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UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OXFORD



ROGER SHORT MEMORIAL FUND

APRIL 2026

It is with great honour that I write the introduction to this year's annual Roger Short Memorial Fund newsletter. Although aware for many years of the fantastic opportunity afforded by the Fund, I had not had any direct involvement with it until 2024, when I 'stood in' for the Master at the annual dinner, and helped as a judge for that year's travel diaries. It was fascinating to read the stories of the Short Travellers in Türkiye and surrounding countries, and very difficult to choose a winner. But the high point was attending the dinner and meeting the ever-growing community of Univ students whose horizons have been expanded by this programme. It is all the more an honour to have subsequently attended further annual dinners and read further amazing travel diaries, and to properly get to know, and gradually be 'adopted' by, the friends and family of Roger Short, particularly Richard and Anna Morgan, David and Lois Sykes, and Roger's family: Victoria, Katherine, Lizzie, and Thomas.

As I write these words, bombs are falling on Iran, a place also visited by some Short Travellers, which throws into sharp relief the fact that a mutual understanding between cultures is more important than ever. The RSMF programme offers Univ students the opportunity to see for themselves how Asian and European civilizations can live alongside one another, with Istanbul epitomizing this. I am most compelled by the diaries of those Short Travellers who, along with seeing the 'sights', have genuinely sought to engage and understand the local people during the course of their travels. I believe that this is what Roger Short would want the experience to include, given his love of the people and culture of this part of the world.

It is also wonderful to hear in person each year the adventures that our students have had during their summer trips. It brings back fond memories of

my own independent travels, as a backpacking youth travelling through Europe. I did not make it to Türkiye until many years later, and even then only so far as Istanbul, but I am afraid that, lubricated by some wine and good company, I have inflicted my own stories of formative adventure and travel—goat-herding in the French Pyrenees, passing through Checkpoint Charlie into East Berlin in the mid 1980s, and traveling through Tito's Yugoslavia and down to Greece. Travel truly does expand the mind, and makes us more compassionate and knowledgeable of our fellow global citizens. I have seen directly how the Roger Short Memorial Fund is helping in that endeavour.

I look forward to meeting the 2025 and 2026 Short Travellers in April, and to hearing their stories of adventure and self-exploration!

❖ **Professor Peter Jezzard**  
Vice-Master



Part of the impressive battlements of Ani. *Sebastian Collins*

## SEBASTIAN COLLINS

Having become enamoured with Central Asia in 2024 I decided that this past summer I had to continue on my journey westwards along the Silk Road. I had the pleasure of travelling for six weeks from Baku, Azerbaijan to Iasi, Romania. In a continuation from Central Asia, I headed (over a long period) towards Europe with the final destination being my grandparents' house. I would like to thank all the family and friends of Roger Short who helped make this wonderful trip possible. I saw just how wonderful these places and the people living there are, and I now fully understand why you would want to help others to experience these places.

My whole journey absolutely amazed me. Firstly, I went all the way across the Caucasus. Then I stayed in the North East of Turkey, through Eastern Turkey and along the Central Spine along the "Dogu Express" railway line.

I left Manchester Airport without too much of a plan, bar that I would land in Baku and would have at least three days there. As I explored the sites of Baku, including the Old Town and the Palace of Shirvanshahs, the mix between old and new architecture was impressive. After some intriguing tours across the East of the country, I headed to Sheki, one of the finest gems in Azerbaijan. It had some of the most beautiful and intricately decorated palaces.



One of Uplistsikhe's amazing carved churches. *Sebastian Collins*

One of my favourite experiences came from my sleeper journey. Not only were the sunrise views of the Caucasus mountains stunning, but the family with which I shared my room were lovely. As the train departed, I used my (I'm certain) terribly pronounced greetings and their English skills to talk about our respective plans. They had a son, whose English was excellent and he would step in if his parents needed help. I learnt that their son, who clearly both parents were very proud of, was a national competitor in Azerbaijani National Dance! They also showed me a holiday resort that they were going to in the mountains

which looked spectacular. Even more brilliant was the food that they offered me, which included biscuits and a cherry cake. Items which I grew up with and that I was so happy to have. They advised me on some local dishes that Sheki had the best of in their opinion, including peti, a dish cooked in clay pots. The next morning, they insisted that I take extra sweet treats with me, and this food helped fuel my trip for the rest of my time in Azerbaijan.

The winding cobbled roads of Sheki revealed a lively community, with football played in the streets and retirees playing chess in tree-covered parks. I felt extremely welcomed in the area even as I relied on Google Translate and hand signals to explain myself. Upon going to Kis, which was nearby and has one of the oldest churches in the world, a lovely local offered to drive me back in his marshrutka. He refused any payment, despite the fact that the journey was clearly out of his way.

Moving across to Georgia I met Linh, with whom I shared a taxi, in the relaxing wine-country of Sighnaghi. Together, we enjoyed the good company and the wine. With the beautiful views from the protected town, I headed onwards to Tbilisi and then to Gori. Gori holds some amazing historical sites, including its castle and, most importantly, Uplistsikhe—one of my favourite sites of the whole trip. Uplistsikhe is a veritable historical playground. This ancient cave city remained inhabited from around the 2nd millennium BC until around the 17th century AD. It holds large cave villas, a secret underground tunnel entrance, a 10th century three-nave church, and stunning views over the valley. I had such fun climbing to discover new caves and houses with clearly defined rooms and even carved decorations. My afternoon was happily spent running about to every new corner and enjoying some wine ice cream. I then headed by marshrutka to Kutaisi.

In Kutaisi, the Bagrati Cathedral really dominated. With this snapshot into the Georgian medieval period, one could not help but become enamoured with their architecture. After a rest day in Kutaisi, I headed onwards to Batumi and to the main event: Turkey. I must say quickly that I was fortunate enough to visit previously Tbilisi and Batumi, hence their fleeting mentions.

Upon arriving in Trabzon I was baffled by how many Turkish flags I saw, the whole city centre was full of Trabzonspor (the local football club) and Turkish flags. I enjoyed the cold and the rain brought in by the Black Sea and the impressive sights nearby, including the Sumela Monastery. I had a memorable

conversation with an elderly Turkish man using my pretty broken Year 9 German. He told me about his life there, how his mother had come to Trabzon to work in the tobacco industry,



I was as confused as you upon seeing this in Kars! *Sebastian Collins*

and much more. The best rice pudding, "sutlac", was had fireside on the misty mountain. It was certainly the most atmospheric rice pudding I've ever had.

