

The New College Ball since 1856

Attendance at a New College Commemoration Ball can be a highlight of a student's time at the college. The latest one, held on Saturday, 28 June 2025, was a suitably grand affair, perhaps befitting its antecedents, or was it? As arguably the major event in the college's social calendar, occurring only every three years, it has received rather short shrift in the published college histories.¹ It might be worth considering how it has developed over time, including when it might have started, seeing as it does focus quite considerable resources of the college and it does entail the transformation of the college into a major party venue, requiring no small budgetary outlay, and student and staff input.

The Commemoration Ball is so named because it occurs in Commemoration Week. This is the ninth week of Trinity Term, i.e. the week after the end of term, when in theory all exams are finished except perhaps for some *vivas* still to be undergone by a few. The week had developed around Encaenia, or The Act, dating back to at least 1622. This was the ceremony where University benefactors were commemorated, honorary degrees conferred, orations given, and music performed.² The Encaenia was originally held in the University Church of St Mary but the occasion moved to the specially built, Sir Christopher Wren-designed, classically-inspired, Sheldonian Theatre in 1670. Handel oratorios featured there, and then other entertainments were added to the programme. These included a ball, first recorded in the town hall in 1773; the earliest visual record of such a ball survives from 1844.³ Encaenia had become by the 1870s the focal point of the grand celebratory coming together of the university that was 'Commem Week', giving senior and junior members the opportunity to commemorate and show off their institution. Cuthbert Bede describes the range of entertainments on offer in *The Adventures of Mr Verdant Green* (1853) including a concert, lecture, 'magnificent choral service at New College', promenade in Christ Church Broad Walk, procession of boats, and the Town Hall ball. In the last were perhaps sown the seeds of the morphing of this university celebration into a more collegiate one as colleges became keen to emulate the ball in particular, with New College perhaps being one of the first to do so.⁴ Balls were very much internal social events for colleges, yet they could be major boosts to the local economy for those providing marquees, ball gowns, food, drink, entertainments and attractions, security, lighting, and the like. Such items were not always sourced locally though with one 1889 ball being castigated for the fact that 'every blessed thing down to the very waiters was imported from London'.⁵ By the 2020s, most, if not all, colleges were holding a ball; some, every year, others restricting such indulgences to a triennial cycle. New College was alternating every third year with Magdalen and Christ Church as being arguably the grandest affairs in town, but the rota has taken some time to be re-established after the pandemic hiatus of 2020. Some of the events have been titled as 'Dances', seemingly less grand affairs, though there could be quite a fine line between a ball and a dance: New College's 'ball' of 1950 and its 'dances' of 1949 and 1951 seem, from their programmes, to have been very similar events.⁶

¹ Balls only feature in the illustration of Jennifer Thorp's 'Archives' piece in *New College*, ed Christopher Tyerman (London: Third Millennium, 2010), pp. 98–101, at p.101 with ball ephemera, with the images not discussed in the text.

² I am grateful to Joseph Dobbyn for allowing me to utilise his notes on these origins of balls; *The Encyclopaedia of Oxford*, ed Christopher Hibbert, (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 100.

³ Etching of Oxford Grand Commemoration of 17 June 1844 in *The Pictorial Times* (22 June 1844).

⁴ Cuthbert Bede, *The Adventures of Mr Verdant Green*, with an introduction by Anthony Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 246–7; L. W. B. Brockliss, *The University of Oxford: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 475–6. The procession that for many now marks Encaenia is perhaps best described in John Betjeman, *An Oxford University Chest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 13–23. New College's earliest ball is discussed below; among other colleges, Magdalen's first was 1886, Hertford 1902, Somerville 1908, *Magdalen College Oxford: A History*, ed L. W. B. Brockliss (Oxford: Magdalen College, 2008), p. 408; *Oxford Review* (1902); Pauline Adams, *Somerville for Women: An Oxford College 1879–1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 77.

⁵ C. J. Day, 'The University and the City', in *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VI: Nineteenth Century Oxford, Part 1*, ed. M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 441–76, at p. 461.

⁶ New College Archives, Oxford, NCA JCR/K3/1949 & 1950, NCA JCR/R/Elliott2.

