, but a literal exchange: cells sending signals, building circuits, falling quiet, misfiring, adapting. For Dr Ricardo Márquez Gómez, that close-up fascination began with a simple question: how do neurons communicate with one another?

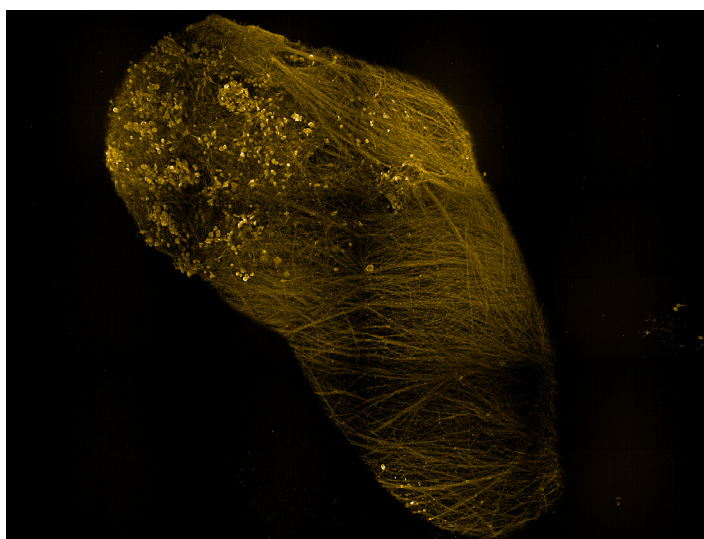
Today that question shapes his work at Oxford, where he leads a team combining chemistry and neuroscience to build human-based “mini-brain” circuits in the lab—models designed to make dementias such as Parkinson’s easier to study. “We’re trying to generate new technologies to speed up how we understand dementia”, he says.

From Chihuahua to Neuroscience

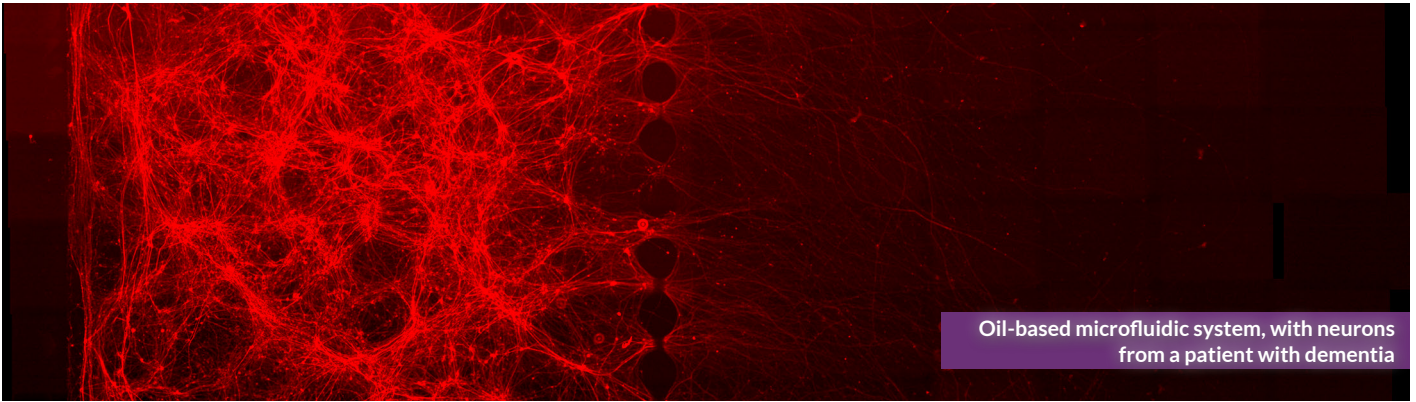
Ricardo’s route into neuroscience was indirect. Born in Parral in Mexico’s Chihuahua state and raised in the city of Chihuahua, he studied locally before a stint in medical school exposed him to big clinical questions. A neurology professor’s influence nudged him towards research, but it was chemistry that offered the leverage he wanted. “Small molecules can be used to explore the brain”, he recalls.

That idea shaped his postgraduate work at CINVESTAV in Mexico City, where he trained in neuropharmacology for both his master’s and PhD. Throughout, one idea persisted: neurons are constantly communicating, and disease often emerges when those conversations break down.

Parkinson’s, he puts it bluntly, is “a disease of quiet neurons”. His research asks a straightforward, but urgent, question: why do they go quiet?



