

Velvet Day



*at the
University of Oxford*

6 November 2014

Programme

12.00 - 12.45

Opening of “Havel’s Place”
Oxford University Parks
(see map)

13.00 - 13.30

Opening of
Sekyra House & Tomáš Halík Lecture Room
Harris Manchester College

13.45 - 14.45

Formal Lunch (invite only)
Harris Manchester College

15.00 - 16.30

“Václav Havel: A Life”,
H.E. Michael Žantovský
Professor Timothy Garton Ash
Harris Manchester College

17.30-19.00

Lecture by Msgr. Tomáš Halík
St Antony’s College, Nissan Theatre

19.00 - 19.30

Drinks reception
St Antony’s College, Buttery

Havel’s Place

Oxford University Parks will be the seventh place in the world with “Havel’s Place”, an installation designed by a Czech architect and friend of Václav Havel, Bořek Šípek. The design consists of two metal chairs connected to a table around a linden tree, the Czech national tree. Bořek Šípek called the installation “Democracy Talks“, envisioning it as “a place where people can meet and exercise their freedom of speech in a democratic dialogue with others”. The first “Havel’s Place” was inaugurated at the University of Georgetown in October 2013, followed by subsequent installations in Dublin, Barcelona, Prague, České Budějovice, and Venice. Brussels and The Hague are scheduled to open their own installations in the near future. The idea for such a gathering space to promote dialogue and remember the legacy and liberal principles of the late president Havel came from the current Czech Ambassador to the US Petr Gandalovič.



Contact: ouc.oxford@gmail.com; tel. 07942483200

Václav Havel

Václav Havel was a playwright, dissident, philosopher, and the first democratically elected Czechoslovak (and later Czech) President. As a student of the Czech Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU) Havel started his career in theatre as a co-author at the Prague Theatre ABC in 1959. By 1968, Havel had attained the status of established playwright at the famous Theatre On the Balustrade, developing the so-called absurdist style of drama. His dissent and anti-Communist activities started after the Soviet clampdown on Czechoslovakia in 1968. Since he had actively participated in the liberal reform movement of the Prague Spring earlier that year, he and his ideas became too dangerous for the Communist regime after its suppression. He was banned from working in theatre, performing his plays was forbidden, and his passport was confiscated. During the normalization period of the 1970s and 1980s, he continued writing and publishing in samizdat (secretly). He was one of the authors of the famous Charter 77 in 1977, criticizing the regime and calling for a general respect of human rights. Havel was imprisoned several times, with his longest incarceration lasting from 1979 to 1983. In 1989, he founded the Civic Forum, the first democratic association in Czechoslovakia. He was elected the first democratic Czechoslovak President in July 1990 and in 1993 became the first Czech president. During his presidential terms, he remained faithful to the moral and ethical principles he believed in, and avoided interfering overly in domestic political affairs. He was especially outspoken about the necessity of a universal provision of human rights and liberal values. For his life-long activities, he was awarded dozens of international honorary awards and prizes, including the Ghandi Peace Prize and the US Presidential Medal of Freedom. He received a honorary doctorate from the University of Oxford in 1998. Václav Havel passed away in December 2011 and received a state funeral, which was attended by thousands of people.



Contact: oucscs.oxford@gmail.com; tel. 07942483200

Tomáš Halík

Monsignor Professor Tomáš Halík is a Czech priest and philosopher. He is a professor of sociology at the Charles University in Prague, pastor of the Academic Parish, and President of the Czech Christian Academy. During the normalization period in communist Czechoslovakia, he continued advancing religious and cultural freedoms and working in the “underground Church” despite being exposed to significant personal risk. Like Havel, he was dubbed an “enemy of the state” by the Communist authorities and banned from official academic circles in Czechoslovakia. He took part in the democratic turnover in 1989, working as an advisor to Václav Havel and his new, Democratic regime. From 1990 to 1993, he served as the General Secretary to the Czech Conference of Bishops. His theological and academic books have been translated into eleven languages. For his efforts in the field of inter-religious dialogue and cultural freedoms he was awarded the 2014 Templeton Prize.