This chronological assessment of New College's balls and dances over time includes as an appendix what may be a comprehensive timeline of all such events. This lists their genre and date along with the numbers of tickets to be sold (on a seemingly ever-upwards progression), the cost of the tickets (definitely on an ever-upwards progression), and the theme of the ball (a more recent innovation dating back only to the beginning of the 21st century). In the early days, a feature of the record of the balls is the senior members of the college trying to set a budget for them, but this was seemingly given up on as far back as 1905 when such a figure ceases to appear in the college approval for these events. The first recorded budget was £225 for the 1874 event, which would not have covered the cost of a single ticket for the 2025 version.⁷

An early principle of New College's balls was that they were student-inspired and JCR-run affairs, necessitating an ever-growing committee, and so providing an opportunity for teamwork amongst at least some of the student community.⁸

There were concerns, on occasion verging on panic, from senior college members about the competence of undergraduates to run such big-budget events. Seeking outside organisers has been discussed on occasion and may have been explored most seriously for the 1979 Sexcentennial Ball which was an addition to the normal triennial cycle. Once approved by the college, no ball has been cancelled, other than during world wars, though dances very much continued during the Second World War. Concerns about the financial viability of balls have been almost an ever-present. The principle had been established fairly early on that they had to be self-financing, i.e. funded by ticket sales, with sponsorship becoming an ever more prevalent additional funding source in more recent times.⁹

In terms of surviving records generated by balls, posters have been one element. The earliest survives from 1908 and the genre became quite an art form by the end of the 20th century, comprising quite a suite of images for such as 2010. However, none have been produced since then as the success of balls has meant that such analogue visual promotion has been less necessary and social media has taken over as the means of advising people of their imminence.¹⁰ Photographs also feature, generally of the breakfast-time/dawn survivors, dating back in the archives to 1899.



2007 Ball poster
New College Archives, Oxford, NCA JCR/K3/2007/3
This and the following images
© The Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford

⁷ NCA MIN/W&F2, ff. 45–6.

⁸ M. C. Curthoys, 'The Colleges in the New Era', in *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VII: Nineteenth-Century Oxford, Part 2*, ed. M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 115–158, at p. 154.

⁹ NCA MIN/W&F2, ff. 45–6 (1874) 'expenses of the Ball . . . will not exceed £223 & will be entirely defrayed by subscriptions' (i.e. tickets).

¹⁰ Other promotional efforts included a publicity party held in Hilary for the 1971 ball and similarly proposed for the 1974 ball: NCA BCF/237.

There are also less formal images of ball activities, including late 20th century ones of tent-sliding. Hard copy invites were the means of entry. They feature until 2019 before being replaced by the less collectable QR code, wristband, or straightforward name on a list. Dance cards were a key accompaniment to a ball, recording the tunes to be played by the band, and usually being accompanied by a pencil for recording one's partner for specific numbers. They survive from 1924 and have in more recent times morphed into extensive programmes. 2025's was a booklet of some 48 pages with details of all the entertainments on offer, and plenty of adverts from the various sponsors.¹¹ As might be expected, the balls have generated lots of administrative paperwork, within the JCR, and other college officers, such as especially the bursar, concerning financial issues featuring insurance, and the warden, the butt for a range of complaints and even on occasion congratulations.¹² More recently, and perhaps less obviously, the archive also comprises music—such as CDs of the college's inhouse New Men choral ensemble's ball repertoire—wristbands, which have been a security feature since at least 2010—and specific ball products with specially brewed beer and art-worked cans appearing in 2022.¹³ This material all covers the balls themselves, and the negotiations necessary firstly to secure permission for the ball to be held, and then for all aspects of its setting up, running, the effect on the local population, the security necessary to thwart the associated activity of ball-crashing, and the aftermath and clean-up.



2022 Ball, the morning after, featuring the ball special Oxford Pilsner can
New College Archives, Oxford, NCA JCR/K3/2022/4/11

¹¹ NCA JCR/K3/2025/1.

¹² One Oxford resident, living over a mile away, wrote in 1992 'to complain, bitterly, about the noise that your Graduation Ball inflicted on so many hundreds . . . I had my windows closed and ear plugs in . . . and I still could not possibly sleep': NCA ACA/1/35.

¹³ The archive for college balls is mostly in NCA JCR/K3, with some additional programmes, cards, and the like in the papers of individual college members in NCA PA SCR/B and NCA JCR/R various.

