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Same old changing-rooms

Time to confess; how many Oxford students, this time last year or the year before, were the dainty, wall-flower variety of sixth-former, envisaging in university an escape from the narrow-minded boundaries of school social life? I suspect a fair number fit the profile, and there's no shame in it. It may seem pretentiously adolescent to have raged against 'philistines,' but all too reasonable to expect a change in attitudes and approaches at University. Reasonable, but sadly over-optimistic.

Instead, the rule of the locker-room prevails even here. The rugby team, the boat club; even the non-sporting drinking societies go for the sweaty-shinpads and flicked towel aesthetic when selecting their members or choice of social event. However individuals may act in tutorials, labs, or their private library time, the old herd mentality - spawned, like verrucas and mould, in school changing-rooms - rears its bovine head. It's that especially English sort of phenomenon that combines so many of our favourite cultural features - binge drinking, peer pressure, the old school tie and even older chauvinism. A lot of people have a lot of fun, assuredly, and normally only at the ex-

pense of their own dignity, livers, and a sense of public decency. Nothing wrong with that.

No; the problem really arises when such private joshing spills over into something messier. When students remember the great British traditions of stepping up to the line and weighing in, but not that of avoiding a scene. Moving into a general observation on the Anglo-Saxon student mentality, the picture is depressing. It's the 6th-century mead hall combined with US hazing. The crass and disturbingly sadistic tendencies occasionally exhibited by athletes of any age are surely symptomatic of the sort of bottled-up stress that good, manly, physical exercise on the field was intended to safely let out. Same principle as national service, you know.

The technique has patently failed. It is clearly too much to expect 'lads' to 'reign themselves in' after victory, defeat, or just a random night out - to the point where it seems inevitable that the end of Summer Eights this weekend will be followed by a night of, not merely debauchery, but damage and mild devastation. Mostly committed by people in piped blazers. Play up, play up, and play the game.

LETTERS & EMAILS

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Greyfriars

Further to our 'Urgent plea for Greyfriars Hall' on 13th May, we are asking the Governing Body of Greyfriars Hall to meet us next Wednesday 29th May, when they are having their monthly Definitory meeting. We are asking for the chance of a face to face meeting with representatives from the Fellows, Lecturers and JCR students, so that we can finally ask and have answers to, the questions we have been putting since October. This meeting has hitherto been denied us and we feel that they owe it to us. As well as having the full support of Cardinal Kasper, the Archbishop of Birmingham and the Papal Nuncio to Great Britain, Archbishop Faustino Sainz Munoz, we now have the added backing of Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Patron of Greyfriars, who has intervened directly to retain the licence and prevent the dissolution of the Hall.

Penny Cookson, Fellow
Donal Lowry, Fellow
Anne Mouron, Fellow

Top Chumps

Sitting here in the Rad Cam, merrily whiling away the hours until my finals, I am generally unaware of the goings-on around Oxford of the great, the good and the chump-like. However, imagine my surprise when a friend, who keeps an eye out for any negative press coverage for me, approached with this week's copy of the Cherwell protruding from his 'man bag'. Excitedly he turned to the centre spread of your esteemed organ, and low and behold what did I see but another refer-

ence to myself by your gossip columnist, John Evelyn. Now, I'm not a prudish man, and I say that without any irony, but I am less than pleased to see the term 'facerape' used to describe my behaviour. You have published such allegations twice now, and I am therefore moved to ask that you cease doing so, or provide myself and your readership with a definition of such a seemingly ambiguous phrase, one that will of course be less than actionable in a court of law.

Cameron Penny



Reclaim the night

The sexual harassment described in your 4th week article, 'Corpus women harassed by sexpest' and 'Students warned after taxi sex attacks' is horrific but by no means surprising. Women across the UK are regularly exposed to sexual harassment while walking the streets after dark, and as a result are frightened to go out alone at night. The rape conviction rate in the UK is disgustingly low: 6% of reported rape

cases result in a conviction, and despite the 1 in 4 women in the UK that have suffered rape or attempted rape only 7% of incidents are reported to the police. There remains a stigma around rape that it is somehow a woman's responsibility for 'provoking the attacker' if she is walking alone, wearing 'revealing' clothing or if she is drunk. Welfare resources don't address the heart of the problem: that women's harassment is perceived as inevitable and that the responsibility is placed on women to avoid exposure to it. It is the attackers, not women, who should be targeted, and attitudes need to change in order that a woman's right to walk alone at night is fully recognised. This November, OUSU WomCam are organising a Reclaim the Night Protest in Oxford to target these concerns, and we would urge those who support this cause to join in to express their discontent.

Hannah Thompson, RTN
Co-ordinator
Leanne Price, Co-Chair,
OUSU WomCam

Clarification

The story 'VP admits OUSU is flouting constitution rules' wrongly referred to a constitutional requirement for the student union to keep an up-to-date list of members. The article was not clear on the distinction between OUSU, which does not need to keep such a list, and OSSL, which is required to do so. The date 19 June 1987 refers to the last time the members' list was updated at Companies House. Due to an editing error, we omitted to mention that OSSL's members list is now ¾ up-to-date.

Lee Jones



DPhil candidate,
International
Relations

No Strings Attached

It's easy to condemn Burma's military regime for blocking life-saving international aid in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. But few stop to ask why the generals behave this way, instead simply branding them 'xenophobic', 'irrational', or 'inhuman'. The truth is that they are afraid of foreign intervention because Burma has been plagued by it since 1948, when Britain left it precipitately teetering on the brink of civil war.

During the Cold War, a Chinese nationalist army occupied part of Burma, trading opium with America and Thailand in exchange for guns to kill communists, bringing about the collapse of Burmese democracy and the advent of military rule. The country was ravaged by communist and ethnic insurgencies, backed by China and Thailand respectively.

After the Cold War, the West took over, bashing the regime for failing to democratise.

While other nations with equally nasty regimes were coddled, the West's lack of strategic or economic interest in the feeble state of Burma made it an ideal dog to kick - one that cannot bite back. Sanctions, which have carefully protected Western oil firms, have done absolutely nothing to budge the regime, but they satisfy pious NGOs and make us feel morally superior. Incredibly, the West has continued to kick the Burmese dog after Cyclone Nargis, attaching conditions to aid and extracting moral and political capital from Burma's wretched people.

But sanctions, and the extreme and selective politicisation of aid and human rights, have also helped create the very 'paranoia' that now blocks effective relief efforts, by convincing the regime - which genuinely believes it is the only thing holding the country together - that Western powers are ruthless imperialists bent on destabilising the country. Western intervention has also encouraged the extraordinarily fragmented Burmese opposition to yearn for external rescue rather than uniting to overthrow the regime. Cyclone Nargis struck just before a scheduled referendum on a new constitution. It is hardly any wonder that the regime views Western aid agencies as Trojan horses. Threats of armed humanitarian intervention and prosecution for 'crimes against humanity' only make things worse.

The West - and, sadly, Burma's people - are reaping what the West has sown. Ironically, events have vindicated the oft-criticised, less confrontational approach of Burma's partners in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations: Burma has agreed to receive aid channeled through ASEAN because it will not be politicised. If Nargis really is, as is claimed, worse than the Asian tsunami, which attracted \$7bn in aid, then current Western pledges to Burma - a measly \$93m - are an insult that bashing the junta has distracted attention from. A donors' conference will be held on 25 May: the West must put its money where its mouth has been, and supply aid to Burma's people via ASEAN without conditions.