



# 40 YEARS OF WOMEN AT BRASENOSE

JCR PORTRAITS PROJECT





## Introduction

To commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the admission of women into Brasenose we really wanted to do something to mark this as students. Margherita proposed to the JCR that a lovely way to do this would be to celebrate some of the things that the women who have attended Brasenose over the past 40 years have achieved in their lives since graduating. Therefore, modelling our exhibition on the way that the portraits in Hall remind us of the many alumni who have made great contributions to college and to society, we have decided to fill the JCR with a series of portraits of our female alumnae. We think that having the portraits in the JCR is important because this is our common space and we want the focus to be on showing these amazing female role models to all our undergraduates.

Over the past few months, with generous support from College and the Brasenose Society, we have worked really hard on the commissioning, creation and exhibition of these 12 portraits. We sought nominations from past alumni for BNC women they believed to be inspiring and extraordinary; in total we received nearly 200 nominations. These women were all nominated for different, but always inspirational, reasons and the JCR is very proud to have them as alumnae of the college. The JCR committee narrowed down the final 12 and the chosen subjects subsequently had their portraits taken by photographer Bill Knight.

We really hope you enjoy the exhibition!

Margherita (Project Coordinator)

Orla (JCR Women's Officer)

## The Photographer: Bill Knight OBE

Bill Knight is a photographer specialising in portraits, theatre and opera. His first job was as a beach photographer at Margate. He was a lawyer in the City of London for 40 years and took up professional photography after he retired as senior partner of his firm. His website is [www.knightsight.co.uk](http://www.knightsight.co.uk)

We also asked Bill to write a few lines about the experience of taking the photos and this is what he said:

"I often take photos of actors and singers. They are used to being photographed but they can be uncertain in front of the camera because without a role to play they are not sure who they are. This was a very different experience. The Brasenose alumnae have very clear ideas about who they are, but are not used to being photographed and most of them approached the experience with trepidation. Several said that they agreed to be photographed because they were chosen by the undergraduates. Over a range of occupations and backgrounds the common denominators were intellect and, in my opinion at least, a sense that they are all spending their lives in the way they want. I really enjoyed meeting them all and would have happily photographed 40 of them. For the first time in my life I was the subject of social media – they tweeted about being photographed!"

# Mary Stokes



For achieving the highest first of her year in finals, Mary was awarded the Vinerian Scholarship in 1980, and then later became Brasenose's first ever female fellow. She is now a Barrister at Erskine Chambers. Mary matriculated in 1976 and read Law.

**Kristina Killick:** *What was it like being the first woman fellow at Brasenose?*

**Mary Stokes:** I was treated very well. The other fellows were, almost without exception, glad to have me there. College still felt quite male and I sometimes felt that I was not taken particularly seriously. Overall, I would say that this was down to being young, rather than being a woman. But yes, it could sometimes be hard, feeling a little out of place with the older fellows, who were still rather formal and traditional.

**KK:** *Why did you switch from academia to practising law?*

**MS:** Although I loved teaching, I felt that it would be easy to become stale as a teacher, partly because of the tutorial system that required me to teach many hours each week, with quite a bit of repetition, particularly in some subjects, which were not fast moving. Do you still study secret trusts now?

**KK:** *Yes!*

**MS:** That's an example of a topic which hasn't changed for decades. Academia is great for young people, but there was (and I am sure there still is) a lot of pressure to write and play your part in College life, as well as teach. I found it hard to find the time to do my own research. I also thought it would have been exciting to write about the law from the perspective of another discipline – say history, or social science or philosophy – but I lacked the background in those subjects. If you are interested in "black-letter" law the Bar is the perfect place to be as fascinating problems come to you requiring analysis, research and then practical solutions.

I was much more confident going to the Bar after spending time in academia. I had become a better lawyer and was a little older, all of which helped. I have no regrets about going to the Bar, but I did enjoy academia too

**KK:** *The Bar is starting to get something of a reputation amongst students for involving unmanageable amounts of work, making it difficult to maintain a work-life balance. What do you think about that?*

**MS:** Of the other women studying Law in my year at Brasenose, and others I had contact with, those who became solicitors have mostly given up. They did very well and had good careers until they had children. Some tried to go part-time, but this usually meant that they were given less interesting work.

At the Bar, there is much more flexibility. You are self-employed and you can work at home a lot if you choose to. Of course,

compromises have to be made, but it is possible to have a good (even if not stellar) career and be very much a "hands-on" mother.

**KK:** *Institutions can take a long time to change. At Brasenose the short institutional memory and open-minded students luckily mean we avoid this institutional pitfall but it is thought to ring true in firms and, often particularly, in Inns of Court. What would your advice be to a woman (or indeed anyone) who finds themselves in an institution that is not as forward thinking or receptive as they would hope?*

**MS:** I don't know about solicitors' firms. As for the Inns of Court, they don't play a significant role in my working life. That is my choice. Instead, my chambers are my base and they are a very nice place to work with a collegial feel to them. They have a much more free and relaxed atmosphere than the Inns of Court, which can still be very traditional and a bit stuffy.

There are those who find themselves in an institution not as forward thinking as they would hope, I think the solution is to make sure you remain yourself, keep your head down until you have a bit of experience and age and are respected and then do what you can to change the aspects of your institution that you are unhappy with. There are still plenty of things which need to be improved about chambers – we need an increase in the numbers of ethnic minority barristers, for example. Often we find that that sort of problem arises because of a larger social problem, rather than discriminatory thinking or practices in chambers. We often find that the best candidates for pupillage have been to private schools and the top universities and are from privileged backgrounds. It is difficult as a very small organisation to do much about this, though we try to encourage students from every background to come for mini-pupillages and test candidates with rigorous interviews, which cannot be prepared in advance.

**KK:** *There has been a breakthrough with entry level percentages of women to the profession. Do we need to do anything more to ensure that in 20 years' time the percentages at the top reflect this or do you think it's case of sit and wait, job done?*

**MS:** No, I don't think it's 'job done'. But what you do about it is another question. I think the problems are structural, societal issues, rather than sexism. These issues are to do with children and family, so I don't know what you can do to change it, though flexible working and plenty of support at work while you have young children would help.

You cannot have it all and be both a top QC and a hands-on mother unless you are an exceptional person – there are simply not enough hours in the day. The women I know of my generation who have been very successful have all had husbands who have been willing to take on a larger share of responsibility for looking after the children and running the home, and to be satisfied with careers which are not as obviously successful as their partner's. It's important to find a happy medium and a compromise which suits you. Like many other women, I have found that I have adjusted my expectations and muddled through. But, I'm happy with the way it has ended up for me: I've got interesting work, good pay and time to spend with my family.

*KK: What's the next elephant in the room for workplace equality?*

**MS:** I don't think there is any glaringly discriminatory behaviour. The problems are structural, with society expecting women to do it all. Perhaps men could share household tasks more evenly. The elephant in the room has always been there and is not a new one: it is how to combine a top career with having children you are involved with and look after yourself, at least some of the time.

*KK: Do you have any final words of advice for young people, women in particular, starting out?*

**MS:** I would have liked to have someone tell me to be a bit more hard-nosed and ambitious. It is easy to find yourself drifting in a career. You need to take care not to be knocked off course by circumstances, whilst retaining flexibility to seize all the opportunities which present themselves and to deal with the bad things life throws at you. If I had to give advice to young women lawyers specifically, it would be to take care that when you have children that you don't become marginalised in terms of the work you are given. But don't undervalue time at home with your family either. At the tail end of life no one ever looks back thinking that they wished they had spent more time at work!

**Kristina studies Law and is currently in her second year.**



## Kate Shand



Kate is the founder of Enjoy Education and has been placed on The Sunday Times's 35 Women under 35 Power list, Young Guns 2013 and the Education Investor Award. She read English at Brasenose and matriculated in 2000.

*Emma Woodhouse: How would you say your time at Brasenose has helped you*

*to run a business now?*

**Kate Shand:** An English degree gives you the immense advantage of being able to structure emails and get your thoughts down on paper. To impress people you need to be able to present and articulate your thoughts extremely well, which you definitely learn writing essays at Oxford. When you have to condense that into an email, you develop a fantastic way of working with language and really using it to the best of your ability.

*EW: Do you think that people have misconceptions about an Oxbridge degree?*

**KS:** So much! What is so valuable is that you have to assimilate so much information on a daily basis, you have to knock out two essays and do all your reading each week, and that has a huge effect on students. What I love is that an Oxbridge degree allows you to really develop on so many different levels, and this is something that we're really working hard to put across to students. We work very closely with Teach First, taking graduates and putting them on a two-year programme teaching in substandard schools with students who are educationally disadvantaged. What I see is a huge lack of confidence in students, both regarding getting into Oxbridge and about its value, and one of the things we tell them is how it opens doors. We need to do a better job of helping students who don't have that support network at school to push forward and be told they are great and should have the confidence to apply. We must help give them that belief!

*EW: When did you realise you wanted to work in the education sector?*

**KS:** Well, I got a job in publishing straight after university, but I decided to take some time out after having realised that it wasn't what I wanted to do. I started working with two young boys; I'd pick them up after school and look after and help with their learning. That's when I realised how much I really love working with children. Some of my own great experiences have been with people who have tutored me: Sos Eltis, my tutor at university; and a teacher at school who was such an inspiring man and gave me so much confidence – he encouraged me to apply to Oxford when I'd never even been told that was an option for me. You often need someone to back your corner and whether that's from school, or your family, you need someone to point that out your potential. I realised that I loved working with children and in their education, but I also loved business, which is why being a schoolteacher had never really ticked the box for me. I really felt that I wanted to build something and that is what I have been able to do with this company.

*EW: What sort of skills do you think make a good tutor or teacher? What is it about that kind of person who can connect with someone to help them learn?*

**KS:** I think that listening is paramount, really listening and responding is incredibly important. I also think empathy; understanding and feeling where students are at and how to help them to get to the next level. I think that good communication skills are vital too – making sure that the teacher can really communicate to the student what is expected of them, what needs to have happened, what they need to do as a learner. Empathy, communication and preparation. Always preparation. As a teacher you always need to be a step ahead

*EW: I was interested last term when I heard alumni come back and talk about their experiences of sexism at university. Did you find that you encountered many problems with sexism and discrimination?*

**KS:** I am really happy to say that I didn't feel that at university. It really helped that I had two female tutors, so I had less exposure to that. I am much more acutely aware of different expectations and different aspects of sexism in the industry I work in. Tutoring and schools consultancy have historically been part of a male dominated industry so it has involved different challenges trying to make my mark as a woman. Though of course, there are obviously some wonderful opportunities that come with being a woman. For example, one of our company achievements was to join David Cameron on his trade delegation to China and being a woman on that trip was very interesting, it's all about understanding what you need to be achieving and how you can make the most of the opportunities that come your way. It's about being realistic about the status quo and trying to push forwards and break down prejudices.

*EW: What do you think can be done to encourage more young women to enter business and become entrepreneurs? Is it something which should be encouraged in schools more?*

**KS:** Definitely. It's difficult because at school you're always concentrating on the next thing – be it GCSEs, A Levels, University. It's hard at 15 or 16 to really be focusing on the potential entrepreneur in you. A lot of women *do* need a confidence boost, so it's key that we provide a network of mentors who can empathise and say "well I was in that position too, here is how you can overcome it". I've been very heavily involved in lots of female groups and networks and I operate on female boards. I am always amazed at how much women like to reach out and help each other and that is such a massive strength and something that we need to utilise more. I'm a big advocate for working on the alumni network and considering how we can help students more.