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS 1850S–1870S

The first mention of a New College ball seems to have been in 1856, albeit the information comes not from college records, but from a less expected quarter, the *North Wales Chronicle* whose 7 June edition reported that ‘in the evening two balls took place, one given by the Freemasons in the town hall, the other given by certain members of New College in the hall of that magnificent building. Both were numerously attended’. This illustrates an aspect that was to be prevalent for a number of years of some element of competition between town and gown in holding balls with the 30 June 1887 edition of *Life* reporting that ‘On Tuesday night the Masons’ Ball which should have been a great success was spoilt by New College giving a ball the same night’. The 1856 ball may have been a one-off as the first recorded instance in the college archives of a New College Commemoration Ball is not until 1866. On 23 May of that year, the warden and fellows gave leave for the use of the Hall for a dance on Thursday of Commemoration Week, with the Hall not to be made available for setting up until after dinner on the Wednesday, and arrangements to be subject to the sub-warden’s approval. The college ball as a genre seems to be fairly well established by this date with the following year’s *Manchester Courier* of 18 June 1867 giving notice of upcoming balls at Christ Church, Exeter, Queen’s, and New Colleges, as well as the university. However, it is not until 1874 that a more detailed record survives of a ball at New College, with two of the main subsequent features of balls now apparent.¹⁴

First was the need for a committee to organise and oversee the ball. The JCR appointed one on 19 May 1874. It reported a week later, having come up with an estimate for the ball of £298. The second feature was the concern of the warden and fellows over what they might be agreeing to in terms of financing, along with the other practical consequences of allowing such an extravagance. So, the original estimate was deemed excessive, and a revision was required, and provided. Permission was then granted on the basis of expenses of no more than £225, to be defrayed by the subscriptions of those attending, who were to number no more than 300 persons. The price of an ‘invitation’ was to be 15s. Coote and Tinney were the eight-piece band, Boffin provided ices, Eldrid glasses, Carter decorations, Gill and Co lamps, Walton flowers, the SCR refreshments, the Buttery bread and beer, the JCR wine, and Hamshaw supper. The Hall was boarded out for the occasion, with the boarding thence going to floor rooms in the first phase of Sir Gilbert Scott’s Holywell Buildings being constructed at the time. Supper was in the Undercroft and ‘refreshments’ in the SCR. There were also costs for college servants, police, and a ‘cider cup broken’. 295 tickets were sold with their income supplemented by voluntary private subscriptions to a ‘Champagne Fund’. The final JCR account showed a profit of £3 18s 6d with the ball thus brought in under the budget set by the college.¹⁵

THE PRE-WAR HEYDAY 1877–1914

The triennial concept already seemed to have been established in the 1870s as it is not until 1877 that another ball was considered. However, the idea of a ball was by no means enshrined as the JCR then considered three alternative motions: a ball, a bump supper for the victorious rowing eight which had bumped on seven nights out of eight, or a new barge (a boathouse would not be built until 1960). The bump supper won out so there was no ball in 1877.

A similar dilemma arose in 1880 but then it was decided in effect to combine the events and to hold a ball to celebrate the success of the rowers, especially the ten bumps by the two crews in Torpids. Leave was duly granted for a ball to be held on 4 June, on the same basis as 1874 (£225

¹⁴ *North Wales Chronicle* (7 June 1856); *Life* (30 June 1887); NCA MIN/W&F1, p. 18; *Manchester Courier* (18 June 1867). University College students applied to hold a ball in 1872 to commemorate the millennium of its purported foundation by King Alfred; they were refused, but a similar request was granted in 1874: *A History of University College, Oxford*, R. Darwall-Smith (Oxford 2008), p. 401.