Contact: ouc.oxford@gmail.com; tel. 07942483200

Michael Žantovský

H.E. Michael Žantovský is a Czech politician, diplomat, intellectual, journalist, and academic. He is the current Czech Ambassador to the United Kingdom (since 2009) and the former ambassador to the United States and Israel. Though a psychologist by training, from 1980 until the end of the Communist regime, he worked as a translator of contemporary English and American literature from English into Czech, and as a contributor to the samizdat press. From 1988, he was the Prague correspondent for Reuters. In 1989, he was one of the founding members of the newly established democratic Civic Forum, and became the spokesman for President Václav Havel, as well as the political director of his presidential office. He later took up a career in writing and translating, and started teaching at several Czech universities. In 2003, he co-founded a Prague-based think tank, Program of Atlantic Security Studies (PASS), and served as its first executive director. In 2014, he published a biography of his close friend, the late President Václav Havel.



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Velvet Day Venues

1 Oxford University Parks

12:00 - Havel's place

2 Harris Manchester College

13:00 - Drinks (Old Dining Room)

13:30 - Tour of Sekyra House

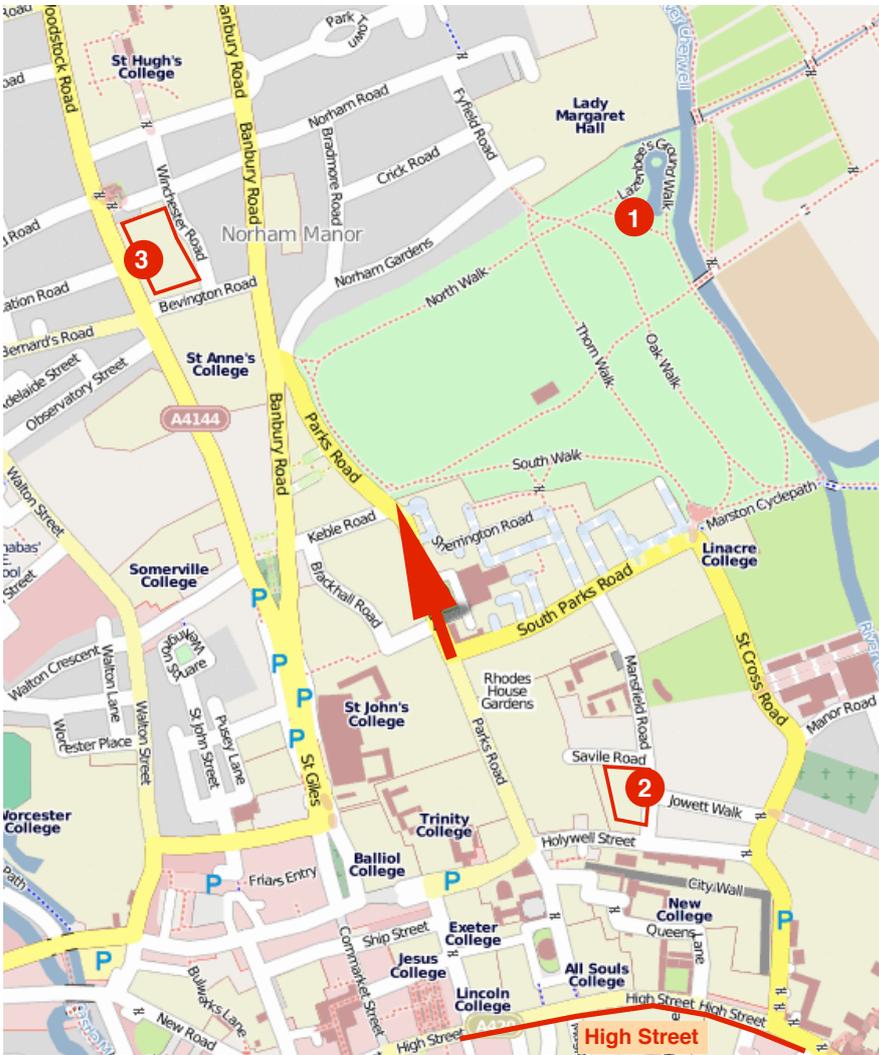
13:45 - Formal Lunch (Arlosh Hall)

15:00 - Book Launch (Old Dining Room)

3 St Antony's College

17:30 - Tomáš Halík Lecture

Entrance to
University Parks



Contact: ouc.oxford@gmail.com; tel. 07942483200

Oxford University Student Organisers:

Matěj Bajgar - Rozálie Horká - Jessie Hronešová - Petr Šulc
Johana Vamberská - Zuzana Vikarská - Kryštof Vosátka



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