*EW: You and the company have won so many awards. Does that mean a lot to you as you created this yourself?*

**KS:** It really does. Sometimes I surprise myself by how ambitious I am. I have yet to feel like I've made it, as there is so much more to build. This morning we had a meeting about how to develop as a company and what our next steps are, our strategy for 2015/16. I have such an amazing team here, ambitious driven individuals who are all looking to constantly build and improve on what we offer. One statistic that we are particularly proud of is

that 95% of families would recommend us, which is one of the things I care even more about than winning awards; there are so many families looking to provide a more personalised education for their children and we respond to that.

**EW:** *How did you go about starting up? Was it something you were very daunted by, or excited by?*

**KS:** The first thing I did was make a really comprehensive business plan; having a really clear strategy is so powerful. One thing which I agonised over was the name of the company; it took me about six months! But eventually I decided on 'Enjoy Education' because it really sums up our aim. I really do believe that happy learners will achieve more. As for how daunting it was – you never know how something is going to progress. When you set up a company it obviously has challenges, but what has been really interesting for me is how every year I run this company I face newer and bigger ones.

**EW:** *You sit on the Prince's Foundation for Children and the Arts and I was wondering what that means to you?*

It has been really humbling as an experience. Opening up the arts to children is brilliant – going to see the ballet for the first time, or to the theatre, that is absolutely one of the most profound moments in life. Here at Enjoy Education we have three different strands of community work which I really care deeply about. One is with Teach First, we have been working with over 100 students from really difficult backgrounds this year. We provide an e-mentoring programme for them, working with them during their lower sixth year to build their confidence. We also work in some really wonderful state schools, with a whole fleet of tutors working one to one with students, and it has been completely incredible to see how much these students have gained from it and how much the tutors love working with the students. We are also working with students through a charity called Chance UK which helps students who have been marked out as being most at risk of developing criminal or anti-social behaviour. They are aged between 5 and 11 years old and we provide mentoring for them. The people we have on board here are so committed to helping students regardless of their background.

**EW:** *What do you think could be done more to encourage more participation in the arts?*

**KS:** There could be more government funding so that people can apply through schools to be able to go on more school trips. It is, of course, also about promoting creativity in schools. Finding that space in the curriculum to recognise that it's not always about learning in the academic sense, it's about exploring who we are as people and what our interests are, and providing the facilities to do that. Of course it's the age old problem of how to finance it and make it accessible. There are some wonderful teams of people, including the Prince's Trust, who work tirelessly to provide those opportunities for students.

**EW:** *Are you excited about what 2015 will hold for the company?*

**KS:** So excited! We have lots of wonderful new team members joining us and people helping the company to grow. It's such a busy time of year for us! We have so much on the agenda and a clear strategy – it's an extraordinary time to be working in education. There is so much growth and interest in UK education. I feel very strongly that we need to respond to that and

encourage international interest in what we do. We have a world-class education system. I think sometimes when you read the press we really denigrate everything, but we must recognise what we are good at.

**EW:** *Do you get the opportunity to work much with families and individual children?*

**KS:** I do get to be with families quite a bit. The initial consultation with families is understanding what they're looking for, so we do a very full on assessment programme to understand where their children are at. I will always continue to be very front line on that because being involved with families means you can be making the right decisions in terms of company growth, hearing firsthand what they're looking for. In terms of the tutoring itself, it's harder for me to commit to sessions, but meeting with families keeps me engaged.

**EW:** *Do you find that you're still in contact with a lot of people who you went to university with, both socially and in terms of your business?*

**KS:** I am definitely still in contact with a lot of people from Brasenose and Oxford. I actually married someone I met at Oxford! It's always a really lovely connecting point, there is a great sense of understanding and community there.

**EW:** *Finally, if you were to give advice to someone who is about to undertake a degree, or set up their own business, what would it be?*

**KS:** Passion is everything – you have to just love what you do! Go with what you love. There are so many opportunities in life where passion can drive you and you can be true to yourself. You do also need to deliver what you're promising, and get a great team of people around you. When you believe in what you do energy pours out and you can be excited about going to work!

**EW:** *Thank you very much!*

**KS:** Thank you! It's a real privilege to have been chosen and Oxford gave me so much in so many different ways – some ways I'm only starting to realise as I get older. Any way in which I can give back is great.

**Emma is a first year student studying English Language and Literature.**



## Andrea Brand



Andrea works at Cambridge University and is Herchel Smith Professor of Molecular Biology, as well as being an Honorary fellow here at Brasenose. Her work focuses on better understanding how the nervous system is put together, in order to better understand how to repair it in the case of damage. Andrea invented the GAL4 system, her work has

the potential to help develop therapies for neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's. In 2006, she was awarded the Rosalind Franklin Award by the Royal Society. Andrea matriculated at Brasenose in 1977, and read Biochemistry.

*Samantha Royston: What did you most enjoy during your time at Oxford?*

**Andrea Brand:** I made some very good friends at College and really enjoyed participating in sports; both at a College level doing rowing and also at a University level, where I did a lot of gymnastics. In terms of the academic work, I particularly enjoyed the fourth year of the Biochemistry course, when we had the opportunity to carry out longer-term research projects in the lab.

*SR: What was it like studying at Brasenose, so soon after women were first allowed to study there?*

**AB:** I certainly found that there was some sexism, both overt and occasionally just accidental and unconscious. Being a woman that early on also meant there were some rather more practical every day inconveniences, for example, there was only a single shower in College for the women because we were expected to take baths!

*SR: What did you find was the most challenging part of studying at Oxford?*

**AB:** Having grown up in New York, it was definitely very different and I experienced a huge culture shock when I first started, which did mean that I was rather homesick in my first year. We obviously didn't have mobile phones back then, and if I wanted to talk to my family it could take an hour at a payphone to get through to the international operator.

*SR: How did you first get into biology, and in particular studying the nervous system?*

**AB:** The first time I felt any interest in this field was when I was still quite young, while still at school, because of how inspired I was by reading 'The Double Helix', about the discovery of double helix DNA. What struck me in particular was how Rosalind Franklin's X-ray crystallographic images led to the discovery of the structure of DNA. I started studying the nervous system considerably later in my career, after my PhD and a first period of post doctoral research. I had been working on how genes are switched on and off in yeast and I wanted a new challenge. These days, my research focuses on how stem cells generate the diverse array of cell types in the brain.

*SR: Having achieved so much in the scientific and medical fields, do you have any advice for current female undergraduates at Brasenose?*

**AB:** I would say to always do something you are passionate about. Apply for every position that you are eligible for, like teaching posts or Fellowships if you want to go into academia. If you don't apply then that's obviously a definite no, but if you do then you always have a chance for a positive response!

**Samantha is in her second year, studying Biology.**





## Emma Garth



Emma is an English teacher at the Henrietta Barnett School, which over recent years has had several students come to Brasenose, and has taught at other schools too, with stints as Head of Department. As recent school students ourselves, we know the value of a good teacher and the influence

they can have. Emma matriculated in 1983 and read English.

*Essi Turkson: How does it feel that you have been picked to help us celebrate 40 year of women at Brasenose?*

**Emma Garth:** Thank you for agreeing to interview me, I agreed to do it if I could be a kind of 'representative' person for all of the 'unsung' teachers and educators of young people of all ages. I rather envisage people looking at a picture of me and wondering why I was picked. So although I think the project is a great idea, I would rather take group rather than individual credit.

*ET: What did you enjoy most about your time at BNC?*

**EG:** I thoroughly enjoyed my time at BNC, in particular the long-lasting friendships I made, and the fact that it led on to a career that I find genuinely interesting, challenging and important. I still have links with Brasenose in my job as a teacher; Sos Eltis has visited my school to talk to our English Extension group which was fantastic, and I know how much Maria Fleischer, another former pupil of mine, enjoyed being taught by her.

*ET: During your time studying here did you feel that there was a disparity between the men and women of the college, in terms of both academic and social lifestyle?*

**EG:** In many ways, I didn't feel that there was as much pressure on girls at university when I was at Oxford - especially in comparison with today. Certainly amongst my English colleagues, I never felt a gender divide. I also benefitted from a year out travelling in Africa before I came up, which meant I was just a little bit older -if not wiser!

*ET: What inspired you to get involved with teaching?*

**EG:** I stayed on to do a PGCE at the Department of Education in Oxford when it was still being headed up by Harry Judge – who I had the absolute pleasure of meeting recently at a Brasenose dinner. I had also come from a 'teaching' family and had always wanted to teach at secondary level. I have taught in mixed Comprehensives across Oxfordshire, latterly as a Head of English, and then moved to London to become Head of English at a prestigious girls' grammar school. I have since taught full and part time, with a break after my second child. I enjoy the intellectual curiosity of the students I teach, and their creativity in responding to the wide variety texts we teach.

*ET: I don't know if you remember, but in the middle of a particularly non-responsive English lesson, you once commented that with respect to feminism you thought that our generation sometime felt like it had nothing to fight for. Do you think this is still the case? And do you think it's true that there is nothing left to fight for, especially for young female university students?*

**EG:** I am concerned that women at university are more self-conscious now than they were: that there is a misogynist attitude amongst some of the men which I had hoped would have been eradicated but which still makes itself known. When I was there I never felt aware of any pressure to look a certain way at or of 'getting scored out of 10' by the boys, so I find it quite upsetting to hear about this being the case and it being accepted as normal. I feel that people who express such opinions are not always stamped down and punished or berated enough by the university.

*ET: Are there other ways you think the university doesn't do as much as it could?*

**EG:** Yes, I am also not convinced by the university's professed intention to include more state school pupils, and think the interviewing system is very flawed. To me it seems like the admission does more than simply test the academic level of applicants, it puts those who are used to that kind of environment and have had significantly more support at an advantage, meaning that the interview system is perhaps not the level playing that it intends to be. The ratio of privately educated students in the national population to that in the Oxbridge student population is still hugely disproportionate. Even as this is changing and improving though, there is still a pervasive mythology in popular culture that Oxbridge is for private school pupils; state school students need to be more valued. Of course, some responsibility does also lie with schools themselves, and that is where the value of teachers who can offer such support lies.

*ET: What has been your proudest moment in your profession/ validated that you had made the right choice in becoming a teacher?*

I love my job and I always love to hear about how all my former students are doing. Recently, It was a particular pleasure to bring my father to BNC and for 3 former students of mine to show him round the college.

*ET: What advice would you give to your 18 year old self just during her first year here?*

**EG:** I would tell my 18 year-old self that I was cleverer than I thought!

**Essi is in her third and final year, studying Psychology, and is a former pupil of Emma's at the Henrietta Barnett School.**

## Valerie Worth



Valerie read French and German at Brasenose, matriculating in 1975, before going on to complete her DPhil in early modern French literature. She has since held academic posts at King's College London, Oxford Brookes, Exeter and Oxford. She is currently Senior Tutor and Professor of French at Trinity College.

**Emily Cunningham:** *Having matriculated in 1975, you were in the second year of women admitted into Brasenose. What was the prevailing atmosphere when you arrived at the college?*

**Valerie Worth:** I think the first year of girls had to break the ice. By the time we arrived, there were not catcalls in hall, but you were aware that there were fewer girls around. There were probably about 25 women in my year. We all lived on either staircase XII or staircase XVI. We were friendly with the boys, so it didn't feel that different from being at the mixed grammar school I had attended previously. To me, co-education was normal; it would have seemed odd to go to an all-girls college. The fact that I attended a state grammar is something that has stayed with me: I had a lovely opportunity that I want to give to other people from backgrounds where going to university is not the norm.

**EC:** *I see that you have worked in many different institutions since your studies at Oxford. Having returned as Senior Tutor, how would you say that life has changed here?*

**VW:** Generally, I think students nowadays tend to be more serious about their studies. Nowadays, most people feel that if they don't graduate with a 2:1, they've done themselves an injustice. As Senior Tutor, if I can help students who are having difficulties, it's often on the basis that they themselves want to go out with a degree that will give them many opportunities.