¹⁵ NCA MIN/W&F ff. 45–6, 126; NCA JCR/B1 p. 519.

maximum cost, 300 tickets) with a ball committee of two SCR and three JCR representatives to oversee matters. The date was somewhat earlier than would be the norm as it was deemed advisable not to clash with 'the three annual Commemoration Balls'. Just two years later, the JCR was keen for another ball, but the warden and fellows were less so, trying to fob the JCR off with a dance in the JCR or a lecture room. The JCR persisted, and the warden and fellows yielded, tasking the bursar with supervising preparations and ensuring the protection of the college fabric from the ball. It was however to be another five years before the ball was repeated, with expenses now climbing to £250, but guests still being limited to 300; the proposal in 1882 to use the library (now Founder's Library) as a supper room was scotched.¹⁶



1902 Ball survivors photo—New College Archives, Oxford, NCA JCR/R/Lorraine/29

A counter-attraction at this time, and a rival claimant on the Hall space, was a grand college concert which was often being held similarly in the week after Trinity term. The ball replaced it in 1880, and it may well have been that the college could only cope with one such major event in Commem Week. So, the ball had perhaps to take its turn and could only be triennial. The concert did on occasion entail the lavish decoration of the Hall, and lighting around other parts of the college, and even fireworks, so providing something of a similar entertainment to the ball. The 1892 version, put on by the college Music Society, saw the 'hall filled to overflowing, ... tastefully decorated with palms and flowering plants'.¹⁷

The three-year cycle now became established with balls held thus until the last pre-war one in June 1914. Costs crept up along with numbers which had reached 570 in 1914, by then including old members as well. The ball was established as an all-night occasion, starting generally around

¹⁶ NCA JCR/B1, p. 515; NCA JCR/J3/3a; NCA MIN/W&F2, f. 186; NCA MIN/W&F3, ff. 58, 61, 65, 173, 177.

¹⁷ As reported in the 25 June 1892 issue of the *Oxford Journal*. See also the issue for 12 June 1880; a programme of the 12 June 1883 concert is in NCA CH/H5.

10 pm and finishing at 6 am.¹⁸ It had expanded from just the Hall out into the Garden Quad and beyond with awnings providing cover. Photographs of the surviving company had become part of the experience, and these survive from 1899 though, interestingly, only men feature in the 1899 one which might have been only for members of the college. An aspect of balls which is less prevalent now is that they did perhaps have a role in providing an opportunity for junior members to experience female company in a social environment. New College's one-time senior fellow, Hereford George, notes that 'The most marked social difference between 1856 and 1906 is that at the earlier date ladies' society did not exist for Oxford undergraduates'.¹⁹ A flyer promoting the 1908 ball survives, but there are no programmes nor dance cards from this era. There are mentions in the early 1920s of seeking to return to the lavishness of the pre-War days with garden lighting and firework displays and lots of floral decorations. The *Oxford Journal* records 'notes by an Oxford Lady' about the 1899 ball mentioning 'smart gowns and diamond tiaras . . . exceedingly smart and well done. The awning tent of magnificent proportions'. For the 1905 ball, there were 500 guests with clearly many being from outside the college which then had a rollcall of only just over 200 undergraduates. The warden and fellows even had to stipulate that the ball had to be attended by at least 50 of the resident undergraduate members of the college. The college's ball was a major Society event with the *Oxfordshire Weekly News* noting the presence in 1905 of such as the Countess of Winchester, Lady Finch-Halton, Lady Harlech, Lady Jekyll, Lady Leitchwood, Earl Compton, and Sir Harold Hardy.²⁰

BETWEEN THE WARS REVIVAL 1920S–1930S

As with almost everything else, the First World War interrupted the sequence of balls. A revival on pre-war lines was proposed by the JCR steward in 1920. This was part of a wider movement within the university organised by the president of Vincent's Club to revive the ball genre with Queen's, Worcester, Brasenose, Christ Church, Trinity, Wadham, Merton, Univ, Exeter, Keble, and New College all considering one. In New College, the warden and fellows deemed the potential expenses of over £1,000 to be excessive and permission was declined. Undeterred, the steward came back with Plan B, for an informal dance in the Masonic Hall, on the other side of the wall in the south-east corner of the garden. The Masonic Hall had been connected to the college through the wall as part of the 3rd Southern General Hospital during the war.²¹ The slight problem was that the doorway then knocked through the garden wall had now been walled up again. The steward proposed recreating that access, funded by some of the balance from pre-war balls. This dance, which was actually not far off a pre-war ball in its lavishness (tickets were at the pre-war rate of 25s), is one for which we have copious information, as a whole file of correspondence and estimates survive for it. An awning was to run the whole way (278 yards) from this doorway in the garden wall to the hall where supper was served, with another running 135 yards similarly to a tent in the gardens. Japanese lanterns and fairy lights illuminated the walkways, railings, gateways, flowerbeds, and trees. The ball was insured against being put off for the deaths of the king, queen, Queen Alexandra, Prince of Wales, chancellor or vice-chancellor, warden or sub-warden, or fire in the Masonic Hall, or any epidemic in Oxford. The following year, 1921, the event was now a ball in name again, with the ticket price having continued to escalate to 30s.²²