My next stay was in North Eastern Turkey in Kars and visiting nearby Ani. Kars feels like a big cultural melting pot. I saw an

Armenian cathedral converted into a mosque, a cheese museum in a former Ottoman bastion right next to the Russian Quarter, as well as Russian mansions. Kars' history is one of conflict, it was very much a border region, having been part of Russia for roughly 40 years until the end of WWI. Most intriguing, however, is the link to geese in the region, as well as Swiss cheese making. All things made apparent to me in the cheese museum and by the massive goose statues in the city. I did also enjoy the goose pilaf!

One of my favourite experiences was visiting Ani. A few scattered ruins dotted the landscape as we arrived. To one side the sun-scorched plains and to the other the impressive curtain walls of the ancient (formally Armenian) city of Ani. The ruins were truly extraordinary. The rocky terrain created from the rubble of this former metropolis lying in ruin made the remnants still standing ever more impressive. There was a palace, large walls, and some churches still standing amongst a restored mosque and houses that had been part of archaeological digs. All around, in the nearby valleys there were caves that had once been

Derinkuyu adventuring! *Sebastian Collins*



inhabited, just like Uplistsikhe. Climbing up to the citadel, I was impressed by the sophisticated and intricate designs which decorated the now ruined palace.

Returning to bustling, and swelteringly hot Kars, I headed west along the central spine of the country through to Sivas and Kayseri

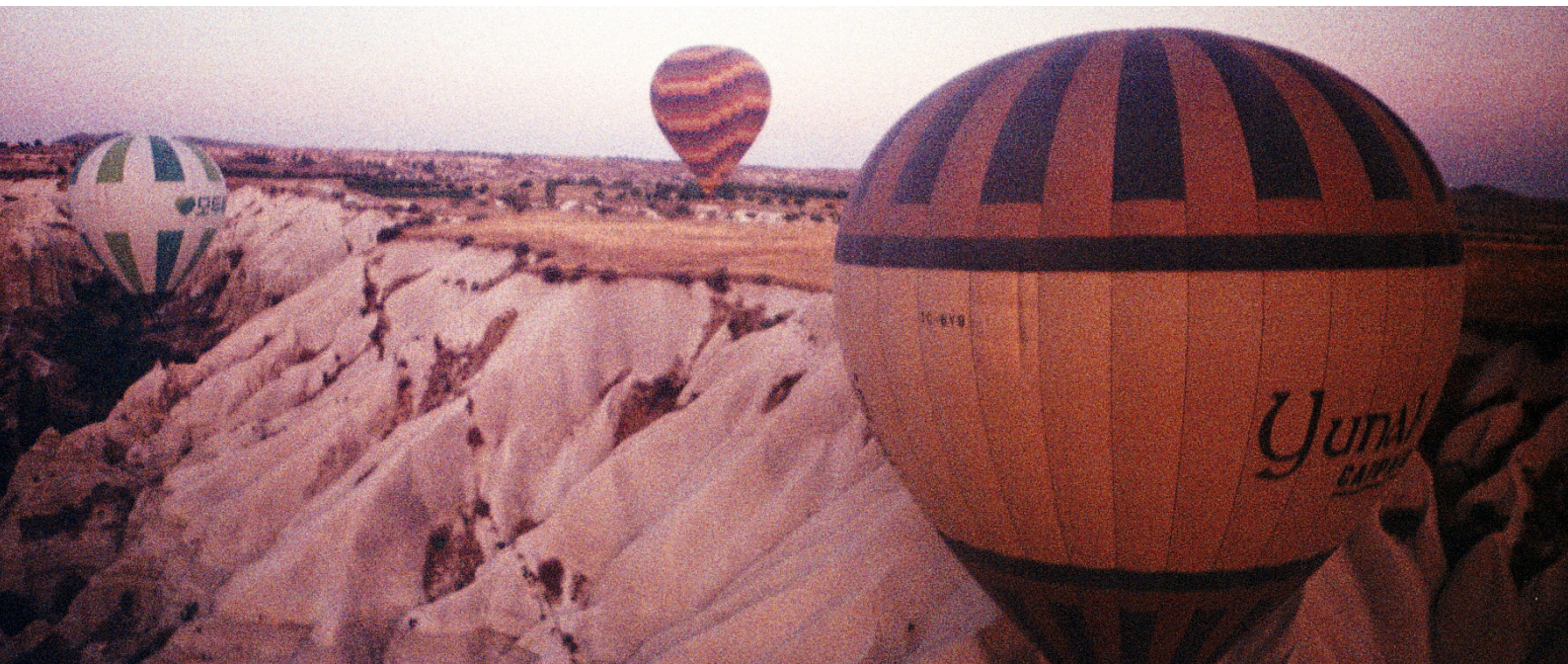


Defne standing in the old library at Efes. *Raphaelle Martinez*

and onto Cappadocia. Sivas and Kayseri were a lot more developed and part of the Ottoman, Byzantine, and Roman empires. Cappadocia was lovely and the trek throughout the valleys was mesmerising. Göreme was very touristy, although I thoroughly enjoyed the cave hostel where I stayed. Derinkuyu's underground city was tremendous. I felt like Indiana Jones going through and discovering all the different levels of this amazing place.

Next, I headed to the ancient sites in the Mediterranean. Taking in places such as Perge, near Antalya, Rhodes, and Izmir with its neighbouring sites of Ephesus and Urla. Some of these spots were truly fantastic. From the Knights Hospitaller castle in Rhodes with its magnificent mosaics to the sleepy seaside

Floating over Love Valley. Taken on real film. *Leah Fogarty*



town of Urla with her underwater city. The hot weather was eased by the refreshing Mediterranean sea breeze. Perge really stuck with me, as well as the hostel in Izmir. Having çay with some local retirees on the street outside of the hostel was really wonderful. Other memorable moments included taking the ferry to Rhodes and Fethiye where I was greeted by a sunset in both ports, the cats in Rhodes were particularly cute and active on the island. Fethiye's bay (where the ferry to Rhodes departed in Turkey) was truly stunning and the markets there were incredible.

The whole Mediterranean coast was fantastic. Some of the views from Urla, a sleepy seaside town will stick with me forever. In Urla, I wandered to a nearby modern quarantine island (although I suppose as I could walk there it is now a headland). I was, however, slightly disappointed at some of the Turkish pricing here. At first my impression of the island was a "crammed building site with reconstructions", and one which you had to pay twenty-five times the cost of a Turkish citizen to visit the main site, with extras easily costing another €50. However, the buildings were tremendous and I'm certain I would have been more receptive had it not come across so poorly at the outset.