What I also see is that there are different pressures now. There certainly were pressures on us, but I have memories of plenty of time to relax and enjoy socialising with friends and do extra-curricular activities, such as drama, sport, singing and going to debates. I think now that the advent of the digital age means that people have a lot of their personal interaction on a screen. I've spoken to some of my friends about this: when we were students, if you wanted to talk to someone, you went and knocked on their door and if they weren't in you left a note. It was a very personal form of communication.

**EC:** *How has the Modern Languages course changed?*

**VW:** The good thing that has happened is that we have a lot of 'ab initio' courses. In fact, if I could have my time again I would have liked to study French and Italian, as I did not realise that you could do 'ab initio' Italian. I think that people who do an 'ab initio'

language now have this passion in their eyes for learning something new.

The other thing that has changed is that we are emphasising listening and speaking as well as reading and writing. I think we do not expect people to read as much literature in the original language as in my day. People have asked me what I think about modern linguists now using English translations and I have got two different answers to that. One is that we need to get people used to reading continuously in the language at degree level because it builds up your linguistic competence. Last year I met someone I taught back in the eighties who is now a high level translator for the UN, and she said that it is the literature she came across here that really helped her, as she gained such a wide vocabulary. When other translators are thinking "I don't know that word", she's thinking "Oh yes, I read that in a Balzac novel!" The other side of me thinks that language learning is about comparing languages and I am passionate about teaching advanced translation courses where you don't just produce a translation, but you think about how the translation is a creative choice that you are making at different stages. I think that using translations can sensitize you to what is special about the language of the original text.

**EC:** *What made you decide to go into academia?*

**VW:** My passion for modern languages and the study of literature - I just love French culture and history! Coming from a family that was not particularly well off, I had not actually been to France until I was seventeen. When I was in lower sixth I went on a French exchange to the Dordogne and that was the beginning of a love affair with France that has lasted the rest of my life. My original idea was to be a schoolteacher: it was a practical plan that would lead to a stable job. But when I was doing my school placement, I could see that I was going to miss the mental stimulation of academia. I thought that if I could get funding, which I did, I would prefer to teach at university. So going into academia was a way of combining my interest in France with a passion for teaching. Teaching is about interchange with people, and the fun is when you talk to someone and you see that that person is excited about something you think is worth learning. That human contact is so important.

**EC:** *Was it difficult to get into academia? How did you choose what you were going to specialise in?*

**VW:** I have always liked the sixteenth century in England and in France, so I knew that was going to be my area. In those days, if you had a good degree, you were given your funding based on a broad idea of the topic for your DPhil, so my plan was to do something on prefaces in sixteenth century France, but I didn't know what. I was basically given time to do lots of reading and the thesis emerged from that, and I was very fortunate to get a Junior Research Fellowship at St Anne's for two years afterwards. The hard bit, and this is still the case now, was getting the first job. I finished my doctorate in 1984, got my first permanent post in 1989, so for six years I was on temporary contracts, and did

some A-level teaching to supplement my income. Then I got my lucky break: I had been applying for various jobs and something came up in King's College London. I see it a lot here that we have excellent people doing doctorates and holding lectureships who just cannot get into that first permanent post.

**EC:** *So what would your advice be for young women academics?*

**VW:** I think that my main advice is to be positive and keep doors open. You have to do something you feel passionate about; you have to believe that it is interesting and valuable and convince other people of this. I would say to young academics that is important to specialise, but also to think imaginatively about having several branches to their careers. When I went for job interviews, one of the problems I had was that I was very specialised in sixteenth and seventeenth century French and most students do modern French, and so I made a point of saying that I had strengths in teaching advanced translation and I had pioneered new audio-visual courses for teaching practical language skills.

For women, there is obviously the issue of how you are going to fit your career around the fact that at some stage you might want to have a family. What I see as Senior Tutor when dealing with staff appointments is that it is a significant issue in the sciences for women running labs. Running a lab is really like running a small business with fifteen or so people working for you, and it is difficult to do that when you have small children. In the arts it is easier because most of your work is with books and libraries so you can work around it. I think we as employers owe it to the modern generation to work creatively to make it possible for them to enjoy fulfilling professional and family lives. So when female fellows and lecturers have families, it is very important that we think about what we can do for them. Providing that supportive environment is really important. As a woman, I feel that you should be able to combine your very positive professional and academic life with having a family if that is what you want.

**EC:** *Do you think that your progress in your field was at all affected by being a woman?*

**VW:** As I was in the humanities, there was a more even gender balance. There were a few women who set the example and showed that women can hold the top academic posts. I did go for some job interviews back in the eighties with a panel of between six and ten, on which there would be one woman and one woman only. It is something that I try to be sensitive to when organising panels here.

In my work, I think my research interest in childbirth and pregnancy comes in part from having experienced it myself, it is not a women-only domain, but I would say that it is one area where my personal experience nourished a research interest.

**EC:** *What has been the best thing about your career?*

**VW:** Being able to share discoveries and excitement about things in French literature and history that I care about with other people. For example, in the book I published in 2013 on pregnancy and childbirth in early modern France, I did a translation of French medical texts in part because I knew that historians were interested in the same material and reading early sixteenth century medical texts without a detailed understanding of early modern French language is tough. I translated the texts, which took quite a long time, wrote introductions and a study alongside the translation, and published it in a series about women called *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*. I was very touched when I was given a prize I did not know I had gone in for. It was a bit like this portrait for Brasenose - I didn't expect for one moment to be nominated! It was a nice surprise as I had won it for the best teaching edition of books on gender and women's studies in early modern French research. What I liked was the sense that something I put a lot of research effort into was actually going to benefit other people interested in the same field.

The second thing I enjoy is the personal element of my job, I love feeling that I have been able to help students at key points in their own careers. It means I am contributing in terms of knowledge to the profession, but also supporting other generations as they go on to achieve something themselves. My first doctoral student was made a professor at Exeter University last year and it was lovely that someone I supervised has gone on to an academic post. And I shall watch you carefully as well, now that you have interviewed me, to see what you go on to do!

**EC:** *Finally, what is your favourite memory of Brasenose?*

**VW:** I think it has to be having tea and toast in my friend Helen Firth's [née Russell] room in staircase XII. On a Wednesday afternoon we would sing with a student choir - we were not wonderful singers, but we really enjoyed it. We would rehearse for two hours and then cycle back up St Aldate's in the cold and four or five of us would land in Helen's room and grill toast over the electric fire (which would be forbidden now under health and safety!). It was the sense of friendship, doing something we enjoyed and doing it in a historic and beautiful place. That is what I remember: it is the people that make Brasenose special.

**Emily is currently in her second year, studying French and German.**



## Ceri Hutton



**Ceri is a human rights campaigner and facilitator who has worked tirelessly for the rights of people with HIV and AIDs, homeless people and refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. She read French and Italian at Brasenose and matriculated in 1981.**

**Orla White:** *First off, can you summarise what you've done and what you do now?*

**Ceri Hutton:** When I left Brasenose, I worked in various campaigning organisations in the UK and overseas until 1988, and then after HIV/AIDS hit I went to work in that for ten years. I was firstly the Head of Policy for the National AIDS Trust and then the director of Immunity legal centre which took anti-discrimination cases. After that, in 1998, I started working freelance. As a freelancer I have found myself working mainly in the less popular or 'cuddly' areas. I both enjoy the challenge and feel motivated by the increased discrimination some people experience. That was one of the reasons I started working in HIV/AIDS when I did, and why work mainly with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants now. There are so many myths and inaccuracies and hatreds around that group of people, and so...I want to be on their team.

So now I do policy research, I evaluate projects, I coach individuals and I work with charity teams and boards to get them to think about what they really want to do - strategic planning and so forth. I'd be called a management consultant if I worked in the private sector and I'd be very rich, but I'm not and I'm not.

**OW:** *I was struck by your story of the Chair Conservative Family Campaign storming off the radio and refusing to be on a panel with "that woman". Do you feel your experience of being a woman in that kind of outspoken role has been different to a male experience?*

**CH:** I'm sure it's been different. I think there are positives and negatives to it. On occasions, particularly when I was younger, I would get heard in a particular kind of way. I used to lobby a lot in the HoC and the HoL around AIDS issues, and I gained access in part by being a seemingly non-threatening young woman. When MPs are being lobbied on all sides on all manner of things all the time, if you can go in and be vaguely charming and non-threatening you can sometimes gain access you wouldn't otherwise have. So in that sense it can be an advantage, I suppose, but of course what isn't an advantage is that you sometimes don't get taken so seriously.

The story that you refer to, with the Chair of the Conservative Family Campaign...I think what happens a lot, with most of the issues I've dealt with, is that there's a kind of continuum of bigotry and prejudice. These people can't come out and say, 'If I had my way, women would be back in the home, doing the cooking and getting my slippers ready,' but you know it's in there. So even though in this particular instance I was talking about the rights of people with HIV and AIDS, I think one of the things that pushed him over the edge at that point was that not only was I saying lots of things that were difficult for him to hear, but I was also a small woman sitting there—with at the time slightly spiky

hair—and I think that probably marked him more than it would have had I been a man in a suit.

I'm certainly a feminist, by now rather a devalued word, which is interesting: it wasn't in my generation, because it's just obvious, it's just about women and men being equally valuable. But I think being a woman has cut both ways, to be honest. I think as in all things, you've just got to be aware of how people will react to you. And then be cleverer than them. That's my advice, if you want to go into campaigning: be cleverer than the people you are trying to influence.

**OW:** *You say 'feminist' is a devalued term nowadays. What do you think has changed?*

I honestly don't know. But I do wonder in part whether it isn't a part of a wider picture. I often talk to young people who are politically demotivated, which of course ties into not calling themselves feminists, and I think there is genuinely something demotivating about tuition fees. When I went to uni, you could go to uni without thinking of it as a financial investment; you didn't get landed with debt, and there was a recognised value in getting educated in its own right. In some way your society was investing in you, and we kind of knew that. We had a stake in it, we were part of this thing called society. We could see connectedness. I just think now that there is a disconnect, and to be honest if I were a young person right now, I would feel pretty bloody hacked off.

**OW:** *I wanted to ask you about what you thought of student activism, actually! What sort of things would you be hacked off about?*

**CH:** Environmentally, we've gone into massive planetary debt. Whatever happens, we will have to get out of massive planetary debt. But also socially, we are now more fragmented than we've ever been as a society. I think there are more possibilities for rupture and, bizarrely given technological advances, a lack of opportunity in some ways. Things are much harder. When I left college, after having had free tuition, I worked voluntarily, and I got basic benefits to support me when I was volunteering and learning 'on the job'. And it was perfectly possible to do that. It's not possible today. And that draws young people away from getting on and owning the society that they live in.

**OW:** *That reminds me of something Toni Morrison said—she was talking about racism, but I think it can be applied generally to oppression—about one of the main functions of oppression being distraction.*

**CH:** Absolutely. There's a great line from an Eddie Izzard sketch about trying to pick the shortest supermarket queues, and he does this thing where someone yells, 'Look over there, there's a badger with a gun!' and then everyone runs over and you nip in to the front of the queue. And I think that's happening in all sorts of ways. Various people are going, 'Look, there's a badger with a gun over there!' and that badger with a gun is migrants or benefit scroungers or Europe, or all of these things which aren't in any way the problem once you get down to a proper economic or social analysis of it.