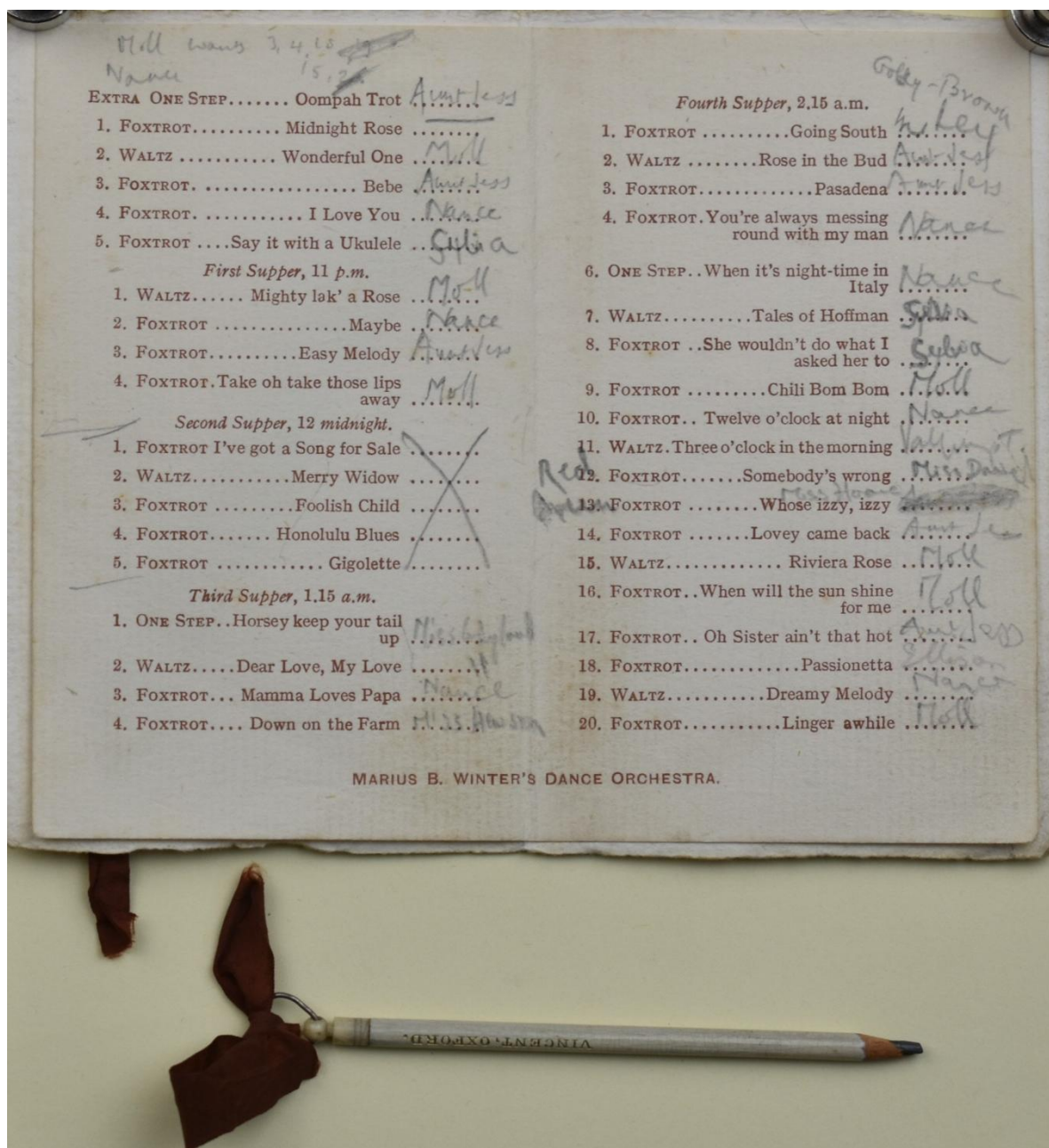
¹⁸ See a description of balls in 1957 in Dacre Balsdon, *Oxford Life* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1957), p. 240.