I finally headed north-west to Istanbul, where I woke up in Sultanahmet to a beautiful sunrise over the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque. I spent four days in a hostel just off the square and had a wonderful time with some lovely individuals. The sites in Istanbul were fantastic and too numerous to list. Though I must mention that I was so enamoured with Topkapi Palace that I spent the whole day there and the Theodosian Walls absolutely amazed me. Another beautiful place was Dolmabahçe Palace, whose opulence was mesmerising. The commanding and serene sunset views over the Bosphorus were brilliant to enjoy at the rooftop bar of the hostel. After seeing almost all the main tourist sites as well as a few more niche areas, I headed onwards to the Balkans.

The Balkans brought a completely different atmosphere. Starting in Bulgaria the noticeable mixing of brutalist communist architecture with the western European, almost Parisian, was striking. The churches and cathedrals in the city were brilliantly decorated and some of the day trips to the fresco-painted monasteries



The view from our hostel in Antalya. Taken on real film. *Leah Fogarty*

and churches were superb. I was also very impressed by their National History Museum. It was an impressive building which gave off evil James Bond villain's lair vibes. Large harsh corners, built in concrete, with sweeping marble interiors and big open rooms, the exhibits were exquisitely supported by the large glass windows giving a view into what seemed like an English country house's garden. I even enjoyed some Bulgarian theatre, watching *Tiramisu* at the Bulgarian Army Theatre!

Afterwards, I headed to Romania, stopping in Bucharest. Seeing the dominating People's Palace and the Old Town with its History Museum (and recreation of Trajan's column) was certainly impressive. I went to the Arcul de Triumf and the National Museum of Village Houses, where surprisingly and amazingly I saw four of my friends from Univ completely by chance! Will, Natasha, Owen, and Tatiana were interrailing across Europe and we happened to be in the right place at the right time to meet. We enjoyed catching up at the museum and over dinner. The next day, after visiting the Romanian Patriarch's complex and the Royal Palace, I headed to the airport to fly to Iasi to finally see my grandparents, a couple of bottles of Georgian wine from Sighnaghi in tow! After enjoying all the fabulous homemade Romanian food (covrig, borsch, sarmale, ardei) and seeing some of the amazing places in Iasi over a few days I eventually headed back to the UK for some UCBC pre-season in Gloucester!

## LEAH FOGARTY

I would like to thank the Roger Short Memorial Fund for awarding me this travel scholarship. Thanks to your generosity, I spent ten unforgettable days exploring Türkiye and



Gergeti Trinity Church in the background, in the Kazbegi region, Georgia. *Raphaelle Martinez*

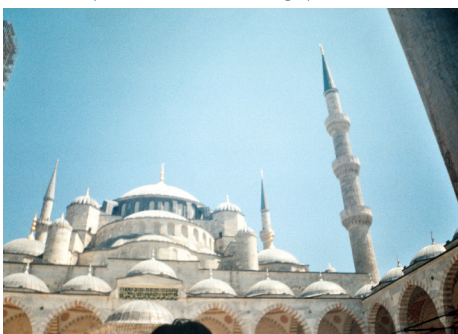
immersing myself in its rich culture.

My journey began in Antalya, a beautiful coastal town on the Turkish Riviera. On our first day, my friend Kalila (a fellow Univ alum) and I found a secluded beach and went cliff diving. That evening, we enjoyed local cuisine at a hidden gem near our hostel. As a vegetarian, I cannot comment on the seafood Antalya is famous for, but I was assured it was exceptional.

The next morning, we tried a traditional Turkish breakfast: olives, honeycomb, thick cream, tomatoes, cucumbers, jams, bread, eggs, and bottomless black tea. Feeling fueled, we drove through the Western Taurus Mountains to Adrasan port and took a boat to Saluada Island, known colloquially as the “Maldives of Türkiye” due to its turquoise waters. We snorkelled for hours and watched a breathtaking sunset on the journey back.

On our third day, we visited Köprülü Canyon National Park, home to impressive mountain views and the ancient Oluk Bridge, a remarkably preserved, single arch Roman structure from the 2nd century AD. We spent the afternoon whitewater rafting through the canyon, enjoying both the views and the adrenaline rush.

The Blue Mosque. Taken on real film. *Leah Fogarty*



The next morning, a 4:30am taxi took us to the airport, where our driver, Yusuf, exemplified Turkish hospitality. He shared coffee, stories, and even insisted on buying us a simit before our flight. After landing in Kayseri, we travelled to Göreme National Park in Cappadocia.

Our main goal was a Cappadocia hot air balloon ride, although these are frequently cancelled due to weather. Ours was indeed cancelled on the first morning, but the locals' warmth made up for it. A potter named Mehmet invited us to his studio for a lesson and later to dinner with his family. His generosity and pride in his craft transformed our disappointment into one of the trip's highlights.

Fortunately, the following morning was clear. At 4:30am we rose gently into the sky above Love Valley. I had expected turbulence, but instead experienced complete serenity. We floated silently as the sunrise painted the valleys below in gold and red. At last, a long-held dream of mine was realised, and a true bucket-list moment made possible by the RSMF scholarship.

Next, we travelled to Istanbul, staying near the impressive Galata Tower. In just 72 hours, we immersed ourselves in as much history as possible. We visited the Blue Mosque and the Hagia Sophia, two monuments reflecting Türkiye's rich and varied cultural history.

We also explored Topkapi Palace, once home to sultans, and wandered through the Grand Bazaar, one of the world's oldest covered markets. Amid its 4,000 shops, we tried baklava and absorbed the lively atmosphere.

To escape the crowds and explore Istanbul further, we crossed the Bosphorus to the calmer Anatolian side, exploring neighbourhoods like Kadıköy and Kuzguncuk. Here we enjoyed talking about coffee with

locals and met some very friendly Turkish dogs!

On our final day, we visited the beach at Büyükçekmece along the Sea of Marmara before enjoying one last traditional meal.

In ten days, I experienced three distinct areas of Türkiye: Antalya's Mediterranean adventure, Cappadocia's picturesque serenity, and Istanbul's fusion of continents and cultures. Each offered a different perspective on the country's diversity.

The main highlight of the trip was the generosity I encountered from so many Turkish people, highlighting their renowned culture of hospitality. This trip also enabled me to appreciate and understand the evolution of history and culture.

I am sincerely grateful to the Roger Short Memorial Fund for making this journey possible. It was an experience I will carry with me for years to come.

## RAPHAELLE MARTINEZ

Thanks to the generosity of the Roger Short Memorial Fund, I travelled to Turkey and Georgia for two weeks in July 2025. I first landed in Istanbul where I met up with my old roommate and friend Defne, and we did the whole two-week journey together. Since she is Turkish, I was able to discover a more local and authentic side, and I hope that through my journal, you will get a true taste of Turkey.