**OW:** *Now I've got to ask the inevitable UKIP question. What do you think has contributed to UKIP's rise in popularity?*

**CH:** UKIP's trick is that it blames. The Daily Mail does the same thing, which is why I think Paul Dacre should be hung by his toes from Westminster Bridge... But the thing about that goes back to the *distraction*. As long as you can distract yourself and think 'it's not my fault', you feel mildly better in the short term. People can think, well it isn't my fault I'm feeling unfulfilled, I'm feeling unhappy: it's migrants or whatever. But actually, the reason people are feeling unfulfilled is because a whole series of things have systematically dismantled not only their opportunities to be happy, but their whole concept of it. Corporations have told people that, you know, if you get the next iPhone, you'll be happy. And it isn't resulting in happiness. So UKIP is picking up on that moment of helplessness and unfulfilment. Really, people are being used as pawns. It's just manipulation.

**OW:** *What do you make of recent debates around, for example, free speech and Marine Le Pen's appearance at the Oxford Union?*

**CH:** I'm not in favour of people not being allowed to speak, unless what they're doing is inciting hate and violence - and if they are doing that I'm hugely in favour of them not being allowed to speak! I suppose what I think about people with right-wing views I find personally abhorrent, is that by all means allow them to be expressed, but make sure that other views are also put forward at the same time. I'd want to see two things: a really good student protest, and some clever people to ask her clever questions. And I'd like to see her debate with someone really on the ball on the migrant side of things.

It's like that Je Suis Charlie stuff. I don't believe you can stand united with Charlie Hebdo and then go, 'but you can't speak', I don't think that's right unless someone is actively inciting violence.

**OW:** *Some people argue that it's difficult to stand with the slogan Je Suis Charlie in calling for free speech because some of the Charlie Hebdo cartoons are perceived as racist.*

**CH:** If anything, they were perceived as Islamophobic I think which is different, and importantly so. They were also satirical.

I think a society without satire is very much a lesser society. It's a fantastically powerful political tool. We had, in the Eighties, Spitting Image, and I think most of us would have hurled ourselves off bridges if we hadn't had that cultural reminder that there was an alternative point of view. It was massively important to keep a spirit of popular resistance alive. Satire is useful and important.. Charlie Hebdo was pretty even-handed in its treatment of all faiths. They were making the point that all religions can be quite silly if viewed a certain way. People who hold that religious view might feel very offended by that, but...tough! Frankly, as an atheist, you can find things funny about all religions in my view. The important thing is that nobody should be prevented from satirising.

**OW:** *It terms of comedy as a vehicle for change, is there anything right now you think is particularly good?*

**CH:** Graffiti. There's a lot of very, very good graffiti happening. And protests can be extremely amusing. I remember being in London when cyclists started protesting about how dangerous it was to cycle in London. There was a group of them called Critical Mass, and they used to go to the Hanger Lane roundabout, and hundreds and hundreds of them used to just go round and round

and round. And it was funny, but it also made a point. UK Uncut now is also doing some great protests involving disabled people who chain themselves to bollards and railings.... The police don't know what to do with them. They are hamstrung by their desire not to appear 'disable-ist', and the activists know that. It's funny but hard-hitting protest.

All the same, I wish that there was something more centre-stage, as there was with Spitting Image, which was really doing a comprehensive critique of politics. I think the absence of that in some way may account in part for the disengagement and disillusionment.

**OW:** *On a lack of humour, or perceived lack of humour, leading to disillusionment.... There's a history of terming feminists humourless in an attempt to make feminism less attractive. What do you think of that?*

**CH:** It's difficult for a movement or a person to be attractive without humour. I know this from personal experience. Sometimes I've done it well, and sometimes I've done it badly. Sometimes I've found myself arguing cases where I thought, 'Well the logic alone with power it through', and very rarely does the logic power you through to winning any campaigning argument on its own. For example, I was involved in a campaign on sex education in schools during the AIDS crisis, when you would have felt the logic of 'there is a killer virus out there, young people are having sex, you need to give them the information that will save their lives' would prevail. But people responded with 'no, we can't give them information because it's against so-and-so's religious beliefs'. And so you think, I'm dealing with something not logical here! So then you get into alternative strategies which don't just involve logic to make what you're saying compelling.

**OW:** *So how important are stories to campaigning and activism?*

**CH:** Really important. People don't normally think in theoretical abstracts. A lot of the stuff I do is mind-numbingly tedious, because it involves looking at policies and numbers and theories. You can offer a statistical, fact-based analysis of what is wrong and what is right, but most people will not be swayed by that unless they're already pretty interested in the topic. What brings it home more than anything else is when you tell a story. That comes out all the time when I do research. So I'll review research, analyse figures, survey people, do interviews...and what people always want is case studies about real people. 'Tell us a story.'

**OW:** *I know you like Bob Marley. Does music occupy a particular place in politics?*

**CH:** Art does. It shines a non-logical, non-intellectual light on things. It makes you feel things and think things that a simple conversation can't. It also can unite. It's a shared experience.

In recent anti-austerity protests in Portugal and Spain, people have started singing revolutionary songs of the past. They stood up in the Portuguese parliament and rather than shout slogans, they just sang the song of the 1974 revolution. That's powerful stuff. Music is important in that moment where you realise you can't put across your feelings in words: you have to have something else. That's the thing about art; it transcends thought and engages emotions, feelings, hopes..

**OW:** *You left AIDS and HIV activism after ten years of working in the field. How difficult is it to be able to step away? How do you know when to do it?*

**CH:** Well, one of the things you need to come to terms with if you go into campaigning, or the field of social and environmental justice, is the extremely hard lesson that as much as you may have wanted, when you were sixteen, to change the world, you can't do it on your own. So campaigning is an exercise in humility. It's a bizarre combination, really, because you have to have real passion and Terminator-like determination and chutzpah just to keep going against sometimes incredible odds, but you also have to not let it kill you.

Why did I leave? I think you just know when to stop with a particular cause. I knew it was right to stop when I did. I'd actually done it before stepping away from HIV/AIDs work; I also stepped away when I had founded an organisation called Homeless International in the late eighties. I was offered the director job, but I was tired from months and months of struggling to get the organisation set up and I just knew I was not the best person to take the issue forward. It would have been comfortable for me to stay in the HIV/AIDs field – I knew lots of people, had a reasonable reputation - but I was going to be saying the same things over and over again. One of the things that tipped me over the line in making my decision was when I was invited to speak on a problem at a conference, and I realised I had been to exactly the same conference to say the exact same thing seven years ago. And I thought, 'It's not that they don't need to talk about this problem again, but they don't need me to speak on it again. Other people need to come in now, because I've given this my best shot.'

Change doesn't go linearly, is the thing. Working in the National AIDs Trust I got the school curriculum changed around sex education after years of campaigning, and that was a fantastic win. And then a new government came in and changed the bloody thing back again. You never know what fresh hell is going to present itself next.

**Orla is a second year student reading English Language and Literature.**



## Jules Chappell



Jules became the youngest ever British Ambassador at the age of 31, having already been awarded an OBE for her work in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein, and is now a partner at Hawthorn. She read Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Brasenose and matriculated in 1996.

*Elisabeth (Beth) Jenkinson: Why did you agree to be part of the project?*

**Jules Chappell:** I did think it was really important, because my experience of Brasenose while I was there was that it was quite “lad-heavy”, probably 75% guys, and I have never wanted girls to think that they were the lesser sex. I love hearing from you now that it’s so normal, and that’s how it should be! Whereas we were always made to feel slightly that if you’d done well it was good, but it wasn’t as important as if a guy had done well. So as soon as I heard what you were doing I just thought it was awesome.

*EJ: Could you describe your experience at Brasenose?*

**JC:** A lot of fun! I loved it. I loved being able to mix with all sorts of people. I hadn’t really come across different views before. We’re all brought up with vaguely the same views, and I remember hearing somebody say something a bit different and thinking wow, they actually think that! A lot of what I went on to do in the Foreign Office was sparked from Brasenose exposing me to different ideas.

*EJ: Do you have a favourite memory of your time there?*

**JC:** Well this is a really terrible memory, but we used to have this routine of the different clubs that we went to. Tuesday night was always this club called 5th Avenue. I was thinking about it the other day, and I remember how I’d never even want to go to the loo, because I was worried I might miss some of the fun! I just think wow, how much fun must I have been having if I didn’t even want to go to the loo!

*EJ: You went directly into the Foreign Office after university. Is that the path you had always wanted to take?*

**JC:** Yeah, I was really lucky. At school I’d met some parents of a friend of mine, both of whom were diplomats, and they started every single story with: “when we were here,” “when we were there...” And I remember my friend just sighing and saying “God, my parents are so boring,” and I was just like - “My god, your parents are so cool!” I just found their stories fascinating, so it kind of seeded in my head that I should look into it. I did go for other things, I went for some consultancy type stuff, but I found myself getting bored even in the interview. Whereas every time I read about the foreign office I was just dead set.

*EJ: As a former British ambassador, travel must have played a massive role in your life. Do you think it’s important for people, particularly young people, to travel?*

**JC:** Oh God, it’s the best education you can have! We are so lucky in this country. It took me 15 years of travelling to learn to love the UK. Particularly as a woman, you travel overseas and you

realise how much we take for granted. Some attitudes out there are unbelievably shocking. Then you come home, and people are gunning for you, and supporting you, and you realise how you just take it completely for granted that we’re far more equal here. One of the most empowering things I’ve ever done was with a charity in Guatemala that was trying to help very young kids to challenge stereotypes. One of the questions posed to these children was what they thought the role of a woman was. They described the role of a woman as being a mother, staying at home and looking after her husband. Whereas the boys would say ‘I wanna be a doctor’, ‘I wanna be an astronaut’, and I just wanted to change this.

*EJ: Maybe if people keep questioning those stereotypes like you did, it will eventually have an impact.*

**JC:** Well I’m a great believer in generational change. One of the most interesting things working with young people in Guatemala was that they felt very disempowered. Even though two thirds of the population are below the age of 30, all of the institutions are quite age-heavy. Sure, we should respect our elders, but it was disempowering to the young people. I always used to tell them that whatever they saw as being normal would be *their* normality in 20 years’ time, so it’s up to them to change it. I was involved in a project which attempted to address the problem of domestic abuse in Guatemala, and when discussing it with young people I used the example of drink driving. In my parents’ generation, drink driving was considered funny and totally normal. In your generation - it’s not cool. The prevailing opinion now is completely against drink driving. Total turnaround, total change. So I use that as an example to show that although at the moment domestic violence is considered a private matter that should stay behind closed doors, if young people want to change that, they can change it.

*EJ: What would you say was the biggest challenge you faced during your time as an ambassador?*

**JC:** When I became an ambassador I was 31, whereas my counterparts from other countries were at least 50, there were four women ambassadors out of more than 80 in total, so we were in a minority. So I was seen as a bit of a freak - like what is the UK doing! So when I first went out there I tried very hard to be ‘ambassadorial’. I tried to dress older and be appropriate, but I realised very quickly that that wasn’t going to work. I was so uncomfortable, and I’m a terrible actress – stuff just comes out of my mouth! So after about six months I just decided that I was going to try just being me. And I discovered two things. I discovered that I had a way of reaching out to all of these youth networks, who really saw me their ambassador. Suddenly they had a voice, and I felt like I had someone that actually wanted to talk to me, which was excellent! And then there was the media, which was really interested just because I was different. Every ambassador seemed to them to look and sound the same, and they noticed that I say some pretty wacky stuff, and I looked different. So being able to talk to two thirds of the population, who hadn’t felt engaged by others, and being covered every week in the media, suddenly meant that I had genuine power in a way that I’d never felt before. That was really exciting, because I suddenly realised that I could do stuff; I could use that three year period to do something that would make a difference. But

my challenge was the first six months, because I was made to feel like I was a joke, like I was not a real ambassador.

