

# Living in limbo

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# VARSITY

## Cambridge colleges paid 996 workers less than the Real Living Wage

**Stephanie Stacey**  
Deputy Editor  
**Vivienne Hopley-Jones**  
Editor

Student campaigners have launched a new league table aiming to rank Cambridge colleges based on their treatment of their lowest paid employees.

Calculated using figures obtained through Freedom of Information (FOI) Act requests, the table ranked Robinson College last, with 58.7% of non-academic or administrative staff at Robinson paid below £8.75 per hour.

Data also revealed that two Cambridge colleges, Christ's and Churchill, paid certain workers wages under £7 per hour, as of 15th August 2018. Both colleges claim they have since increased staff pay.

This new table, coined the 'Taylor's Table', is named after Professor Sedley Taylor, a former professor at Trinity College, who in 1907 offered £500 to Cambridge Borough Council to pay for a dental inspection for every child at a council-funded school.

According to the data revealed in the Taylor's Table, as of 15th August 2018, 996 workers directly employed by Cambridge colleges were paid wages below the then-Real Living Wage of £8.75.

Last February, the University committed to pay at least the Real Living Wage to all of its direct employees. However, this does not apply to the University's 31 constituent colleges, which act as independent institutions.

The Taylor's Table forms part of a wider campaign to encourage all Cambridge Colleges to become officially accredited Living Wage employers. As of now, despite ongoing student campaigning, only Queens' College is an officially accredited Living Wage employer.

The Real Living Wage is independently calculated each year to meet the real cost of living. This figure currently stands at £9.00 outside of London, and £10.55 within London, but the Taylor's Table was calculated using the value relevant to the period of data collection - last year's real living wage - which stood at £8.75. This is higher than the National

**Full story Page 9 ►**



▲ Christ's was one of only two colleges found to pay below £7 (DANIEL GAYNE)

## Frustrated Market Square vendors welcome proposed change

**Jess Ma**  
Senior News Editor  
**Diana Stoyanova**  
Senior News Correspondent

Cambridge residents and visitors will be able to comment on proposed new designs for the city's Market Square during a two-month consultation period this summer and autumn.

Cambridge City Council has commissioned urban design firm BDP to review the management and use of Market Square and propose a design for its renovation. The new plans are set to address present concerns surrounding hygiene and accessibility.

With the goal of improving accessibility and cleanliness, the plan suggests that the Square's cobblestones will be replaced with a "one level smooth pavement" to make the market easier to clean and more accessible to wheelchair users.

The proposed plan also includes the installation moveable stalls to facilitate a regular plan for night markets and conversion of the market space for other events. Underground bins and cycle

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We don't need to accommodate homophobia

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## vulture Magazine

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# Hibo Wardere 'The obstacles that I face are part of what drives me'

Hibo Wardere talks to **Daniella Adeluwoye** about her work combatting FGM as gender-based violence, the work of survivors, and the importance of engaging communities in critical conversations

CN: This article discusses FGM (Female Genital Mutilation)

**H**ibo Wardere has a way with words. Speaking at Caius diversity day, her words roll effortlessly off of her tongue. As students attentively nod in chorus to her speech, she closes her address by encouraging us to recognise that whenever we encounter any form of struggle, we should find our source of motivation in the fact that we are doing it for the generation after us.

Wardere, a Somali-born campaigner against female genital mutilation (FGM),

“It needs the community at the heart of the issue as they must trust you in order to work with you”

finds her motivation in the generation of women after her. She campaigns against FGM so that they do not have to endure the pain she herself experienced when she was six years old.

When I ask whether Wardere has encountered any obstacles and challenges while campaigning against FGM, she shares that has been accused of becoming too “Westernised” and of having abandoned her religion.

“It comes with a lot of heartache, but for me, every time I feel like I am being attacked, left, right and centre, I remember my six-year-old self, and then I remember all the 200 million women who have undergone FGM.

► Students at NewVlc sixth form college protesting against FGM in 2017 (YOUTUBE/NEWVLC)



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“I remember every seven seconds a girl somewhere is being cut: she is either dead, dying or altered for life. Then I don’t have time to think about the criticism.”