We moved between cities, historical sites, rural and beach towns. We began in Istanbul, a city at a crossroads not only geographically but culturally, with layers of history, and full of contradictions. We then flew to Tbilisi, where the energy was palpable in the lively streets, warm summer nights, and vibrant artistic scene. From there, we visited the Kazbegi mountainous region and Kakheti, the wine-making region. Conversations with locals revealed anxieties about Georgia's geopolitical position, and witnessing protests firsthand reminded me that travel is as much about listening as seeing. We then did a road trip along the Aegean coast in Turkey, visiting Defne's grandmother in Balıkesir, seeing ancient ruins in Efes and fishermen towns like Cunda Adası. And finally, back to Istanbul.

I love food, and Turkey and Georgia arguably have two of the best cuisines in the world. So, I will share three of my favourite dishes that I tried (and that you should try too!).

**Çiğ köfte:** Çiğ köfte is a vegetarian version of “raw meatballs” made from fine bulgur wheat, tomato paste and various spices. You can get it in a wrap filled with çiğ köfte, lettuce, tomato, and pomegranate molasses. Delicious. I had this on my first night in Istanbul, at a hole-in-the-wall place for roughly £1.

**Adjaruli khachapuri:** Probably the most rich and decadent Georgian food: doughy

Adjaruli Khachapuri, one of my favorite Georgian dishes. *Raphaelle Martinez*





Turkish flag over Pigeon Valley. *Mia Muxlow*

bread filled with cheese and butter, and with an egg yolk on top. I had this at a family-run restaurant in Stepantsminda, a small town in Kazbegi, the mountainous region in the North of Georgia.

**Künefe:** Finally, my absolute favourite is künefe. At my request, on my last night in Turkey, Defne's parents bought künefe for dessert. It is a soft cheese covered in shredded pastry dough (kadayif), syrup, pistachios, and heated in the oven. Warm, cheesy, gooey and sweet. Bloody delicious.

Furthermore, every day of my travels I learned a new local word or expression.

**Gaumarjos ("cheers"):** Georgia claims to be the first country to have ever made wine, so we were obliged to try their world-famous wine. We took a day tour to the Kakheti wine-making region where we had multiple wine tastings. Our tour guide, Gigi, taught us the word "gaumarjos" which means "cheers". We learned that Georgians select a "toast-master" who gives a toast before each glass of alcohol. The toast-master says "gaumar", we reply "jos". This is repeated once, and then the final time he says "gaumar", we say "jos, jos, jos".

**Çekirge ("cricket"):** On the first day of our road trip along the Aegean Coast, we drove five hours from Istanbul to Assos, a

quiet seaside town. That evening we went to a delicious "Rum" restaurant (local Greeks living in Turkey are called Rum). The drive back to the hotel was lovely: windows down, music blaring, sunroof open, stars above, just great. But then...we spotted a massive cricket in the car. Defne was terrified it would jump on her while driving and she would crash the car, but she couldn't stop the car in the



The memorial to Roger Short in the Crimean Memorial Church in Istanbul. *Raphaelle Martinez*

middle of the road. She asked me to help but I am apparently terrified of giant crickets too. Eventually, she pulled over. I was running around barefoot trying, and failing, to swat the cricket out. A man walked by, and we asked him for help. He quickly got the çekirge out of the car. Defne told him in Turkish, "you were sent from God", and he replied, "no, I came by myself".

**Yangin ("fire"):** On day 10 of the trip, we drove about three hours from Balıkesir (where Defne's grandmother lives) to Ephesus Ancient City. On the drive there, we saw an active wildfire by the side of the road. "Yangin" is fire in Turkish. Helicopters flew overhead with large water balloons, trying to douse the flames, and firefighter planes circled above. I had never seen anything like it before—both fascinating and saddening. Thankfully the fire didn't seem too big and hopefully it was quickly contained. Defne told me that this region sees a lot of wildfires, often poorly managed. We passed many charred landscapes which had suffered previous years' fires.

**Aile ("family"):** Our road trip eventually ended, and we drove back to Istanbul. Defne's parents, Banu and İzzet, had prepared a feast: lentil soup, vegetarian kebab for me, çiğ köfte, köpöğlü (a cold meze of potatoes,

eggplant, yogurt, and tomato), cacik (yogurt and cucumber), hummus, and much more. Her mum even made me try rakı, which was far too strong for me. I couldn't help but make a face. "Aile" means family, as it is central in Turkish culture for all to gather around a home-cooked meal. Defne's family welcomed me as one of their own, and this meal was such a thoughtful gesture. I am very grateful.

**Anı ("memory"):** On my first evening in Istanbul, Defne's parents asked me where the grant money came from. I explained what the Roger Short Memorial Fund was, and they told me they vividly remembered the 2003 attacks and knew who Roger and Victoria Short were. Therefore, on my last day in Turkey, we decided to go on a walk in remembrance of Roger Short. Our first stop was to see the British Consulate, one of the sites of the 2003 Istanbul bombings, where Roger Short was killed. We went to pay our respects. Our second stop was the Crimean Memorial Church, belonging to the Church of England, in the Beyoğlu neighbourhood. Inside the chancel is a memorial to Roger Short, which I was able to see thanks to a very kind man who let me in. Our third stop was to see the Doğan Apartments, beautiful yellow buildings with unique architecture, where Victoria Short once gardened. The word is therefore "anı", meaning memory. First, in memory of Roger Short and his family. And second, because I will treasure the memories of this journey for a long time.

I hope I was able to share a little bit about my love for these two countries, their culture, their people, and their food. Finally,

Learning some pottery in Cappadocia. *Leah Fogarty*



House in Monks Valley. *Mia Muxlow*



Standing on the Acropolis, Athens. Xiangying Ye

I would like to warmly thank the Roger Short Memorial Fund once again for giving me this opportunity, which has enriched me personally in ways I will carry forward for years to come.

## MIA MUXLOW

It would be impossible to begin this journal without expressing my deepest gratitude to the benefactors and organisers of the RSMF travel scholarship. Their generosity made this journey through Turkey not only possible but transformative. Turkey has left an incredible mark on me, and I hope this reflection conveys both the depth of my appreciation and the impact of the opportunity I was given.

When I applied for the scholarship, I wanted to explore a longstanding personal interest, religion, why people believe what they believe, and how those beliefs shape societies, politics and daily life. Turkey, positioned between Europe and the Middle East and layered with centuries of spiritual history, felt like the ideal place to pursue these questions. I travelled with the dual intention of experiencing the country fully while examining the lived reality of faith within it.