*EJ: You were awarded an OBE for your services in Iraq. Could you expand on what you did there?*

**JC:** Iraq was a classic actually. When we first got there it was very positive; everybody was very excited post-Saddam, but everybody thought there was a plan. We were trying to be very democratic by asking people what they thought the plan should be, but the Iraqis we were speaking to were all like, 'well, you tell us!', we replied 'No no no, this is your country...' and suddenly it all got a bit panicky. We formed a governing council, a temporary body; because there needed to be elections but there weren't any of the preparations needed for proper elections yet. One of the very senior people said to me; 'Jules, you're a woman! We need to have women involved in the political process.' So I was instructed to go and engage with the various different women's groups all over the country and encourage them to be vocal, when some of them were very nervous, and to push an agenda that still lives on today.

*EJ: You've mentioned the different attitudes towards women in some of the countries you've been involved with. Did you ever find it difficult to reconcile your views with the need to respect another culture?*

**JC:** It's weird, it's harder now I'm home than it was when I was out there. When you're there you just adapt. I adapted so much that when I first came back from Iraq, I went out clubbing with a friend, and I remember looking at what everyone was wearing and being really shocked. And my friend said, 'Jules, I've seen you wear a lot less!' So slowly over time you just change, and what's normal changes without you even realising. Your basic principles don't really change, but the parameters for what you would consider shocking slightly move. I would react to a comment here much more strongly than I would out there, because my expectations are different. Rightly or wrongly, I think it's just a human condition. If you're going to influence people, you've got to work with what's out there. If you come at it like a bull in a china shop, you're not going to convince anyone. Instead, you try to work with people who you can see agree with an element of what you're saying. You have to be very patient, which is hard, because while you're being patient there's a whole load of awful stuff happening. So it's not an easy job if you're an idealist.

*EJ: Why did you choose to move into a different sphere of work, by becoming a partner at Hawthorne?*

**JC:** I moved because I didn't want to be a diplomat all my life. In the foreign office you're kind of in a bubble: I'd worked with a lot of British business and advised them; if they wanted to invest in a country I was in I would tell them all about the culture, the politics and the economics, I would also help them lobby the government and launch products. So I did a lot of stuff, but it's not the same as doing the business yourself. I wanted to go from being in a very big, safe, environment to being in a shit scary, start-up environment - which is where I am now. I could have read about everything that goes on in business doing an MBA or whatever, but it's nothing like the stress and the pressure and the excitement when you're doing it.

*EJ: What is the achievement you're most proud of in your working life?*

**JC:** I was in Guatemala and it was my last couple of weeks there. We'd been working on this domestic violence project, and because it's seen as a very private issue, we wanted to bring it to the public attention and get people talking about it. Domestic violence victims will always say that they feel very isolated so we wanted to do something very unifying. We spent over a year organising this human chain of 18,000 people from the top to the bottom of Guatemala's biggest volcano. The Guatemalan flag was passed from the bottom and it went all the way up to a flagpole in the crater. The moment the flag was raised, people started cheering and crying. That for me was just a moment of feeling massive satisfaction; it made me very proud.

*EJ: This is a bit out of the blue, but do you have a favourite film?*

**JC:** Probably Love Actually! There's a line that Hugh Grant says at the beginning and the end of the film, which I find particularly relevant to diplomacy, which is that we all focus on the bad and the hate in the world, but when you go to an airport you realise that actually we're all surrounded by love. When you're working in the foreign office, your job is to focus on the bad stuff - so it's nice to remember the good. Even in Guatemala there was all this hideous violence, and yet everyone I met was lovely! I was always wondering where these bastards were who were doing all these awful things!

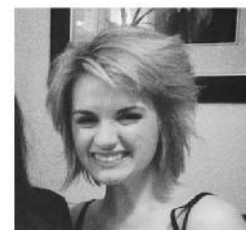
*EJ: What advice would you give to young people today?*

**JC:** Be very careful not to get stuck in a rut, whether it's a career rut, a relationship rut, a social life rut. Humans seem to adapt in a way that seeks routine and normality, and after a while we make ourselves boring. Because of my career, because my postings were around three years, I was always forced out of the rut. Every time I moved it was a massive upheaval, but every time I met new people, saw new things and did new stuff. I have this thing where every place I go to I try to learn something new. So I've learned to ride a motorbike, to ride a horse, to scuba dive... And every time you do something new, you're exploring yourself without being told what you're capable of.

*EJ: And could you extend that to young women studying at Brasenose?*

You guys are already awesome! The world is your oyster; you will have so many opportunities. Don't feel the pressure to therefore have to be the first woman to do this or the first woman to do that - do what you want to do. The best you can do to make other people proud of you is to do what's right for you. Enjoy.

**Beth is currently in her first year and studies Philosophy, Politics and Economics.**





## Rachel Harrison



Rachel is a digital consultant and multimedia producer who has created TV programs, educational digital content and the first ever British multimedia encyclopaedia. Among other awards, she has won a BAFTA. Rachel matriculated in 1990 and read English

**Language & Literature.**

*Jess Ward: First of all, congratulations on having been nominated as a portrait subject to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women in Brasenose! How did you feel when you were approached for the portraits?*

**Rachel Harrison:** I was really flattered and extremely proud. During my time at college, I had sat in the Hall surrounded by portraits of illustrious men and always thought to myself: "Have there never been any Brasenose women who have done something worthy of portrait?!" I used to joke with my friends that one day I would do something good enough to get a portrait in Brasenose, but never seriously thought I actually would! So thank you very much for helping me win that bet!

*JW: So let's start at the beginning. What was your time like at Brasenose?*

**RH:** I enjoyed every millisecond of it! I found myself having to run everywhere so I could fit in everything that I wanted to do! Brasenose was the perfect fit for me because it's small enough for you to know everyone and to make friends easily, but it's also big enough to have some space for yourself. It's a magical place and I felt like it was my home from the first second I walked into it.

*JW: Did you find any disparity between men and women during your time at Brasenose?*

**RH:** I came from quite a female-dominated environment at home because I have three elder sisters, and my school had a roughly 50:50 gender balance. When I came to Brasenose, the ratio of boys to girls was roughly five to one, so this was definitely a change for me. Yet I never felt the girls were left out, treated as second class or overruled by what the boys wanted to do - except when there was cricket on TV! If anything, we were rare and therefore a novelty, so we were treated well by the boys. I did, however, have one tutor who told me in my first ever tutorial that "women should not go on to further education as they would just leave university and have babies", but he was quite an eccentric man and that was his own strange personal view, not the view of anyone else there. I was entertained by his comments if anything, rather than intimidated.

*JW: Being an English student with dyslexia, what barriers did you face during your studies?*

**RH:** It was very difficult, especially with the sheer volume of reading required for an English degree at Oxford. When I look at words on a page, I see the white spaces within the letters rather than the letters themselves, and they're also moving - a bit like reading on a rollercoaster. When I was growing up, teachers weren't trained in how to recognise and help dyslexic pupils like they are now. My mother kept going to the school saying I wasn't

devouring books in an afternoon like my sisters did but the school just wrote it off as a lack of motivation. Luckily, dyslexics tend to be very creative and resourceful people and we're great at finding techniques to help ourselves, although this often conceals the fact that we are struggling. For example, I used to get panic attacks if asked to read aloud in the class because my ability to read disappears entirely under pressure, so I went to my teacher and asked how many times a year it would be reasonable to read aloud. I said I would volunteer that many times, if he would promise to never pick me if my hand wasn't up. When he agreed, I went to the local library and learned plays and novels off by heart by listening to audio tapes repeatedly then, when 'reading aloud' in class, I would hold my book up as if I was reading, but I was really doing it from memory. I still do that in meetings and presentations today, and no-one has ever noticed!

At Brasenose, I was lucky that my best friend, Glenn Tapp, was also my tute partner, and we would have to read the same texts so he would just read everything aloud for us both. It wasn't until my 2<sup>nd</sup> year at Brasenose that I went to a specialist and got myself diagnosed as dyslexic, and once I admitted it to the college, they were very supportive. When it got to my third year, I was one of the first people to have a computer in my room (though no internet!) and I typed everything on that with one finger! There were only two college computers at the time, in a basement below staircase 15, but no one used them and there was no internet as such. I did my finals on that computer too in a little room by the library and with question papers printed to the size of wallpaper. There was also a wonderful team of volunteers in the Bodleian who would do shifts reading all my books onto tapes. It took a long time to listen to them all - Daniel Deronda alone took 36 continuous hours!

*JW: If you had to pick one memory of your time at Brasenose, what would be your favourite?*

**RH:** That's difficult! I remember one day I was coxing the Brasenose crew on the river and I realised I was at what I could only describe as the ultimate summer camp ever! It was a beautiful sunny but frosty morning and I was being rowed down the river with other people doing the work, later on in the day I was going to discuss my favourite literature with some of the world's leading experts, then I was going to direct a play I had written and have dinner in the beautiful Hall with my friends and then that evening I was going to a Bop (usually playing EMF's Unbelievable and Dexy's Come on Eileen!). I realised it was one of the rare times in my life when I would have the luxury of spending all day doing all the things that I loved with people I loved and in the place I loved. I'm enormously grateful to Brasenose for encouraging us to get involved with the full Oxford experience, as well as the work.

*JW: So now you work as a digital consultant and multimedia producer. How did you go about being involved in such a relatively new industry?*

**RH:** Whenever I went to career talks I always said that my dream job hadn't been invented yet, and it's true. We didn't have websites or smart phones or more than three TV stations then! Being a writer/producer of content across multiple platforms simply didn't exist. Even now, every five years technology changes so radically, and I'm not sure that my actual dream job has been invented even now! I knew I wanted to incorporate my A-levels - English, History and Art - and I gravitated towards a career that used all of them, I guess, plus my experience with computers that I'd gained during my final year. One thing I love

about my career is how it's constantly changing and evolving, and I'm still constantly learning.

*JW: Have you found much disparity between men and women in your working life?*

**RH:** Digital media has traditionally been a very male-dominated industry but the more the focus has become about the content and less about writing hefty code, the more it has evened out. One of the greatest programmers I ever met was a woman, and there are lots of female project managers and editorial staff as well as an increasing amount of coders. There have also been some good projects to encourage more teenage girls to get involved in digital media, such as Google's Made By Code. Those kinds of initiatives are great.

*JW: And of course, we must talk about your BAFTA (named 'Gerald'), amongst the many other awards you have won. What would you consider the greatest achievement of your career?*

**RH:** Winning the BAFTA was one of the high points, definitely. That project won many awards in this country and internationally, and it was great to have invented, produced and written something that helped so many people. As someone who is dyslexic, I always try and design my digital projects with disabilities in mind because, aside from making the projects accessible to everyone, it tends to lead to good clean design for all. One of my favourite moments was when I was testing a new interactive whiteboard project in a classroom and one of the children had learning difficulties which meant he had never spoken in class. When the mole character on the screen popped up and asked where she was in the world, the boy shouted 'MADAGASCAR!' His teacher was so delighted she cried! I was so proud that something that began as an idea in my head had engaged him to such an extent that he overcame his difficulties and joined-in for the first time ever! To make good content, you always have to picture the customer and think about what will motivate and delight them, so whenever I make a children's project, I always think about him.

*JW: So if you had one piece of advice for Brasenose Undergraduates what would it be?*

**RH:** I would definitely say keep building on the skills that you have by constantly adding more things that interest you. If you want to learn how to do something, teach yourself! I've never had any formal training for computers or software; I taught myself by having a go. There's always a guide online or a YouTube video that will help you learn, and the rest is just about thinking about what you want to achieve and doing it step by step. I also have to mention how great the tutorial system is at Oxford. One of the greatest things Brasenose did for me was give me the confidence that I have now. Tutorials teach you how to work to a deadline and deal with essay crises – and those essay crises still happen in your work life! It also gives you the experience of talking to people who are experts in their field without feeling intimidated. They give you the inner confidence to know that you can deal with any stressful project deadline, hold your own in any conversation, and have faith in yourself to get to the finish line of your project...somehow!