Wardere is a survivor of type three FGM and her activist work has made her one of Britain’s most prominent campaigners on the issue. She tells me how grateful she is that her daughters don’t have the problems that she had when she was their age.

“It just makes me feel absolutely accomplished and I just keep on going. They’re a source of my energy.”

Wardere emphasises that campaigns against FGM should be led by survivors like herself. “What people often forget is that this is a practice that been in our communities for thousands of years. It needs time, it needs resources, it needs trust. It needs the community at the heart of the issue, as they must trust you in order to work with you.”

Activist work has focused on raising awareness of the fact that FGM is a form of gender-based violence, highlighting how the practice is entrenched in gender inequality as an attempt at controlling women’s sexuality. Common reasons behind FGM are the preservation of virginity, enhancement of male sexual pleasure and notions of the suitability or appeal of a woman for marriage. However, the current Western portrayal of female circumcision as ‘primitive,’ with horrifying mothers, cruel fathers and helpless daughters fails to engage these communities.

Women like Wardere assume the role of a mediator and educator. “It’s extremely important that these communities have somebody from within who has the courage to talk about it.”

FGM is a very contentious issue amongst feminists, where the practice attracts wide-ranging opinions. When I mention Germaine Greer, I am immediately greeted with an exasperated sigh. Greer has commented that attempts to eradicate the ritual cutting would be “an attack on cultural identity.” She has argued that “one man’s beautification is another man’s mutilation.”

Wardere expresses the frustration she feels towards feminists such as Greer as “this is an issue for humanity. It’s a humanitarian issue, it’s a violation.”

Individuals opposed to combating FGM have accused activists of cultural colonialism through their imposition of ‘Western standards’ upon communities in which FGM is common. There is a tension between recognising human rights and not wanting to impose moral standards on another culture. We need to be self-reflexive and understand that morality is a production of social processes – our moral standards are a production of our geo-political institutions. However, we must remember that FGM is violence.

Wardere emphasises that it is important not to slip into the grounds of moral relativism – we should not shy away from actively criticising practices that are harmful for fear of not respecting a community’s culture. FGM is a practice which needs to be criticised and challenged so that its harmful perpetuation might be eradicated. Some may be reluctant to impose their Western standards on other communities because historically, this has been attached with the heavy burden of colonialism and imperialism. By criticising a culture’s practices it inevitably positions the West in a

“The youth today are the most important part of eradicating this vicious cycle”



morally righteous position. While FGM is undoubtedly deplorable to us by almost any standards, we have to understand how deeply cemented the practice is within particular communities. This is why it is important for women like Wardere to lead the discussion, where she is in the position to navigate the two spheres.

What tends to be the problem within communities that continue to practise FGM is that they are simply conforming to a deeply entrenched societal norm. Wardere believes that this needs to be challenged.

“I challenge my own community especially when I’m talking to the women: I ask them why is it only females, why is it us that need to be ripped apart, sealed, to the point where you can’t even urinate properly? Why do you want to perpetuate that?” It is fundamental for Wardere to be engaging in these critical conversations with her community.

“Our traditions are beautiful. We have great food and we have great attire to wear. All these things are amazing parts of our traditions. But when the culture practised is hurting and is causing death, you’re basically handing down a life sentence of pain. We need to challenge it and we need to challenge it deep within ourselves, not anybody else from

▲ As a survivor of FGM, Wardere’s motivation stems for her wish to combat the issue for future generations (LORRAINE/YOUTUBE)

the outside. Ourselves, we need to start having this conversation.”

Wardere wants her community to understand that FGM should not be perpetuated in fear that daughters will be socially excluded or stigmatised for not carrying out the ritual cutting. Her efforts focus on visiting schools and raising awareness amongst the younger generation. “The youth today are the most important part of eradicating this vicious cycle. They are the ones that we need to equip with information and education.”