My journey took me to four places: Istanbul, Uçisar in Cappadocia, Konya, and Antalya. Each revealed a different facet of Turkey's identity. Istanbul was an exhilarating introduction. The city pulses with life, ferries cutting across the Bosphorus, the scent of grilled corn in the air, and the call to prayer echoing across rooftops. Wandering was the best education. From the frenetic energy of the Grand Bazaar to the serenity of sunset along the water, Istanbul felt like a living tapestry of empires and eras layered upon one another.

Nowhere is this layering more visible than in the Hagia Sophia. Standing beneath its vast dome, one feels both awe and tension. Built in 537 AD as a cathedral of the Byzantine Empire, later converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest in 1453, transformed into a museum in 1935 under Atatürk, and reconverted into a mosque in 2020 under Erdoğan, the building embodies Turkey's complex religious and political journey. Christian mosaics peek above Arabic calligraphy, with worshippers praying where emperors were once crowned. It is not merely a monument but a physical reminder of Turkey's everchanging narrative.

Inspired by this history, I made my way to the current seat of the Ecumenical Patriarch at the Church of St George in Istanbul. Compared to the grandeur of the Hagia Sophia, the setting was modest and almost hidden, tucked behind high walls and security. Yet this understated space is the spiritual centre of Eastern Orthodoxy, home to the Ecumenical Patriarch, regarded

as first among equals with the Orthodox bishops worldwide. Stepping into the church, adorned with rich iconography and gold detail, I was struck by the contrast between its global significance and its physical scale. It felt intimate rather than imposing. That contrast spoke volumes about the shifting political and religious landscape of the city. A faith that once crowned emperors beneath vast domes now gathers in a small sanctuary, resilient and enduring. Visiting the Patriarchate deepened my understanding of how religion in Turkey continues to adapt and survive within a complex national story.

From Istanbul I flew to Cappadocia, landing at a comically small airport. With its cave dwellings and quiet streets, Uçisar could not have contrasted more sharply with Istanbul's intensity. My modest cave hotel overlooked valleys punctuated by fairy chimneys, natural rock formations shaped by centuries of erosion.

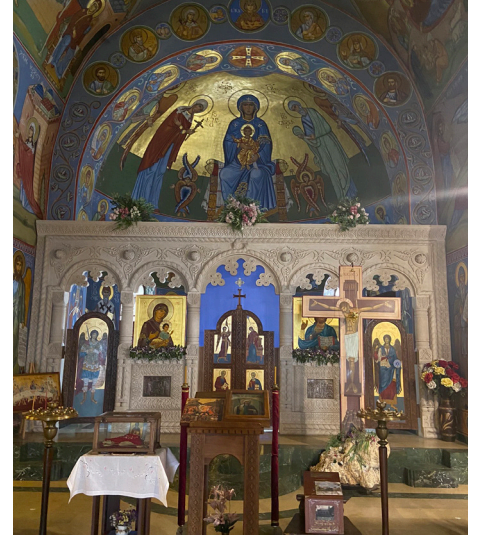


Cute cats. Mia Muxlow

Nearby lies Göreme National Park, home to rock-hewn churches and monastic settlements carved into the landscape. Dating all the way back to the early 4th century, these spaces testify to early Christian communities who sought refuge and solitude there.

One of the most striking experiences was descending into Özkonak Underground City. This ten level deep subterranean complex dates back to the 4th century BC. Narrow tunnels connect living quarters, storage rooms, water wells, and defensive passageways. The ingenuity of these spaces

Folded limestone along the D400, Fethiye. Xiangying Ye



An Orthodox Church in Tbilisi, maintained by a lovely man called Giorgi. Raphaëlle Martinez

which were built for protection and survival, showed the vulnerability and resilience of early believers. Cappadocia's landscape revealed how geography and faith intertwine.

Konya offered another perspective. Less overtly touristic, it felt grounded in the everyday of life, children playing in streets, vendors selling fruit, families gathering in squares. At its heart stands the mausoleum of Rumi, the great Sufi mystic and founder of the Mevlevi Order. Visiting his tomb, I sensed a profound reverence among pilgrims. Sufism's emphasis on divine love and inward transformation felt woven into the city's atmosphere. Here, faith was not a spectacle but quiet constancy. Observing devotion in a tradition different from my own expanded my understanding of how spiritual longing manifests across cultures.

Antalya, my final destination, combined a "Brits abroad" vibrancy with antiquity. Beyond its bustling modern facade lies Perge, an ancient Greco-Roman city central to early Christian history. It was here that Paul the Apostle is believed to have preached during his missionary journeys. Walking among its colonnaded streets and ruined theatres, I tried to imagine the first articulation of ideas that would later shape continents. The



Cappadocia landscape shaped by volcanic tuff. Xiangying Ye

juxtaposition of ancient Christian ruins within a predominantly Muslim nation underscored Turkey's role as a crossroads of belief.

Religious diversity in modern Turkey revealed itself most poignantly during an unexpected visit to the Crimea Memorial Church. Once closed for lack of a congregation, it now hosts a small but vibrant Anglican community. There I met converts whose stories illustrated both courage and tension, individuals navigating personal religion within conservative contexts. During a choral service, the faint sound of the call to prayer drifted through the open windows. That moment encapsulated the coexistence and complexity I had come to explore.

While I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to expand my studies within Turkey, I would also like to note that the trip was not all religious work and no play. There are memories of Turkey that I will treasure always, which is all thanks to this grant. Treasure is the optimum word, as many of my memories defy sufficient articulation to the joy brought to me despite how simple some of it may sound. Many hours were spent walking the streets, sampling new foods, stroking cats, and savouring the surroundings. True moments of blissful peace that are treasures to me. As has been mentioned in perhaps every travel guide, the warmth and hospitality of the Turkish people was always incredible. From people stopping

Ancient inscription carved into limestone at Hierapolis, Pamukkale. Xiangying Ye



to help me when I was looking confused on public transport to an entire restaurant trying to work together with their broken English and my non-existent Turkish to translate a menu, the hospitality went above and beyond. And this wasn't only exclusive to the people, as an animal lover a real highlight was the abundance of friendly cats. Journeys often took twice as long due to all my stops to stroke the cats, but it was undeniably worth it. As I left Turkey, I felt I had only begun to understand its complexity. What started as an academic exploration became a deeply human encounter. I want to say a final teşekkürler to all the people that helped this grant become a reality and thank you for sharing the beauty of Turkey with me.

## XIANGYING YE

**"If memories could be canned, would they also have expiry dates?"**

✦ *Chungking Express*

After my journey ended, I found myself thinking about it again in quieter moments. I am deeply grateful to the Roger Short Memorial Fund, whose generous support made this experience possible.