**Jess is a first year student reading English Language & Literature.**



# Marcia Hutchinson



Marcia founded the culturally diverse educational publishers Primary Colours in 1997. She was awarded an MBE in 2010 for her services to Cultural Diversity, and often visits schools as a role model and mentor to BME children. Marcia read Law at Brasenose and matriculated in 1982.

**Asta Diabaté:** *What is your fondest memory of life as a student at Brasenose?*

**Marcia Hutchinson:** Probably rowing because I had never done anything like that before. even though it was hard getting up in the morning to go down to the river it was great at 8 when we'd finished and we were coming back just as everyone else was getting up. I rowed in my first year and my second year. Third year, I didn't, I decided to concentrate on studying and exams.

**AD:** *How do you remember your time at Brasenose generally?*

**MH:** Generally I think I would say that it was like going on a safari, because for a poor black northern girl from Bradford I had never mixed with people from different social classes before so they were like exotic animals! It felt like a three year holiday amongst a very very strange group of people, but I gradually got to know them and made some life-long friends.

**AD:** *That's a peculiar way of describing your time at University but I really like the analogy. So how did your career start? When you finished university, what did you do?*

**MH:** I did a law degree so the obvious thing to do when you do a law degree is to become a barrister or a solicitor. I was interviewed at university from a number of law firms and started working for a City law firm and spent two years there, qualified as a solicitor and then moved on to other firms.

**AD:** *What attracted you to City law?*

**MH:** When I went to Oxford I didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life because I had gone to a comprehensive school in the North with no tradition of getting pupils to Oxford we didn't really know much about the different subjects like Classics or PPE. I hadn't even heard of PPE, I didn't know what it stood for. It meant I was quite limited in the degree I could do: I didn't have any foreign languages so although I liked history I think you needed a foreign language at A-level to do history, so almost by a process of elimination I ended up studying law. I always had been interested in law but I didn't specifically want to be a lawyer – it was just a degree my A-level suited. Once you start doing a law degree, if you're not sure what you want to study or what you want to do with your career it's very easy to fall into being a lawyer. You'd have to make a conscious effort to do anything else and I think that's why I ended up as a lawyer. But I think I also had the feeling of wanting to take the difficult option so rather than go for a subject like English I went for law because it was harder to get into and rather than work anywhere else I went to the City because, you know, jobs in the were harder to get.

**AD:** *Did you enjoy your career as a lawyer?*

**MH:** No. Mainly because I hadn't consciously chosen it and I don't think it suited me as a person. I think I am perhaps more creatively minded and law is very detailed oriented and whereas I can do details I don't think it was really me. But I think that for a lot of people, it takes them a while to decide on a career that really suits them.

**AD:** *What is your proudest achievement?*

**MH:** I think I'd say the 16 years I've spent running Primary Colours, which is a publishing company that I've set up to create books and learning resources that promote cultural diversity. I decided to set the company up after I had children and realised that I couldn't really find many books which had really positive images of Black and Minority Ethnic children. So I thought, you know what, I'm going to do this myself. It was very hard going at first, we then moved on to working with schools and I think the impact of working with schools – because each book will reach a class of thirty children – and I think the 17 years working running Primary Colours, I think that's my proudest achievement.

**AD:** *What motivates you in life?*

**MH:** Someone said something to me the other day which made me think that yes, that's something: maxing out against potential. What I mean by that is being the best that you are physically and mentally able to do. For instance, I'm only 5 ft 4. I would never have been an absolutely brilliant rower because I'm not tall enough, so fulfilling my potential in terms of rowing would have been making the women's second team, which I did. But in other areas I think what motivates me is getting the best out of yourself bearing in mind the limitations and so I really enjoy keeping fit and healthy and I've taken lots and lots of physical type activities such as rowing, racket ball, swimming, I've even tried triathlon. I think it's pushing yourself to get the very best out of yourself. I think that's what motivates me.

**AD:** *Do you still row by any chance?*

**MH:** No, it's very hard to find rowing crews outside Oxford. First you have to find a river, then you have to find a club you have to get down on the river at the sort of time everyone else is rowing which is going to be really early in the morning. So although there is a rowing club in Manchester where I am now, it's just finding the time to get there where everybody else is there and to get 8 people in a boat - I prefer rowing in eights rather than fours or twos. So no, I haven't really rowed much since I left Oxford.

**AD:** *Do you think things have significantly changed for women?*

**MH:** They have but not as much as they could. I think a lot of the blatant sexism has gone underground but there's still a lot of code so a lot of things are said and you can interpret what they mean. For instance, David Cameron, who is obviously a Brasenose "Old Boy", saying to a female MP "Calm down, Dear" is quite a pejorative way to speak to a woman. I think things have improved because there are things like the Sex Discrimination Act but not as much as one would hope. Women are still significantly discriminated against in the work place and the lad culture is still there. I think a lot of the discrimination is now more obvious because women are reporting it and using things like #YesAllWomen so many of the things that are happening are no longer hidden but there still is a long way to go.

**AD:** *Did you experience that kind of overt sexism in the workplace where you worked in the City?*

**MH:** Yes, I think I did but it's very difficult to desegregate the factors. Being a Black woman, you're not entirely sure whether some of the attention coming your way is race-related or gender-related or where the intersection between the two comes. I know, for instance, that the law firm I first went to after Oxford, I was the first black woman they had ever had. I don't think they had ever hired a black man either. And I think it goes both ways. Everyone knows who you are because you're the only black person and at the same time the sexism heads your way as well but it's hard to distinguish the two. But yes, there was definitely sexism. I don't think I found it quickly.

**AD:** *Do you have any advice for young women studying at Brasenose today?*

**MH:** Yes. I would say stick to your guns, decide what it is that you want to do and make sure you find out as much as you possibly can about the career you want to do and go after it. Don't allow other people to undermine you or tell you that you can't do it because...because either you're female or because you're Northern or because you are black or because you're working class. But at the same time if you change your mind accept that it's okay to change your mind. You know you're leaving university at 21 and no one expect a 21 year old to be absolutely sure about what they want to do with the rest of their lives. So make sure you get as wide a range of experiences as possible while focusing on your goal.

**AD:** *What do you like the most about your career right now?*

**MH:** Well, I think the nice thing about running a publishing company is that I get to do a range of things. I work with lots of creative people – writers, graphic designers, illustrators – but at the same time I also follow a book from the inception of the idea. I take it all the way through from commissioning writers, commissioning photographers, commissioning teachers to write the teaching packs as our work goes into schools, right through to launching the pack in school. Then I get lots and lots of feedback from teachers and children on how it has affected them, what they have learnt that they wouldn't otherwise know. If you create a good teaching pack teachers will use it year after year so the numbers of children who have benefitted from it are exponential because they'll keep using it and I think it is the long term impact of the work that I do, I think that's what I enjoy them most.

**AD:** *What did you feel when you received your MBE?*

**MH:** I think I was surprised because, although I enjoy my work and I was delighted that we had quite a wide impact, I didn't necessarily realise that the impact had been such to be noticed at national level. So I think I was very proud, especially for my family given that I am the first person from my family ever to go to university and my father died when I was young so he had never seen me going to university, but my mother was delighted to be able to come to Buckingham Palace and to watch the investiture. I think it's nice to get the recognition because it means that even people have heard of your work who might have otherwise not heard.

**AD:** *How did you feel when they asked you to sit for a portrait?*

**MH:** I was really honoured because Brasenose was one of the first Oxford colleges to accept women and I didn't realise that. I think it had been only 5 or 6 years that they had been accepting women when I was there. So to hear from current Brasenose students "we're celebrating 40 years of accepting women and we would like you to be one of the 12 women represented" made me feel very honoured that the work I've done has been recognised and the college where I learnt it all has remembered me and wants me to be involved.

**AD:** *What made you choose Brasenose as your college of choice?*

**MH:** Because I didn't know anything about Oxford and I didn't know anyone who had been to Oxford, after A-levels I went back to school and said "I'd like to go to Oxford", and they panicked. They said, "We don't know what to do. We've never had anyone apply to Oxford." However, people made calls and eventually a professor was found who had studied history and he had been to Brasenose. He taught me for the entrance exam and also suggested that I applied to his old college, which was Brasenose. That's why I ended up applying to Brasenose.

**AD:** *Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. I really appreciate it.*

**MH:** You're very welcome.

**Asta is currently in her second year and studies History & Politics.**



# Fay Schlesinger



Fay became the youngest ever Times News Editor at 30 and is the first female Home Editor. She won scoop of the year in 2012 for her work uncovering tax avoidance schemes. She read English & French at Brasenose, matriculating in 2002.

*Margherita De Fraja: As the most recent alumna involved in the project, your experience as a female undergraduate will have been very different to some of the earlier alumnae, but while you were at Brasenose did you feel any disparity between men and women?*

**Fay Schlesinger:** It felt very equal, definitely socially it was totally equal. Academically was slightly different; one of my tutors once told me that when women take exams they are more likely to get a good 2.1 but less likely to get a First or a 2.2/third, whereas it's the opposite for men. Women have ideas but don't project them with the same all-out confidence as men do, and when men project their ideas with that confidence either they get it right or they get it totally wrong! I think I felt some of that when I was there, when some of the men would not have done the reading but still have a brilliant tutorial I'd think 'how can I compete with that?' and be more nervous. There is still is that sense that women don't – to use that Sheryl Sandberg expression – 'lean in'; and I see it at work now, where I'm in a very male-dominated world and there is a tendency by women to let men do the talking in meetings, which is something that my editor is really trying to change.

*MDF: So within the student community during your time at Brasenose men and women felt equal, did you feel that the College itself celebrated the achievements of its female alumni?*

**FS:** No, not really. I can't remember a single time anybody said "this is a woman from Brasenose who has achieved something fantastic." As an undergraduate you're not particularly aware of alumni, but when you look around Hall it is mainly men in the portraits, so if I had any sense of alumni at all, then it was very male dominated. So no, I don't think they were celebrated.

*MDF: What would you say your favourite memory, or proudest moment, at Brasenose was?*

**FS:** There are a few... I think one of my favourite things that I took away with me was the joy of being in libraries! I got into my fourth year and things got so interesting academically and it was only then that I really started to get into the nitty-gritty of the literature and really love it. I would find these totally bizarre books that were hidden in all sorts of libraries that I'd need special permission to go to, some books hadn't been opened in decades and that was so exciting! Also amazing was getting a first, I remember the day; I was working up in Yorkshire and one of my friends phoned me to tell me and I just couldn't believe it. I think the whole way through university I'd felt like I wasn't quite good enough and then suddenly I'd managed it, and not only managed it but exceeded my expectations. I felt really good. I felt I'd used my time in Oxford best way I could – it's such a fantastic resource and I got something out of it.

*MDF: From doing a very literature based degree, how did you go about going into journalism?*

**FS:** I did a little bit at university for the OxStu, including interviewing Scott Mills from Radio 1. Then afterwards I did loads of work experience at different papers in Yorkshire before getting a job at the Barnsley Chronicle, which I just loved. My first story was about a stolen cement mixer and even that was really exciting! I worked there for a few months and I was just hooked from the beginning. Then after that I went to London, got a bursary through the Guardian and the Arts & Humanities Research Council and did my postgraduate degree, then worked for the Guardian briefly, did a traineeship at the Daily Mail and spent three years there and then came to The Times. It doesn't have much to do with literature, although it does have to do with spotting patterns, and being incredibly inquisitive. All I wanted to do was know more about things: everything fascinated me, whatever it was. I'd be writing a story about Tesco, or about wind turbines, and have to become an expert just like that. That's the key to journalism. In a literature degree you might read a novel as your primary material and then your secondary reading for the analysis; in some ways journalism *is* like that: you've got your primary facts, you talk to experts and witnesses, then you have to come up with a way of conveying all this in a way that is accurate and interesting. Just like essays really, only with them you're referring to things that are a few hundred years old instead!

