

WIKIPEDIA

# The Isis Magazine

*The Isis Magazine* is a student publication at the University of Oxford, where the magazine was established in 1892. Traditionally a rival to the student newspaper *Cherwell*, *Isis* was finally acquired by the latter's publishing house, Oxford Student Publications Limited, in the late 1990s. It now operates as a termly magazine and website, providing an outlet for features journalism, although for most of its life it appeared weekly. The two publications are named after the two rivers in Oxford, "Isis" being the local name for the River Thames.

## Contents

**History**

**Alumni**

**References**

**Sources**

**External links**

## History

*The ISIS* was founded by Mostyn Turtle Piggott, the first of the student editors, in April 1892. In his first editorial he wrote:

"We have no politics and fewer principles, and should we last until the General Election we shall use our influence for neither side. We shall endeavour to be humorous without being ill-humoured, critical without being captious, militant without being malevolent, independent without being impertinent, and funny (as Mr Albert Chevalier says) without being vulgar."

In its early days, *The ISIS* was owned and published by the Holywell Press. Students were given complete independence, as long as the paper they produced was profitable and within good taste. Oxford welcomed the addition to its scene wholeheartedly, and was more than

### The ISIS



The cover of the Trinity 2012 issue of The ISIS.

<b>Type</b>	Termly magazine at Oxford University
<b>Owner(s)</b>	Oxford Student Publications Limited
<b>Founded</b>	1892
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Headquarters</b>	7 St Aldate's, Oxford
<b>Circulation</b>	c. 4,500
<b>Website</b>	isismagazine.org.uk (http://www.isismagazine.org.uk/)

prepared to pay the weekly sixpence. *The ISIS* was an accurate recorder of proceedings in the Oxford Union - enough of a function to maintain sales. The same price (2.5p in modern money) lasted into the 1960s.

One of the features of the magazine that survives today is the "Icons" section (then known as "Idols"). Back in the 1890s, being President of OUDS (the Oxford University Dramatic Society) seemed to guarantee an appearance in print. Some of the Idols featured pre-1939 were Lord David Cecil and T. E. Lawrence; it was not until 1935 that the editors judged a woman worthy of being featured as an Idol – Lady Katherine Cairns being the first.

After the beginning of World War I, *The ISIS* ceased publication for four years, until it was resurrected in 1919 by Beverley Nichols, who produced the opening issue entirely by himself.

"...the great fact remains that Oxford is still here, a little dazed and unsteady perhaps, but Oxford all the same, and it is to sing of Oxford that *The ISIS* appears once more, to reflect its every tendency, to echo its laughter and – well, to do the other thing."  
(Beverley Nichols in his opening editorial, 1919)

Evelyn Waugh contributed to the magazine regularly. Waugh was also the first to participate in the rivalry between *The ISIS* and the freshly established *Cherwell* by writing for both. *The ISIS* was disparagingly referred to in *The Cherwell* as "The Was-Was".

The 1930s were times of much political turmoil in Europe, yet serene in *The ISIS* - but then, so were they in the rest of the British press. A couple of articles more flippant than political in tone got *The ISIS* banned from Germany in 1935. Only a year later, the magazine had again to suspend its operations until 1945, to re-emerge with new strength.

The H-Bomb was a significant topic for debate in 1958, and the magazine published a whole issue on the subject consisting of unsigned articles. Two of the undergraduate contributors, William Miller and Paul Thompson, were both ex-national service, and wrote about British Intelligence operations on the borders of the Soviet Union.<sup>[1]</sup> The two men were prosecuted under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911, and sentenced to three months imprisonment. As result, the proprietors at Holywell Press saw the need to step in, with the objection that the staff was now "definitely left-wing and will almost inevitably remain so."

The definite article dropped from its title, in the 1960s *ISIS* turned its guns on Oxford. In Michaelmas Term 1961 under Editor Paul Foot, the magazine began publishing reviews of University lectures. Of themselves the reviews attracted little interest outside the university. However, the decision of the University's Proctors to ban them triggered a national outcry. Exactly three years later under editor Chris Meakin (see Google) *ISIS* had a second attempt. This time it succeeded and the Proctors, despite a fierce intellectual battle with the Editor using their Proctorial Summonses, at length found it simpler to back down under the spotlight of national newspaper interest. The debate revolved around the disagreement :

who was doing more to "bring the name of the university into disrepute"? > > the reviews by exposing in public the worth of university lecturers > > or the Proctors by banning the reviews? Isis won. The Reviews then lasted for several terms until less-connected editors lost interest. Exceptionally the Editor also undertook the role of lead Oxford Union critic himself, as noted above a position of considerable influence around Oxford University from the magazine's earliest days.