As a student of Earth Sciences, I have spent years reading about plate tectonics, subduction zones, volcanic deposits, and sedimentary layers. On maps and cross-sections, everything appears clear and logical. But standing on the Acropolis in Athens, touching the marble warmed by the sun, I began to feel something different. The stone beneath my feet was not only part of human history; it was part of geological history millions of years older. The same tectonic forces that uplifted mountains had also shaped the marble beneath the temples. For the first time, geology felt immediate and personal.

Crossing the Aegean by ferry was slow and slightly uncomfortable, yet meaningful. Watching the Greek islands appear one by one at dawn, I thought about the subduction of the African Plate beneath Eurasia, about volcanic arcs and folded crust. But I also thought about traders, poets, and sailors who had crossed the same waters long before modern borders existed. Chios, rocky and sparse, shaped by climate and erosion, had given birth to Homer. The land was harsh, yet it produced epic imagination. I began to understand that geography does not limit culture; it shapes it.

In Izmir, I was lost for only a few minutes

before a local family approached me with warm smiles. Their kindness turned confusion into friendship. We walked through the archaeological museum together, looking at fragments of marble statues and ancient mosaics. As they explained local traditions and laughed at my attempts at Turkish phrases, I felt the Mediterranean spirit not as a concept, but as generosity in action. Later, as we shared tea in small glass cups, I realised that travel is not only about monuments. It is about moments—when strangers decide to care.

Istanbul felt like a conversation between continents. On the rooftop of Mrs. Victoria Short's home, overlooking the harbour at sunset, I listened to stories of a city that had changed and yet somehow remained itself. The minarets in the distance, the call to prayer drifting through the evening air, the ships moving slowly across the Bosphorus—everything carried a quiet sense of continuity. Visiting Hagia Sophia the next day, I stood beneath its vast dome and felt the weight of layered history: church, mosque, museum, and mosque once again. Faith, politics, architecture—all resting on stone shaped by geological time. I felt small, but in a peaceful way.

That feeling of smallness was not unfamiliar to me. As a Chinese student studying in Oxford, I have often sensed the quiet pressure of history. Walking across college quads in the evening, hearing the bells echo through centuries-old stone, I sometimes felt unexpectedly alone. Surrounded by tradition and accumulated achievement, I became acutely aware of how brief a single human life can seem. Standing in Athens and Istanbul intensified that awareness: empires had risen and fallen, yet each generation must still confront its own uncertainty. Individual lives flicker; the structures remain.

Cappadocia moved me in a different manner. The volcanic tuff, soft and easily carved, had been formed by eruptions millions of years ago. Wind and rain sculpted it into "fairy chimneys," and people later carved homes and churches into the same rock. Nature created the material; humans gave it meaning. Hiking through Rose Valley with Mr. Liu, who had once climbed Everest and was now travelling across continents, I felt that age did not matter. Curiosity connected us. As we discussed volcanic layers and life decisions in the same conversation, I sensed that both geology and human journeys share something in common: they are shaped by pressure, risk, and time.

Pamukkale was almost unreal in its whiteness. Watching calcium carbonate

“My academic training was no longer confined to a classroom; it was alive in the landscape around me.”

❖ Xiangying Ye

precipitate from hot spring water, forming new layers of travertine, I was witnessing geology in motion. The process that built the terraces also supplied building material for the ancient city of Hierapolis. Again, nature and civilisation overlapped. The ruins above the terraces were silent, but not empty. I imagined the people who once believed in the healing power of those waters. Earth processes had become part of spiritual belief. Science and myth were not enemies; they were different ways of responding to the same landscape.

Along the D400 coastal road toward Antalya, the folded limestone cliffs reminded me of lectures about continental collision. The African Plate continues to press northward, lifting mountains and shaping coastlines. These immense forces operate



Sharing Turkish tea in Izmir. Xiangying Ye

so slowly that we rarely notice them, yet they define where cities stand and where roads curve. Sitting in a car with three fellow Chinese travellers who had kindly offered me a lift, explaining fault zones while watching the Mediterranean shimmer outside the window, I felt grateful. My academic training was no longer confined to a classroom; it was alive in the landscape around me.

Only near the end did I realise that the places I had visited were quietly connected. The temples, cities, and even borders I had admired were standing on processes

far older than themselves. Marble became temple. Volcanic ash became home. Travertine became theatre. Folded limestone shaped coastlines and harbours. Long before any empire claimed these lands, the geology of the region was already shaping what would be built there.

Yet the most meaningful change happened quietly within me. When I first left home, I was eager to see famous sites and confirm what I had learned from books. Over time, especially during moments of solitude in Oxford, I realised that knowledge is not only accumulation, but perspective. Travelling alone across unfamiliar landscapes, waiting in bus stations late at night, navigating languages I barely spoke, I understood that growth often feels like instability before it becomes structure. Mountains do not rise in a single movement. They are shaped by pressure that no one can see happening. People, I suspect, change in much the same way.

Returning to Oxford did not feel like closing a chapter. In China, I write about geology for a general audience, and this journey soon became part of that work. I organised my photographs and added short geological explanations, introducing the volcanic tuff of Cappadocia, the rapid formation of travertine in Pamukkale, and the folded limestones along the Mediterranean coast. I shared these materials with members of the Clarendon Association and within the Oxford China–UK community, hoping to make the geological processes behind familiar landscapes more accessible. Many people are drawn to ruins and coastlines without realising that they are still being shaped by the same tectonic and sedimentary processes. Explaining these connections helped me see that travel does not end at a border; it continues when knowledge is shared and seen from new perspectives.

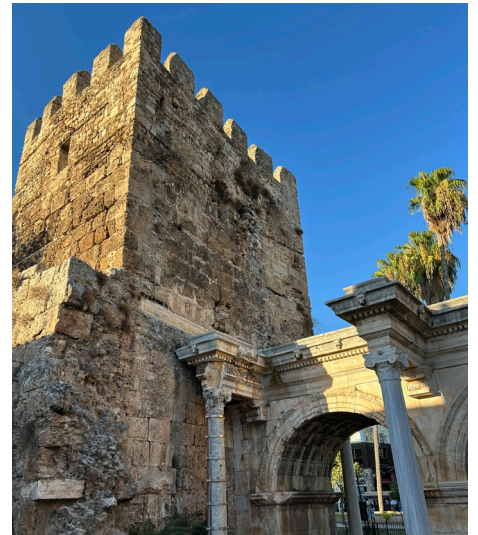
At the beginning of this journey, I wondered whether memories, like canned fruit in the movie *Chungking Express*, might carry an



Hagia Sophia illuminated at dusk. Xiangying Ye

expiry date. Now I am not so sure they do. Landscapes change, institutions evolve, and even stone erodes. Yet certain moments remain quietly intact: the first light over the Aegean, the warmth of tea shared with strangers, the stillness beneath an ancient dome.