¹⁹ Hereford B. George, *New College 1856–1906* (London: Henry Frowde, 1906), p. 96.

²⁰ *Oxford Journal* (24 June 1899), *New College Record* 1906, NCA MIN/W&F5, ff. 118v–19r, *Oxfordshire Weekly News* (5 July 1905). The ball committee now numbered eight along with the JCR steward and two SCR members: NCA JCR/A1, f. 6.

²¹ William Shire, '[Supporting the War Effort: The Convalescent Hospital at New College during the First World War](#)', *New College Notes* 23 (2025) no. 9.

²² NCA JCR/J4/4; *Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette* (25 June 1920).



1924 Ball, Deric Mallet's dance card—New College Archives, Oxford, NCA JCR/R/Mallett/3

Numbers and prices inflated still further three years on in 1924, to 750 guests paying 35s a head. An innovation here was a 'small dance' on the previous evening. So, the ball was on 24 June with the small dance on 23 June. In later years this pre-ball event would be known descriptively as 'the floor-polisher'. The increase in numbers (260 were at the 1924 pre-ball event) partly reflected the number of chaperones present looking after their charges. (Deric Mallett's 1924 dance card included a fox-trot with 'Aunt Jess' (possibly their chaperone) before he could dance with Nance and then Moll.) The 1927 event was a seemingly rare occasion when the weather threatened to spoil the fun with the organisers being reportedly more concerned to provide hot soup than iced champagne.²³

²³ NCA JCR/R/Mallett/3; *Daily News* (28 June 1927) 'undergraduates are finding it difficult to keep up the Commemoration levels in this dismal weather'; NCA MIN/W&F7, pp. 142, 149.

Balls continued every three years, though that for 1933 was downgraded to a ‘dance’, as the national economic crisis had led to the university imposing a moratorium on the perceived extravagance of college balls in 1932 for the sake of public relations. (A contemporary description of a college ball as ‘an affair of superlative delight and magnificence’ does acknowledge that its cost could put it ‘beyond the reach of those whose means are modest’.)²⁴ Normal service was resumed at New College with a ball in the following year, 1934. The 1937 ball was to be the last such grand occasion before the Second World War interrupted such events. Or did it?

1940s DANCES

The new global conflict did not have quite the same effect on New College that the First World War had had in pretty well emptying the place. But it did change the character of New College considerably. Not everyone rushed to the colours immediately this time, and there were always some doing the usual degrees during the duration of the war. There was also now a quantity of students on short courses along with others receiving an even shorter-term education, being maybe already in uniform. So, for many, life was being lived perhaps at a brisker pace as it might not last long. Balls were off, but leave for a dance was being granted by the college on 23 November 1940 for an event on 6 December 1940, and one was similarly sanctioned on 3 June 1941 for 21 June.²⁵ But for this, no food was to be expected from the kitchen, nor any wine from the cellar, and no advertisements were allowed to be put up in the porters’ lodge or in college boarding houses. It was to be over by 1 am and tickets were to be 10s a couple. This seems to have been the pattern for pretty much the rest of the war, and beyond, though the Christmas event does not seem to be featuring by then. Symptomatic of the times, for the June 1945 event, tickets additional to the scheduled 100 were to be issued to as many returning prisoners of war as wished to bring partners. The 23 June 1950 event was termed a ‘ball’ again, though in the following year 1951 it was back to being a ‘dance’, albeit the surviving programmes for each have little to distinguish them other than their title and the date. They do however indicate that the venues within the college are multiplying and expanding with a ‘dance’ marquee’ now appearing in Holywell Quad and an open-air dance floor near the Mound. The dances themselves are still perhaps traditional, being waltzes, fox trots, quicksteps, reels, tangos and the like.²⁶

BALLS 1950s–2025

From 1953, the story has been far more consistent, with the only apparent interruption to the triennial cycle of a ball in Commemoration Week—now on the Saturday, but previously on the Tuesday—was an Easter Ball in 1964. There was also the Sexcentennial Ball of 1979²⁷, being only two years after the ball of 1977, as an addition to the normal cycle which continued with a further ball in 1980.