Hand printed oil-droplet showing dopamine neurons (yellow, left) and their axons (right) which will establish communication with other neurons



Oil-based microfluidic system, with neurons from a patient with dementia

Oxford, unexpectedly collaborative

After completing his PhD, Ricardo looked abroad. A direct approach—emailing researchers whose work interested him—led to Oxford’s Department of Pharmacology and a Newton International Fellowship in 2019.

Before arriving, he admits, he expected Oxford to be “snobby and old-fashioned”. What he found instead was deeply collaborative, international, and strikingly self-directed. Researchers were encouraged to shape their own paths, an independence that reshaped how he thought about building a scientific career.

During this period, Ricardo began working with induced pluripotent stem cells and brain modelling, bringing chemistry and neuroscience together. The aim was clear: use human neurons arranged into circuits to understand what changes when Parkinson’s-related mutations are introduced.

Building better brain models

Ricardo’s work now centres on developing small, controllable systems—often described as open microfluidics—that model aspects of the human brain. Unlike animal models, these platforms aim to reflect human biology more closely, while remaining scalable enough for systematic testing.

That sense of impact extended beyond the lab when Ricardo became a Junior Research Fellow at St Cross College in 2022. Without a college affiliation, he notes, postdoctoral researchers can feel like outsiders in Oxford.

The JRF changed that. “I felt more enthusiastic about my day-to-day activities”, he recalls, pointing to the College’s talks, social life, and informal lunches.

As a graduate college, St Cross offered easy conversations across disciplines and a strong sense of community.

From those conversations grew CrossLinks, an interdisciplinary initiative Ricardo helped develop following the arrival of the new Master in 2023. “Interdisciplinary sharing is already happening over lunches”, he says. “It just needs an outlet and support from St Cross’s donors”.

To learn more about CrossLinks, visit the dedicated page on the St Cross website



Looking ahead

With ageing populations, the need for better dementia research tools is pressing. Ricardo’s ambition remains deliberately practical: to build systems that work consistently, allowing better questions to be asked more quickly.

For him, St Cross has been part of that story—a place that fostered connection, curiosity, and collaboration. It is a reminder that progress in science, like progress in communities, often begins simply with people—and neurons—learning how to communicate.

“ We’re trying to generate new technologies to speed up how we understand dementia ”

Articles

Chevening CRISP and Gurukul at St Cross: A Natural Home for Leadership and Innovation

Each year, mid-career leaders from India and Sri Lanka arrive in Oxford for an intensive period of study, reflection, and exchange. At St Cross, two distinctive fellowship programmes – Gurukul and CRISP – have found not just a base, but a home.



On a warm evening in the St Cross quads, it is not unusual to hear conversations that move effortlessly from health policy to artificial intelligence, from infrastructure to community leadership. The speakers are often students or Fellows—but they are also often participants in two Chevening-supported fellowship programmes based at St Cross: the Gurukul Fellowship and the Chevening Research, Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP) Fellowship.

Both programmes bring accomplished professionals from South Asia to Oxford for 11 weeks of residential study: CRISP fellows in the spring, and Gurukul fellows in the

autumn. Both aim to deepen professional expertise while strengthening ties between the UK and the Indian sub-continent. Yet each has its own history, constituency, and intellectual emphasis.

The Gurukul Fellowship, its name drawn from an ancient Indian model of residential education, meaning “home of the teacher”, is the older of the two, though it was originally based in London. Initiated by the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and moved to Oxford in 2017, it is delivered in partnership with the University’s Department of Politics and International Relations (DPIR).

Gurukul brings senior leaders from India—often with substantial experience in government, public policy, or public life—for a period of reflection and renewal. Over time, its cohort has broadened, but its focus on leadership, excellence, and public impact remains. Gurukul fellows become Members of Common Room at St Cross, fully integrated into College life.

CRISP, by contrast, emerged around 2010, with its first cohort arriving in Oxford in 2011. Hosted by St Cross, it concentrates more explicitly on science, innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology policy. It draws mid-career professionals from India and Sri Lanka whose work sits at the intersection of research, enterprise, and government, and whose leadership is often shaped by rapidly evolving technological environments.

Selection for both programmes is rigorous and highly competitive. Those chosen are not only individuals who would benefit from participating, but those judged capable of contributing to their cohort and to wider UK–South Asia relationships.

Once in Oxford, fellows encounter what one organiser has described as “a mixture of structured and unstructured” learning. A core academic schedule – partly co-designed with participants and covering global challenges and leadership – is combined with extensive visits including to Parliament, the Indian High Commission, and Scotland. Each fellow develops an individual project—ranging from business plans to social initiatives—which culminates in a presentation and a tangible output to take home.