For the *ISIS Idol* in his term, Meakin prophetically chose the (much later) novelist Jeffrey Archer who showed no literary flair whatever at Oxford, and never wrote for *ISIS*. The magazine did not only criticise Oxford. One issue during that same term was mainly devoted to an on-the-spot examination of a controversial parliamentary election in the Birmingham constituency of Smethwick, where the widely-criticised Conservative candidate Peter Griffiths was considered to have fought a racist campaign. To produce that particular issue, *ISIS* took a coachload of undergraduate journalists to Birmingham for the day. The result was an edition of the magazine which was widely admired and which Paul Foot hailed as "one of the best things *ISIS* has ever done." Following his editorship, Meakin produced a weekly satirical column "The Fifth Column", a title that has been borrowed numerous times since; it then took him about fifty years to produce his first novel *The Chinese Ocean* published in June 2015. It was probably a record delay for editors of the magazine; he followed this in 2017 with his non-fiction "The Origin of Economies."

Meantime the first of several attempted rescues came from millionaire businessman, Robert Maxwell, and his Pergamon Press on Headington Hill, Oxford. In a risky business move, a national student publication was created - *ISIS National*, which began distribution in Spring 1964, without success. He departed in 1970, making *ISIS* an entirely independent and student-run company. The "University" tag was scrapped, and *ISIS* was also distributed at the Oxford Polytechnic in Headington (now Oxford Brookes University). Quite soon, the absence of solid financial backing caused the frequency of publication to be cut by half, and *ISIS* began to appear fortnightly. The following decades were interspersed with financial crises, the worst of which was a £1,000 printing bill in 1972 - and no cash to cover it with. Again, a rescue squad appeared from an unlikely, but illustrious source, in the form of this telegram:

"Read of your financial troubles in The Times STOP One thousand pounds will be en route as soon as you cable us name and address of printers at the Granotel Rome - Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton"

In 1998, after a series of growing financial crises, "ISIS Publications Ltd" was created. Today *The Isis* is a termly magazine which is owned and published by Oxford Student Publications Ltd.

## Alumni

---

*Isis* magazine has been the springboard for careers in literature, the theatre and television, with its specific influences in *Private Eye* and Westminster politics. *Isis* alumni include Hilaire Belloc, Evelyn Waugh, Harold Acton, Graham Greene, John Betjeman, Michael Foot, Jo Grimond, Sylvia Plath, Sue Lloyd-Roberts, playwright Dennis Potter, Adrian Mitchell, Charles Graves, Robert Robinson (the BBC broadcaster), Richard Ingrams (former editor of *Private Eye*), David Dimbleby (*BBC Question Time*), Paul Foot (Dep. Ed. *Private Eye*), Alastair Macdonald (Dep. Permanent Secretary at the DTI), Derek Parfit (All Souls' philosopher) Christopher Meakin (double columnist on both *Isis* and *Cherwell*; Fleet Street etc.), Mike Harloe (vice-chancellor, Salford University), Peter Gillman, Mary Kaldor (Professor at LSE), Gyles Brandreth (MP and entertainer) and Terry Jones (Python). Then in the "only four issues a term" era: George Osborne, Nigella Lawson, Jo Johnson and Ben Goldacre. Exceptionally, Paul Foot and Gyles Brandreth were also presidents of the Oxford Union. <sup>[2]</sup>

## References

---

1. Humphrey Carpenter, *That Was Satire That Was: The Satire Boom of the Sixties*, London: Victor Gollancz, 2000, p. 13.
2. "The ISIS" (<http://isismagazine.org.uk/about/>). *The ISIS*. Oxford Student Publications Ltd. Retrieved 17 July 2015.

## Sources

---

- The *Isis* website Isis Online (<http://www.isismagazine.org.uk/>)
- Billen, Andrew and Skipworth, Mark. *Oxford Type*. Robson Books, 1984.

## External links

---

- Isis Online (<http://www.isismagazine.org.uk/>)
- Oxford Student Publications Ltd (<http://www.ospl.org/>)

---

Retrieved from "[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The\\_Isis\\_Magazine&oldid=928750099](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Isis_Magazine&oldid=928750099)"

---

This page was last edited on 1 December 2019, at 11:46 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.