*MDF: What would you say your proudest achievement has been in your career so far?*

**FS:** My biggest achievement as a reporter was definitely the tax avoidance investigation that I did with my colleague Alexi Mostrous. First of all I had to get my head round the topic which was hard, as I started out knowing *nothing* about tax – I'd never filled in a tax return, I barely understood my own tax affairs, let alone those of celebrities or complex tax avoidance schemes. It was a really unique investigation in that all the things we were investigating were totally legal, there was no suggestion of illegality, so we were fighting a bit of an uphill battle because everyone was asking why we were picking on these people who weren't breaking the law, but our point was that there should be a better law! For The Times to publish this, as a very proudly pro-business paper, was quite bold, and it was really exciting to do it. We had a big debate over whether to name Jimmy Carr or just leave him as an unnamed celebrity, and looking back I can't imagine having not named him. He's often still cited now. There is mention of tax avoidance crackdowns all the time now, in the autumn statement, in the most recent budget, and I genuinely believe that is because of mine and Alexi's investigation and I am so proud of that. It was also a lot of fun of course – although when it got to Take That I was a bit upset, as I love Take That!

*MDF: I suppose now you have less chance to use your language skills, do you miss it?*

**FS:** I do. It's different, I use my skills in a very different way now as Home Editor, and the language used is incredibly important. Headlines as well are so important, and that is language – a different type of language to the language of an essay, but I'm using it all the time. The French however - that I use less! Every now and then there's something to translate in the office, and I

use it when I go on holiday to France, but I do wish I used it more. I did think about going to be a journalist in France, but you just have to be so fluent. I still love French, and I do read a bit of it in my spare time.

**MDF:** *At the moment we hear a lot about how everyone speaks English, and we don't need to learn languages any more, but would you say that it is still important to study languages?*

**FS:** It is an important skill, in two ways; one is that yes, we do live in quite an English-centric world, but if you're going to properly access a culture you have to speak the language. In some ways I wish in my year out I had spent more time with French speakers, because I was an English teacher, which does mean you become slightly defined by your Englishness. Languages are hard though, I tended to find listening harder than speaking, especially in a big group of people, and it's also so hard to be funny in another language, because your comic timing just goes and you're always about three seconds behind! But at the end of my year abroad, I spent some time working on an archaeological dig, speaking nothing but French, and that was really fun – I learnt a lot of archaeological phrases that have been totally useless to me ever since!

**MDF:** *What do you think about the idea of the portraits project?*

**FS:** I think it's great, if it inspires teenagers and students that's brilliant. I do sometimes feel unsure about whether women should be separated off from men in their achievements but I think unfortunately we're still in a position where that is necessary. I think that as long as we still need to keep banging the drum for women then so be it, eventually we'll get to the point where we don't need special exhibitions to focus on women's achievements but we're still on the road there.

**MDF:** *What did you think about being approached for the project?*

**FS:** That I haven't achieved anything yet!

**MDF:** *I think we could definitely dispute that!*

**FS:** Well, I'm flattered of course, and it's really nice. It's great that students will be able to see people who've gone into different walks of life, from the same college and same environment and yet who have fanned out and done so many different things.

**MDF:** *Well, we hope you might inspire people who may never have thought about journalism.*

**FS:** People are always fascinated by journalism, people are aware of it going on around them and it's got this quite romantic, exciting edge to it. It is a field that anyone can go into, all you need is to be fiercely intelligent and extremely inquisitive, that thirst for knowledge and a commitment to accuracy. I definitely see this in my new job as an editor, where I have about 40 reporters working with me and each has this web of things going into their stories. What I love about my job is this wonderful privilege of seeing over the top of this whole landscape, I get a wonderfully distilled sense of what is going on in the country and I'm contributing to the decision every day of what the most important thing is, what we're going to put on the front page. My main aim is to make people engaged in life in the way I feel that I am.

**MDF:** *As a final question, what would your advice be to a female undergraduate coming into Brasenose now?*

**FS:** You've got to work hard, obviously. But above that feel like you *are* good enough, you'll only have got in if the tutors have seen something special in you. You have to feel like you can hold your own. Put in all the work and just go all guns blazing into your tutorial and speak up and talk, even if you get stuff wrong! I got so much wrong in my first and second year. I remember one translation which was a French text about a man hiding in the bushes with some binoculars, but because the word for binoculars is of course the same word for twins, 'jumeaux', I translated the whole text with the word twins instead, saying "his sweaty hands were on the twins" and it was so embarrassing, but in the end it's funny and it doesn't really matter!

**Margherita studies French & Italian and is currently in her second year.**



## Harini Iyengar



Harini is a barrister and is also on the steering committee of the Temple Women's Forum, and mentor to young women in her field. She recently gave an inspiring talk to Brasenose's Peerless Women's Network. Harini read Law at Brasenose and matriculated in 1993.

**Rosie Thomas:** *What would you say is a particularly memorable thing that stands out from your time at Brasenose that shows how much things have changed?*

**Harini Iyengar:** There was going to be a JCR meeting with a motion proposed to ban the rugby team from stripping in the bar and my tutor asked me to come and have a sherry with him in his room and said. "As your tutor I'm telling you not to go to this debate, and don't speak for the motion. You'll be made a figurehead and you'll be thrown to the wolves." As he was my tutor who was about to write all my references I had to do what he said. I have a scrapbook at home all about this and one point there was a gossip column in the Daily Telegraph, about 'radical feminists at Brasenose College trying to spoil this tradition.'

**RT:** *Knowing what college is like now, that is incredible because that would just never happen!*

**HI:** I'm so happy to hear that. It was quite a torrid time but after 5 years I had got to the end of my patience and the discussions went on for several weeks, and I was threatening to run a workshop on harassment where I'd let people know their rights about harassment under UK law. Interestingly there were three members of the rugby team who came to see me secretly to say, "I'm so glad you're doing this, they force me to drink shots and I hate it, but we can't say anything."

**RT:** *What was the gender balance like in your year?*

**HI:** Around 20% women. It was not 50:50 in any of the years. Having more women in the college makes a big difference. A lot of the boys who were there had been to single sex schools and a lot of them didn't know how to interact with females!

**RT:** *You were at Brasenose for an undergrad and a masters in the 1990s - did you see it change much in that time?*

**HI:** I got more bolshy!

**RT:** *Excellent. Apart from being a radical feminist and standing up to the boys what sort of other extra-curricular activities did you get involved in?*

**HI:** Politics. I was elected in the Oxford Union in my first year and after that was an officer of the Labour Club. I was minister without a portfolio because I didn't want to run for women's officer.

**RT:** *Are there any particular experiences apart from the anecdotes which you've already mentioned which have influenced your views on gender, race and discrimination?*

**HI:** I went to a very feminist girls school, Manchester High School for Girls, and I think the first woman who was called to the Bar at Gray's Inn went to my school, as did the first ever British female

solicitor, Carrie Morrison. And the Pankhurst daughters all went there too. So I was brought up in a very Northern, bolshy tradition. And then I found myself at a very conservative, very traditional, very establishment College.

**RT:** *Do you think you stood out compared to the other girls?*

**HI:** They were maybe more southern. When Bill came to take the photo I tweeted about it and one of the other portrait subjects, who is a different age and in a different job tweeted back and we ended up having a little dialogue about it so I'm starting to realise that there are lots of other female alumni of lots of different generations who I would be very interested to meet.

**RT:** *I'm amazed by how much change there has been in such a relatively short period of time since you were here. Did Brasenose feel very old fashioned compared to some of the other colleges?*

**HI:** I mean maybe we felt frustrated because it felt old fashioned compared to the rest of society and the rest of Oxford! I mean Brasenose has always had a great reputation as a law college and I have benefitted from having it on my CV. But I never had a tutorial with another woman and that would have been nice!

**RT:** *So how did Oxford in the 1990s prepare you for life afterwards, beyond what you studied?*

**HI:** I don't want to be disloyal and awful, but I found once I got to the Bar that I was a lot more respected as a woman. When I arrived at Brasenose I was really shocked that people who had good A levels did not believe that men and women were equal, but I'd come from a very progressive school and it took me a long time to accept that there are people in society who just don't get it!

**RT:** *Can we talk about your photo?*

**HI:** I had a long conversation with the photographer about images of women and what object to have in the portrait. I had spoken to some colleagues beforehand about whether to wear the wig or not, and had quite an interesting discussion with our senior clerk and our marketing manager – who are both women with children – about whether to wear the wig or not, as some people can assume that you're not a barrister if you're a woman. Though it's happened to me less as I've got older I still don't like people assuming I'm in a different job to the one I'm in because of my gender.

**RT:** *Have you always had an interest in employment that has led to your current specialism?*

**HI:** No, I actually wanted to do public law, my thesis was on freedom of assembly, so I wanted to do human rights law. But then we had to look at the different chambers and they all did public law and something else - public and commercial, public and employment, and I did my pupillage here and so had to do the employment too. In my early years I was always trying to do more judicial review and the employment law would just keep coming in because of the reputation of chambers. I didn't realise how lucky I was when I was younger that we got so much good work. Then after five years it was like falling in love with your best friend, it was that kind of experience with employment law! I suddenly thought, why am I chasing after this other kind of law when there is so much good, interesting work technically and factually, with the different relationships people have at work. A lot of people spend more time at work than they do at home, so

there's a lot of human interest with employment law both sides feel intensely about it. And I love cross examining!

**RT:** *You speak out in the media quite a lot with regards to race and gender and employment law. Why do you think that the case against discrimination needs to be defended so much?*

**HI:** You don't have the equality in practice that you have on paper in this country. Which is interesting because I don't think that law is the best instrument for change. Most quarrels people resolve themselves. One good thing about this government is that they have enacted section 78 of the Equality Act which I think is good because it takes a feminist issue on pay gaps and makes it a regulatory issue.

**RT:** *How do you prove there has been discrimination?*

**HI:** It's very hard. The burden of proof used to be on the employees but a lot of improvements in equal opportunity law have come from Europe. In a sophisticated company there will be very little open abuse so you used to have to ask the tribunal to infer discrimination. Now the burden of proof has shifted, so if you have facts from which you could infer there was discrimination then the burden of proof shifts to the employer to show that there was not discrimination. The good thing is that most employers don't want anyone to be discriminated against. When you start monitoring data and presenting it to them then people become more active.

**RT:** *How do you rate the legal profession as a career for those leaving university at the moment?*

**HI:** I think the Bar is shrinking and we have become very specialised and there's a lot of movement. Unfortunately there's a lot of people leaving. In the Temple Women's Forum we give training to encourage women to stay in the profession and we ran one by common request called "Crossing Boundaries: alternative careers" for women who are thinking of leaving the Bar to show them how they could use their legal skills in a different career. It is a very grim time. But saying that, we're also running one called 'A survivor's guide to staying at the Bar' for those who are left!

**RT:** *I really enjoy your twitter feed @Harini\_Iyengar and I wondered why you had decided to set one up?*

**HI:** I never wanted to be on social media because I'm quite private but in 2012 I was going to write a book and one of my senior clerks came to see me and said 'Don't do it! It takes up a lot of time you could spend looking for work and building up a practice and you won't get any money from it and you could do much better going on Twitter'. And he was right, it has been good for business. What surprised me was how enjoyable it is! You have to be careful as lawyers have strict professional rules and you could do something professionally inappropriate if you're not careful. I kept it totally to do with work at the start then after a few months I realised it was really boring so put a few personal posts on. If you have a slightly different voice on something like Twitter that makes you stand out which is a very charming inversion of the norm.