But the programmes are not confined to seminar rooms. Fellows volunteer locally, including at the Cutteslowe Community Larder, and live together in small groups in central Oxford, forming bonds that are often just as significant as the formal curriculum.

It is here that St Cross proves to be more than a host institution. As a graduate college with an international and interdisciplinary character, it offers what one programme leader calls “a natural home for a wide-ranging programme of this nature”. The College’s egalitarian culture—where students, Fellows, and visitors meet readily over coffee—can be striking for participants accustomed to more hierarchical academic environments. The atmosphere encourages intellectual risk-taking and honest exchange.

Gurukul fellows arrive with substantial professional experience and bring distinct worldviews shaped by senior leadership roles in India. CRISP fellows contribute perspectives from rapidly developing science and innovation sectors across the Indian subcontinent. In turn, both groups integrate quickly into College life. The moment when participants begin referring to St Cross as “their” College—and pull on their initialled hoodies without self-consciousness—has become an informal marker that the programme is truly working.

The impact is mutual. Fellows extend invitations back to India and Sri Lanka; collaborations and business links have emerged; and St Cross students gain first-hand perspectives on public life and innovation in South Asia. What began as institutional partnerships has become, over time, a web of personal and professional relationships.

Since Gurukul’s move to Oxford in 2017, it has come to feel increasingly organic within the College. Each iteration strengthens the sense that these fellowships are not peripheral initiatives, but part of what St Cross does best: convening people from different disciplines and backgrounds, and giving them space to think together.

In that sense, CRISP and Gurukul are not only programmes hosted at St Cross. They are expressions of the College’s character: international, graduate, interdisciplinary, and confident in the belief that sustained conversation can change both institutions and individuals.



Dorian Singh

Assistant Director of Chevening Fellowships (CRISP & Gurukul) for both the Department of Politics and International Relations and St Cross College



Richard Briant

Emeritus Fellow of St Cross and Associate Fellow at Saïd Business School, Richard directs the Chevening CRISP and Gurukul Fellowships

Interviews

WAMBUI KAMIRU COLLYMORE

ST CROSS ALUMNA, MSc AFRICAN STUDIES

Wambui Kamiru Collymore (MSc African Studies, 2007) builds installations (pictured below and at right) that look deceptively calm. Beneath their surfaces lie questions about history, memory and identity – questions she first began to sharpen during her time at St Cross.

In her studio, research materials sit alongside objects that might, at first glance, appear ordinary: beads, domestic forms, fragments of text, repeated marks. Nothing announces itself dramatically. The work asks to be approached slowly.

Wambui Kamiru Collymore's installations often begin in archives – and in conversation. She works with oral histories and museum collections. She asks what documents leave out, and what memory preserves.

“Both history and art are storytelling,” she says. What differs is how the story reaches people.

That instinct – to question how knowledge is shaped and shared – long predates her artistic career. Before she committed fully to art, she was immersed in research. Raised between the United States and Kenya, she grew up in an environment shaped by inquiry; her mother was a scientist, and



Wambui Kamiru in Nairobi

the habits of careful reading and questioning came early. By the time she arrived in Oxford for the MSc in African Studies, she was already deeply engaged in researching the war for Kenya's independence and collecting oral histories from those who remembered it.

Oxford offered scale and intensity. The archives and museums were close, and scholars whose books she had read were suddenly within reach. The experience was energising, but it was also demanding. Classroom debates about how Africa should be studied were not abstract for her; they were personal. She remembers pushing for African writers to be more fully integrated into the curriculum and resisting the idea that lived experience should be set aside in the name of objectivity.

She chose St Cross intentionally when applying to Oxford. Its egalitarianism appealed: the lack of high-table ceremony, and the sense that you could speak with senior academics over



Shaqa'iq An-Naa'man
(Wounds of Naaman) (2024)

lunch as an equal. What she remembers most clearly now is how easily conversation moved through the day – over meals and in the common room, at parties in the cellar, and in the small, familiar exchanges with the Porters’ Lodge as she came and went.

After Oxford, her path was not immediately artistic. She worked in research and communications roles, translating complex scientific work for wider audiences and contributing to interdisciplinary curriculum design. But something about the form of academic writing unsettled her. Important conversations, she felt, often remained confined to specialist circles.

“Art is a way of having heavy conversations and making them accessible”, she says.

Around 2012–13 she decided to commit fully to her practice. The shift was less a rupture than a reorientation. The research never stopped; the questions never changed. What changed was the space in which they were posed.