The wartime development of charging tickets per couple continued until the mid-1970s, by which stage they had reached 19 guineas for a double. The idea of pricing tickets in guineas was a perhaps archaic development of the early 1960s intending to emphasise the special nature of the event and also perhaps to confuse people as to how much their ticket really was; guineas did not outlast 1980.

²⁴ NCA MIN/W&F7, p. 171; J. P. D. Dunbabin, ‘Finance Since 1914’, in *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, ed Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 638–82, at p. 647; Carleton Kemp Allen, ‘College Life’, in *Handbook to the University of Oxford*, ed F. Humes Dudden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), pp. 101–124, at pp. 120–21.

²⁵ Ashley Jackson, *Oxford’s War 1939–1945* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2024), p. 187; NCA MIN/W&F8, pp. 171, 190.

²⁶ NCA MIN/W&F8, pp. 171, 190; NCA JCR/K3/1949; NCA JCR/K3/1950; NCA JCR/R/Elliott/2.

²⁷ There was also a School ball in 1979 attended by 270 Old Boys and parents, and further celebrations for staff and tenants, *New College Record 1979*, p. 1.

Such grand, all-site events as the ball are obviously susceptible to the vagaries of the weather. This does not unduly seem to have afflicted balls, with maybe 1980 being exceptional when the rain started half an hour after the start and persisted until apparently two minutes after the end, heralded by a bagpiper piping in a grey dawn. This denouement was not universally appreciated, with a Holywell St resident not attending the ball in 1977 regarding the piper as the final insult to his disturbed night when the 'Ball passes from being a barely tolerable nuisance to being an altogether unreasonable imposition' on the neighbours.²⁸

Part of the reason for such objections from the local community has of course been the change in the music with amplified sound having replaced the maybe more genteel tunes of Marius B Winter's Orchestra or Vincent Lopez and his band of the between-wars years. The 1964 Easter ball had the perhaps more varied sounds of the Monty Sunshine Jazz Band, the 'Escorts' from Liverpool, and the Ivan Chin Steel Band, with the 1965 ball featuring in the Holywell tent the more classic sounds of Bill Savill and his Orchestra and Humphrey Littleton, whilst the more contemporary bands The Wranglers, The Zephyrs, and The Pretty Things played the Garden tent. Several bands were now the norm at one ball. At the 1968 ball, the chart-topping Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Titch and the Jamaican ska band The Skattelites were supported by three other acts in the garden tent, and a disco now also featured, though the proposed Go Go Girls dancers who piqued the warden and tutors' curiosity may not have made it beyond the proposal stage. Headline acts in more recent times have included such as Roni Size in 2001, Dizzee Rascal in 2004, and Scouting for Girls in 2010.²⁹

The ball continued to grow in extent and reach throughout the college with the ever-burgeoning programmes requiring and including maps to help guide the ball-goer round all the entertainments, including such as bumper cars and helter-skelters on occasion.³⁰ A more consistent development of recent times has been the idea of theming the ball, with something French often being the basis for this, such as the opulence of the Sun-King's court in 2004, but starting in 2001 with the ball's recreation of a Venetian Carnival with masks and costumes adding to the sense of occasion.³¹ Ever expanding and more inventive food, drink, music, and entertainment offers have provided for a widening diversity of tastes and experiences. The challenges of providing security, frustrating ball-crashers³², and appeasing aggrieved neighbours kept awake by early-morning pipers or startled by articulated lorries trying to deliver dodgems are all now part of the ball landscape. For the latest edition of the genre (2025), advice was even provided on 'How to Break Out of New College Ball'.³³

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²⁸ *New College Record* 1980, p. 3; letter to the warden of 24 June 1977 from 100 Holywell St, NCA ACA1/35.

²⁹ NCA JCR/K3/1964; NCA JCR/R/Elliott2; NCA JCR/K3/1968; NCA BCF/237; *New College Record* 2001, p. 25; *New College Record* 2004, p. 36; NCA JCR/K3/2010.