They do not expire; they remain part of how I now see the world.



Ancient Antalya. Mia Muxlow

RSMF dinner 2025 L-R: Geri Della Rocca de Candal, Tiancheng Wang, Hugh Moorhead, John-Henry Charles, Abi Reeves, Stuart Perrett, Johanna Schiele-Charles, Josie Illingworth-Law, Joanna Palermo, Julia Johnson, Joshua Pearson, Mia Muxlow, Piers Armitage, Leah Fogarty, Xiangying Ye, Jon Tilley, Raphaelle Martinez, Andrew Cammish, Josie Forsythe, Sebastian Collins, Rufus Jones, Diana Avadani, Tom Freeman, David Astley, Andrew Christian





Rooftop evening overlooking the Bosphorus. Xiangying Ye

## 2006

### REBECCA RICKETTS (GREEN)

Our two boys turn 9 and 7 this year, and they continue to bring equal parts joy and chaos to our lives! We have had some great adventures in the last year, including a fantastic trip to Montenegro. My role at Clyde & Co has also continued to evolve, giving me many opportunities to grow both personally and professionally. It's been wonderful to see the Roger Short alumni community expand. I always enjoy catching up on what everyone is doing in the newsletter.

## 2008

### MICHAEL GIBB

I am still working for the United Nations, leading the Security Council's investigative Panel on South Sudan. You can also see me in episode 5 of series II of Sky Art's Landscape Artist of the Year, which aired in February 2026.

## 2010

### SAM GEORGE

This March I'll be relocating to New York to take up a Senior Fellowship at the Asia Society's Center on US-China Relations, where I'll work with Kevin Rudd and Orville Schell. After studying Mandarin and doing my graduate studies in Chinese political history at Stanford, I've focused my career on the Chinese Communist Party. It's been a fascinating intellectual journey and I now write and advise on the Party's history, ideology, and how it operates today. New York is a hub for this type of work and I'm excited to be a trainee from the foreign policy community in Washington, D.C.

Last year, I revisited Patrick Leigh Fermor's travel writings and was especially charmed by *Mani: Travels in the Southern Peloponnese*. By chance, I learned that there was a new literary festival in Kardamyli on the Peloponnese, where Leigh Fermor built a gorgeous house in the 1960s and lived for the remainder of his life. I assembled some friends and bought tickets, only to find out that Josh Barley was on the organising committee! It was terrific to catch up with a fellow Roger Short Scholar over a glass of wine in Greece—a fitting and serendipitous reunion.

## 2011

### JOSH BARLEY

I am still living between Athens and northwest Greece, and splitting my time between writing and guiding. My latest book, *Athens Tales*, was published by Oxford University Press in October 2025 and has just been longlisted

for the Runciman Award. I have recently been exploring more of the Balkans, and am looking forward to leading my first tour in Albania this summer, followed by a tri-country trip that covers Greece, North Macedonia, and Albania. Someday I hope to include Turkey on one of my itineraries!

## JOANNA PALERMO

I've enjoyed the past year travelling the world with my little daughter, Gemma. We made it to eight different countries to see family and friends within those 365 days. In December, I left my role as COO at Hygglo after seven years, and am ready to move onto the next career adventure. In the meantime, I'm enjoying some one on one time with Gemma and consulting for the start-up SousChef AI as they get off the ground. In the autumn, I married my long-term Oxonian partner of 13 years, Aron, in a small ceremony in London.

## 2012

### KRISTA SIROLA

I had another eventful year in 2025. My husband Arthen and I welcomed our son Felix Aatos Darius, little brother to our daughter Aurelia, in September. I also joined the partnership at my law firm, Kirkland & Ellis, in October. I am currently making the most of maternity leave, enduring house renovations and looking forwards to extended holidays in Portugal and Japan planned for 2026.

## 2013

### TRISTEN NAYLOR

My wife and I moved to Hong Kong this past summer, which will serve as the East Asian hub for the Oxbridge Diplomatic Academy. While we'll miss this year's RSMF dinner, we're

With my latest book, *Athens Tales*. Josh Barley



looking forward to being back in Oxford in July for the Academy's annual summer programme. In the meantime, if anyone finds themselves out this way, please do get in touch!

## 2014

### LIZZIE GERMAN

I am living in the Netherlands, enjoying working on new project development for an energy infrastructure company. I continue to travel and explore new places—last year spending a fascinating holiday in Poland, hiking across the quite wild interior of Sardinia, and doing my first Olympic distance triathlon.

### ROBERT NATZLER

**News: I got engaged last year!**

The second most exciting thing was getting to travel along the Hexi Corridor to the Dunhuang Caves.

On cycles that vary between decades and centuries in length, our sun switches from a phase of increased solar radiation to a phase of decreased radiation, and back. In the increased radiation phases, if other climate cycles align, the warmer Earth atmosphere supercharges the South Asian monsoon enough for it to reach across the Tibetan plateau and rain on the southern Mongol steppe. This creates a region, Hexi, that alternates between decades of fertility and decades of desertification. In the fertile years it becomes a population centre with civilizations like the Xi Xia organising around oasis irrigation or the Han Chinese extending their sedentary agricultural practices westward from the upper valleys of the Yellow River. In the barren years, Hexi shifts to pastoralism and then at last to complete desertification, spurring the natives into drastic population migrations. This is believed by the locals to have been successively a home for the Huns, the Avars and – yes! – the Turks before desertification phases triggered their long rides west.

A visit through Hexi, east-to-west, begins in the non-navigable upper Yellow River, crosses the mountain passes fluttering with Tibetan prayer flags, and then descends via pre-migration Hunnic holy sites to a plain of arid hills and irrigated greenery. The road runs through four ancient oasis towns, each with its own proud history as caravanserai on the old Silk Road. Every day and always, on your left, tower the Himalayan foothills, studded with stupas. On your right, crumbling and ruined, the classical era Han Great Wall runs in fits and starts, connecting old mudforts until, at last, at Dunhuang it runs its course and the vista of the endless steppe opens up in front of you. The sky is so large you can only weep. In Dunhuang itself, hundreds of Buddhist cave chapels are painted with the kind of vibrant, varied, and humanistic scenes that are normally associated with European cathedrals. For a thousand years, Parthian, Scythian, Turkic, Indian, Chinese and other merchant families tended their ancestral shrines here, before at last the sea road reduced the town to irrelevance for a millennium, until the caves' rediscovery to the world by an itinerant Taoist monk in the 1900s. You do not need to be religious to find spirituality in this place. It is a monument as impressive and humbling as a Persepolis, Abu Simbel, or Petra.