**RT:** *I've seen you've done a few pieces on Sky News - how did you get contacted by them to speak on various legal issues?*

**HI:** In previous years to put myself forward for things but didn't really get anywhere. Our marketing director sent a few emails out

to different organisations saying that we had expertise on these issues and would be willing to speak about them if needed, and Sky News got back in touch inviting her to their studio in Millbank and told her what things they were interested. I think Sky have a target of 30% women experts which is really radical. When the Nigel Farage Claridge's breastfeeding story came up I thought, "well if I don't do it now I never will", so I did, and have been on three times now, and did something for The Independent and have been on LBC radio twice. I went to an event a few months ago about women experts and the Sky News business editor was there so I went over to thank her.

**RT:** *What sort of resources should young women be tapping into in order to help them early on in their careers?*

**HI:** Professional women's networks are now pretty mainstream and most organisations have embraced it. Also do as much training as you can and take any mentoring opportunity because we used to say that the old boys' network was the way people used to hear about things. Now I think women need to network too. Even my school has started having a dinner in London and it's great to meet women from lots of different jobs and generations and I think the college should start doing dinners for women too. I suspect I'm not the only woman who's not very attracted to come back to Brasenose to spend time with old boys but there must be lots of interesting women out there and my interest has definitely been piqued now! I went to the launch of the First 100 Years project in the House of Lords a few weeks ago and I met Alexandra Marks and there were two other women and she gathered us all and said 'We're all Brasenose alumni'. That was really interesting because I was attracted to Brasenose because of its reputation in law. I think it will be very fruitful for us to meet and keep in touch at the event on May 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brasenose.

**RT:** *So why were you interested in coming back to get involved in OUSU?*

**HI:** Well because I had felt very disenchanted with Brasenose and then in 2013 I thought about going back to a gaudy, and the Development Office encouraged me to go back, emphasising that it was my institution too. So I went back and things *have* changed. It also made me realise that it is an ancient institution that we just pass through, but that I am part of that institution as much as that gang of boys that happened to be dominating while I was there. They were just passing through; they are not the institution. So I thought I should reconnect with it and be proud of being part of that institution. I was invited to address the Peerless Women's Network and then thought that I could do something useful as an external trustee of OUSU, and that's where I am now!

**RT:** *That seems like a great place to end it - thank you very much, and I look forward to seeing you on the second of May!*

**Rosie is in her third and final year, and studies Philosophy, Politics and Economics.**





## Kate Allen



Kate has been the director of Amnesty International UK since 2000 and before that she was deputy Chief Executive of the Refugee Council. She was in the first cohort of female undergraduates in 1974, and read Philosophy, Politics and Economics. She is now an honorary fellow at Brasenose.

**Katie Arundel:** *As you know, I'm interviewing you as part of a project to celebrate 40 years of women at Brasenose. How did you feel when you were asked to take part in the project?*

**Kate Allen:** I was taken aback that it's 40 years ago, it doesn't feel like that at all, it's really interesting but also that it very nice of you to ask me: I think it's a great project. We were pioneers in our day and I hope you're enjoying your time there.

**KAr:** *What was your time at Brasenose like?*

**KAI:** What was it like? It was a mixture I think. I made some very good friends, people that I still know and will know for the rest of my life. I really enjoyed the work that I did- I studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics- that has given me a good grounding for the work that I have done during my life. It was a great privilege for me to go to University: I was the first person in my family to go to university, so it was not necessarily the automatic thing that was going to happen at all. It was great meeting Vernon Bogdanor and having him as a tutor, he was very interesting and it has been nice seeing him on the telly from time to time and having our paths cross occasionally. It was quite tough sometimes being the first women. Most people were very welcoming, but there were some people who weren't quite so welcoming. We really did break new ground.

**KAr:** *What was the gender split like when you started?*

**KAI:** There were only 20 women in the whole college. We were all put on one staircase and I think that this male institution which had been male for centuries struggled a bit to get used to the idea of women. I don't think there were any women academics at that stage. Of course at that stage there were quotas; at that time it was perfectly legal to say 'we'll take 20 and no more', so if number twenty-one of the women was better than number twenty of the men, she still wouldn't get in, because we were only taking twenty women. It's quite astonishing really when you think about that now.

**KAr:** *So from Brasenose, how have you got here, to Amnesty?*

**KAI:** A series of jobs. I thought about politics, and so I sent some years as a local politician on Camden council, thinking about whether I would become an MP or not, and I went to various selection meetings to find out whether I would get selected as an MP. But during that process I really decided that that wasn't really for me.

**KAr:** *Why not?*

**KAI:** I just thought that, quite honestly, the chances of ending up as a back bencher were quite high and I would be bored silly. It wasn't really what I wanted to do and, to be honest, I like running things. So by that stage I'd had a career in local government, various policy work and policy issues.

Then I moved to the refugee council. I spent a good part of my career there and left to come here. When I left I was deputy chief executive. It was a very large organisation, we were running campaigns and a whole series of programmes for refugees and asylum seekers, we'd just run the Kosovo emergency evacuation programme, and before that the Bosnian emergency evacuation programme. So it was one of those kind of full on amazing jobs. In the Refugee council at that time, about half the staff had refugee backgrounds from different parts of the world. It was massively multicultural and just brilliant to work in. I just loved it. I then moved to Amnesty which I love too.

**KAr:** *Your job must be really inspirational, but it must also be really tough at times- is there anything which gets you through that, or keeps you working?*

**KAI:** I'm just back from Lampedusa and Sicily, after 4 or 5 days, meeting people who had fled appalling situations in Nigeria, Somalia, other parts of Africa, and fled through Libya, which is another shocking story, and then onto boats across to Europe and people who had survived that journey, but watched others die. The resilience of people who have survived so many horrors, and the dedication of the people that I met, from the Italian coast guards to the people in hospitals, reception centre staff – you hear some really appalling stories and some really terrible things that happened to people and that were done to people, but you also see the best of humanity as well. You see amazing bravery, you meet astonishing people who have done the most amazing things. That's what I find completely uplifting.

I stayed in a family hotel in Lampedusa, run by a couple who were just so welcoming of Amnesty, so pleased that we were there. They do everything they can to be welcoming to refugees and migrants arriving on that tiny island. They felt so reinforced by what we were doing and by our solidarity. I find the ordinary everyday lives of people doing the right thing so inspiring. People think it's a grim job, full of terrible and awful things, and there is that side to it, but it's far outweighed by the other side.

Also the level of activism in the UK – we have over half a million members, supporters and activists – half a million people in the UK who stand up for human rights. That's inspiring. At the AGM we had 400 activists in a lecture theatre at Warwick university, talking about what we do and how we do it, and what they're doing, which at the moment is campaigning with their parliamentary candidates, asking them "what will you do and what will your party do about making sure people don't drown in the Mediterranean?". And that is amazing, we can get to every MP in the country, in the same week on the same issue and tell them what we think, and that's massively powerful.

**K**

**Ar:** *As a charity, do you ever find the line between lobbying politicians and supporting politicians difficult?*

**KAI:** No, I think we live in a sophisticated country in that sense, so one of the great things about Amnesty is that our money comes from our members, which gives us freedom because not taking government money means we're not having to think about how we do and say things, so we just are very clear about what it is that we think should be happening. Sometimes we and the government agree and work very closely together. I've worked really closely over the last four years with William Hague, until he was moved from foreign secretary, we worked on the Arms Trade Treaty and the end Sexual Violence Initiative. In these last few years we have got the current government totally on board, so much on board that I think they think it's their idea! But that's fine. We really worked very very closely with them to secure that. And then at other times, like at the moment, we think they're a disgrace for what's happening in the Mediterranean.

We can do both. One time, when he was foreign secretary, I met Jack Straw in the morning to talk about the arms treaty and to work together, and in the afternoon I met him at a different meeting to be hugely critical about rendition and allegations of torture. Most of our politicians are sophisticated enough to understand the difference and do understand that we can do both things at once.

**KAR:** *As well as politics, you've interacted with the media- you've been on Question Time, you write in the Guardian occasionally. How have you found being in the public eye?*

**KAI:** I think it's part of the role, and it was part of my role at the refugee council. What you want to be is the best spokesperson possible with the stories that you have. I enjoy that, I have a brilliant press team here and policy team. But it doesn't all rest on me at all, at a local level our local groups have that relationship with their local radio stations, local newspapers- and we get that message out there. When you look at where people trust the media, they most often trust their local media much more than they trust national media, so our ability to have that impact with our activists is also crucial.

**KAR:** *Amnesty deals with all human rights, which of course includes women's rights- is that something you feel particularly strongly about?*

**KAI:** Yes. I'm a feminist, and Amnesty has taken up the cause of women's human rights, and over the years has really understood the different ways in which women's rights are affected, and that we need to understand and recognise that in the work that we do. We've run some brilliant campaigns- we have one at the moment, which is called 'My Body, My Rights', and a lot of that is around access to reproductive and sexual services, such as access to contraception, abortion, the ability to make decisions about marriage or not, children or not, all of those things. It's a very good campaign which has different targets in different parts of the world. In places like El Salvador, Nicaragua, there are no abortions under any circumstances, so women with ectopic pregnancies risk death, it's absolutely shocking.

Even here in the UK, women in Northern Ireland don't have the same access to abortion that women do in the rest of the UK, it's not just something in other parts of the world. We've done some

brilliant work from AIUK too, in the last three years, we've done work with women in Afghanistan, particularly human rights defenders who really do put their lives on the line. We've done some work supporting them and their organisations and getting the EU and all the missions in Afghanistan to understand how they can support women human rights defenders in very practical ways. That's just taking off now, so I hope that we'll see the UK embassy and other human rights embassies supportive of women human rights defenders in Afghanistan. And that's really needed because they have such a fight on their hands.

**KAR:** *What would you say has been Amnesty's biggest achievement in the 15 years you've been with them?*

**KAI:** I think the one which is closest to my heart, and which was a 20 year campaign, is the Arms Trade Treaty. To see something going from a stage where people say to us "Don't be silly, don't be ridiculous, what do you mean 'a Global arms trade treaty'? That's never going to happen" to it actually coming into force through the UN on 24th December last year. Amnesty's Christmas present to the world. I think I'll have the Arms Trade treaty on my gravestone. I could be here all day with individual stories, such as people who have come off death row or stories of individual women in Afghanistan that I felt very very proud about.

**KAR:** *How do you decide which campaigns to focus on?*

**K8:** Yes, that's a good question and for it's important for a global movement. We don't just sit here in the UK and make those decisions. There are 7.8 million supporters globally now, we're in most countries of the world, in one way or another, so we consult and we talk and argue and decide. But what it comes down to at the end of the day is the gravity of the situation, and being really clear about what it is that we think we can achieve if we harness our resources and direct them in a particular way. There's a process in Amnesty by which we do that, we get our political analysis right, we make decisions about what we think we can achieve, we put our resources into it and then we go for it. So a lot of debate about that and then we decide. Win or lose in those debates, everybody gets on board.

**KAR:** *I've just got one more question: I know you were involved in Amnesty's book, 100 poems to make grown men cry, and I wondered whether you had a favourite poem?*

**KAI:** We're actually doing 100 poems that make grown women cry now, so I have been thinking about that question and I haven't yet got an answer, so I'm not going to pull one out! But nice question, it is a brilliant book, and the grown women one will be lovely too. They're hoping to have it out by the end of the year, we've got some pretty amazing women.

**Katie reads Mathematics and is currently in her second year, she has been an Amnesty supporter since the age of 16.**



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