A formative moment came during her time in Oxford at the Pitt Rivers Museum. There she encountered Kikuyu jewellery she had previously seen only in black-and-white photographs. Seeing the objects in colour – noticing details such as pale blue trade beads – opened new lines of inquiry about pre-colonial exchange and material memory. Since then, she has worked extensively with museum collections in Britain, the United States, and Kenya, alongside her current MFA studies at the Slade School of Fine Art in London.

Her installations often appear restrained at first encounter. Familiar materials create a sense of calm. Only gradually do the layers reveal themselves: colonial histories, suppressed scripts, questions of belonging.

“I like using objects that are familiar to have difficult conversations”, she explains.

Nearly two decades after her year at St Cross, the through-line remains clear. The habits formed there – rigorous research, intellectual debate, the insistence on asking who shapes a narrative – have not faded. They have moved outward, into public spaces, and luckily for us, into the pages of *Crossword*.

“ Art is a way of having heavy conversations and making them accessible ”



Shaqa'iq An-Naa'man
(Wounds of Naaman) (2024)



Wakariru (2019)

UPCOMING DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES



Professionals in Residence

Thursday 30th April
St Cross

St Cross Encaenia & Prizegiving Dinner

Thursday 25th June, 6:30pm
St Cross

St Cross in the City

Pub Meet-Up
Thursday 14th May, 6pm
The Astronomer, London

60th Anniversary

Closing Celebration
Friday 18th – Sunday 20th September
St Cross



Further dates to be announced – please keep an eye on our Events page

MEET THE DEVELOPMENT TEAM

From the Development Director

It is a pleasure to write to you in this 60th anniversary year. From the Development Office, what we see most clearly is the strength of the community that surrounds St Cross — alumni and friends who remain engaged, generous and interested in the College long after their time here.

A central part of our work is maintaining connection: through events, communications and, whenever possible, meeting St Crossers in person. Those conversations are a reminder that the College's impact is often felt in specific and lasting ways — in friendships formed, ideas tested, and opportunities opened.

Together, our team works to ensure that generosity is stewarded carefully and that it supports the College's priorities with clarity and purpose. We are grateful to colleagues across the College for their partnership, and above all to you — our alumni and friends — for your continued engagement and support.



Make a Gift to St Cross

Milos Martinov (centre) – Development Director

Milos leads the Development Team and oversees fundraising and relations between the College and our global community. Get in touch with him to find out more about supporting St Cross and getting involved.

Julia Aslet (front right) – Senior Development Executive

Julia provides assistance in philanthropic and alumni relations activities, with a focus on developing fundraising campaigns. Get in touch with her to learn more about how to support the College or leave a legacy.

Savi Joglekar (front left) – Alumni Relations & Engagement Officer

Savi is the first point of contact for all members of the College community, and leads online communications efforts with our alumni and friends, including e-newsletters and the alumni LinkedIn group. She also supports the career mentoring programme. Reach out to her if you have any news or updates to share.

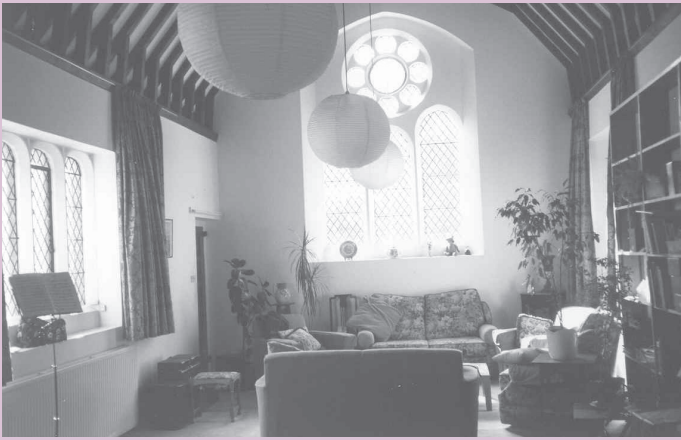


James Brazier (back right) – Development & Alumni Relations Officer

James manages events for alumni and supporters of St Cross, organising events in College and around the world to connect the global St Cross community. Contact James to find out more about upcoming events in your area.

Benjamin Gladstone (back left) – Graduate Associate in Development

Ben handles research and publications in the Development Office, including the production of *Crossword* and exhibitions on College history and artwork as part of the 60th anniversary celebrations. Contact him if you have news or any memories of St Cross you would like to share.



Life at St Cross in the 1960s & 1970s



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