Rebecca Rickets Green and her two boys.

## 2015

### DAVID ASTLEY

Last year, I decided to quit working for climate NGOs and think tanks after many years of dissatisfaction with the cycles of compromise, delay, and compromise. I am now retraining as a secondary school geography teacher in the Slough area, which, so far, has been what I had hoped. I am enjoying the sense of purpose and impact each day brings. Teenagers are very funny and fascinating to be around. In other news, we spent two weeks in Munich and Berlin in the summer and another in Vienna over the New Year. Much to recommend from each, though, as a vegetarian, German cuisine is not one I'll be rushing back to soon. Finally, in two senses, I'm in the long and dull process of changing my surname to Arhestey, which is the mashup that Kiran and I came to when we got married in 2023. So maybe this will be the last outing for Astley in the newsletter.

## 2016

### LOUIS GRANDJOUAN

I have just returned to London after five weeks of travelling with my partner, from St Lucia and Martinique to Montreal, New York, Mexico City, and the Pacific coast of Mexico. It was a stimulating trip, with surprising contrasts (Mexico felt as peaceful as St Lucia felt tense), many ferries, and consistently beautiful light. I particularly enjoyed travelling in a way that I haven't done since university and my own Roger Short trip: with time to linger, and the freedom to leave.

### JOHN-HENRY CHARLES

I've spent a lot of the last year at work, building [alentisenergy.com](http://alentisenergy.com). It's a platform which automates manual/administrative

work for operations teams in renewables. We're approaching IGW assets on-platform (500,000 UK homes worth of electricity generation!), mostly with clients in the UK. I moved to Frankfurt (fellow RSMF scholar, Johanna Schiele's hometown) to be closer to her family – and for me to expand operations into Germany!

### JOHANNA SCHIELE-CHARLES

2025 brought the biggest job-culture shock in my working life so far: from wearing Birkenstocks to the office at the EUs climate ministry, to joining Deutsche Bank's Energy Project finance team. Still financing energy transition projects.

John-Henry Charles, fellow RS scholar made the jump into the cold water and moved to Frankfurt with me...♥

I had a lovely month off between jobs, in which I cycled to Rome, my first long bike trip by myself, building on those years-back-Roger-Short skills!

### HUGH MOORHEAD

After an incredibly spoiling six months of travelling during Winter 24/25, I have returned to the real world with a bump. Professionally, this has entailed a career switch into journalism. I am now the proud property correspondent for *Investors' Chronicle*, a weekly magazine aimed at retail investors (subscribe!).

Personally, I have managed to go on some interesting trips, including hiking around the Accursed Mountains of Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo, which I would thoroughly recommend, and three weeks in Australia watching our cricket team, which I would not.

I have few concrete plans for 2026, but am hoping that my fellow Short Traveller, Louis Grandjouan, will make a spring excursion to Belgrade to visit his father there. Here's hoping it doesn't clash with the dinner.

## 2017

### ALEXI ANDRIOPOULOS

A perk of the area where I'm a pastor is being home to Manchester's Curry Mile. Though really it should more accurately be called the 'Kebab Mile'. As such, the sights and smells, people and places on my family's doorstep often evoke memories of my RSMF travels. One highlight of late has been meeting with a local Turkish friend to read

about the hope of Christ detailed in the first letter of St Peter, which is addressed to the ancient dwellers of 'Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia'. I also recently found out a Kurdish parishioner had been visiting Batumi at the same time as Cameron and me on our RSMF trip in 2017!

## 2018

### DIANA AVANDANII

After a hectic year wrapping up academic projects in Germany, and an Early Career Prize at the European Materials Research Society in Strasbourg, I ended up moving back to the UK. I am now based in Cambridge, working on novel electrodes for Li-ion batteries in the Grey Group. I am also a Faraday Institution Research Fellow. Very happy to be back in the UK, and very much immersing myself in the battery scene here.



Myself & Louis Grandjouan ahead of the Victoria Park half marathon in October. Hugh Moorhead

## 2022

### LEONIE DEFONTEYNE

I am writing from Corinth, Greece, where I am studying some pottery as part of my DPhil project on the representation of women on Corinthian vases of the Archaic period. I am currently in my third year, so my thesis is slowly, but steadily, coming together.

Corinth, Greece. Leonie Defonteyne



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## SHORT TRAVELLERS 2026

- ❖ Ben Aldridge DPhil Earth Sciences (2024)
- ❖ Nathaniel Hodson DPhil Theology and Religion (2024)
- ❖ Aisha Khan-Aziz BA History (2024)
- ❖ Luka Shanidze MPhil Late Antique and Byzantine Studies (2025)
- ❖ Erik Vanegas Müller DPhil Engineering Science (2023)



Walking through the ancient streets of Hierapolis. Xiangying Ye

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## TRAVEL JOURNAL PRIZE

The prize for the best journal is awarded at the dinner each year by Richard and Anna Morgan, life-long friends of Roger and founding contributors to the Fund.

To read the journals in full, please visit the Univ website at: [univ.ox.ac.uk/news/in-memory-of-roger-short/](http://univ.ox.ac.uk/news/in-memory-of-roger-short/).

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## HONOURS

The University College Record listed the following academic honours:

- ❖ Andrew Christian (ST 2024) awarded a First in Chemistry
- ❖ Sebastian Collins (ST 2025) awarded a First in Ancient & Modern History
- ❖ Josephine Forsythe (ST 2024) awarded a First in Chemistry
- ❖ Julia Johnson (ST 2023) Brewer-Loughman Scholarship for Outstanding 4th Year Project  
AWE Prize for Best Fourth Year Performance in Geophysics
- ❖ Raphaelle Martinez (ST 2025) awarded Bachelor of Law
- ❖ Joshua Pearson (ST 2023) awarded a First in Engineering Science

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## DONATIONS

Donations to the Roger Short Memorial Fund may be made by contacting:

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Thank you to the Master's office for their support, and particularly Louise Watson for her many years of organisational expertise. The annual dinner and the newsletter would not come to fruition without her outstanding assistance.

We thank all those who contribute to and support the Fund each year. Such commitment is vital to help develop and grow this special fraternity.

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## NEWSLETTER DESIGN & EDITING

Editing, layout, and design by Charlie Morgan. Visit her website at: [www.charliemorgandesign.com](http://www.charliemorgandesign.com).