³⁰ For a sanguine summation of balls in the 1980s, discussing the perception of them, the dress required, their cost, planning the night, your partner, breaking and entering, and working at them, see M. Hamilton, 'Balls to you' in *The Cherwell Guide to Oxford* (1986/87), 24. And for a contemporary view of them, considering especially their post-COVID future, see Mair Andrews's feature, 'How to build a ball', in *The Cherwell* student newspaper of 5 November 2025: <www.cherwell.org/2025/11/05/oxford_college_balls/> (Accessed: 14 November 2025).

³¹ *New College Record* 2004, p. 36; *New College Record* 2001, p. 25.

³² A ball committee meeting of 27 May 1980 noted, when discussing possible gatecrashers, that 'it had to be a bad Ball if no one bothered to enter', NCA BCF/237.

³³ *The Phoenix* Trinity 2025, NCA JCR/K4/4.

APPENDIX:

LIST OF BALLS/DANCES
INCLUDING DATE, NUMBER AND PRICE OF TICKETS, AND THEME, WHERE KNOWN

1856	Ball
1866 June 14	Dance, price 15s
1867	Ball
1874 June 15	Ball, 300 tickets
(1877	Bump Supper in lieu)
1880 June 4	Ball, 300 tickets
1882	Ball, 300 tickets
1884	Ball
1887	Ball, 300 tickets
1890	Ball, 300 tickets
1893	Ball, 300 tickets
1896 June 24	Ball, 400 tickets
1899 June 20	Ball, 420 tickets, price 21s
1902 June 27	Ball, 500 tickets, price 21s or 25s if after 7 June
1905 June 27	Ball, 500 tickets
1908 June 23	Ball, 550 tickets, price 21s for first 400 then 25s
1911 June 27	Ball, 560 tickets, price 22s 6d for first 400 then 25s
1914 June 23	Ball, 570 tickets
1920 June 23	Dance, price 25s
1921 June 21	Ball, price 30s
1924 June 23	Dance, 260 tickets, price 12s 6d
1924 June 24	Ball, 750 tickets, price 35s
1927 June 27	Dance, price 15s
1927 June 28	Ball, 700 tickets, price 35s
1930 June 23	Dance
1930 June 24	Ball, price 42s
1933	Dance
1934	Ball
1937 June 22	Ball
1940 December 7	Dance, price 12s 6d
1941 June 21	Dance, 200 tickets, price 5s
1941 December 6	Dance
1942 June	Dance
1943 [December]	Dance
1945 June 23	Dance, 100+ tickets
1946 June 21	Dance
[1947 June	Dance]
1948 June 25	Dance, price £1 15s
1949 June 24	Dance
1950 June 23	Ball
1951 June 22	Dance
1953	Ball
1956 June 22	Ball
1959	Ball
1962	Ball
1964 Easter	Ball, price 3½ guineas double
1965 June 21	Ball, 1,200 tickets, price £8 8s double
1968 June 24	Ball, 1,200 tickets, price 10 guineas double

1971 June 22	Ball, 1,300 tickets, price 12 guineas double
1974 June 25	Ball, 1,200 tickets, price 19 guineas double
1977 June 15	Ball, 1,000 tickets, price 27 guineas double
1979 June 30	Ball, 1,000 tickets, theme Sexcentennial
1980 June 27	Ball, price 39 guineas double
1983 June 24	Ball, 1,000 tickets, price £36.75
1986	Ball, 1,200 tickets, price £47.75
1989 June 24	Ball, price £65
1992	Ball, 1,600 tickets, price £82.50
1995 June 23	Ball, 1,500 tickets
1998 June 26	Ball
2001 June 23	Ball, 1,000 tickets, price £125/£95 non-dining, theme Masked
2004 June 26	Ball, 1,000 tickets, price £150/£120, theme L'Extravagance
2007 June 23	Ball, 1,000 tickets, price £160/£125, theme Arcadia Redux
2010 June 26	Ball, 1,000 tickets, price £180/£150, theme The Cave of the Golden Calf
2013 June 21	Ball, 925 tickets, price £170, theme Retrouvez les Années Folles
2016 June 25	Ball, 1,200 tickets, price £195, theme Nature's Endless Treasury
2019 June 29	Ball, 1,200 tickets, theme L'Ile Enchantée
2022 June 25	Ball, 1,400 tickets, price £215, theme The Lost City A Journey Through Atlantis
2025 June 28	Ball, 1,400 tickets, price £265, theme La Vie en Rose