This month, a mother who mutilated her three-year old daughter was found guilty of FGM. She was also the first person in the UK to be successfully prosecuted. I express my surprise at this revelation considering the fact that FGM has been illegal in the UK since 1985. I ask Wardere why she thinks it has taken over three decades for the first successful prosecution. “What they miserably failed to do was to inform the community that live in the UK about this law. The community didn’t know anything about the law because our community don’t have the vocabulary of child abuse.”

Wardere explains that this is simply because FGM is considered a cultural practice and thus, it is rarely challenged. However, she points out that this

“landmark case” is a “historical moment” to changing perceptions towards FGM. Her goal is for FGM to be eradicated within her lifetime.

Survivors of FGM are reluctant to report their parents because they know that they don’t cut their children out of hate and thus are reluctant to implicate their own parents. Wardere tells me that she forgave her mother a long time ago, but she says that even today questions remain: “How did you manage to ignore my screams? How did you mute me out? It’s a question that I would really love her to tell me. But then I already know the answer. The answer is that she didn’t think what she was doing was wrong.”

Wardere wants to change this attitude and break the practice of FGM, one girl at a time. While the international community continues to rightfully deplore the practice of FGM, Wardere continues to look for actions that will actually have substantive change such as raising awareness amongst her community.

“Patience is huge. Most importantly building trust is huge. And for me if they close the door, I can’t just leave, I have to keep on knocking at the door because those are my people. So for me the obstacles that I face is part of what drives me.”



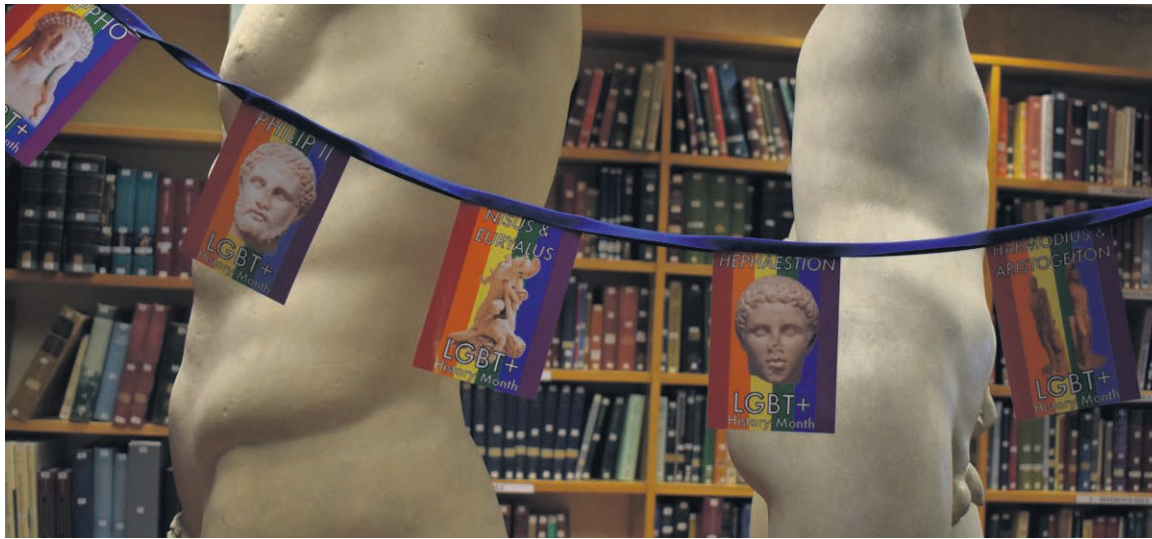
# News



## Rainbow road

With rainbow flags flying in colleges and faculties, Cambridge is celebrating LGBT+ History Month. Students decorating the Classics faculty said: "Our conception of what it means to be LGBT+ is based on modern Western ideas of gender and sexuality - but that is not an argument that people with very similar experiences did not exist in other times."

(STEPHANIE STACEY, JESS MA, TOM MCGACHIE)



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## News



### DEJA BREW

#### First British beer found in Cambridge

Evidence of the first beer brewed in Britain was found during road works on the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon. Dr Steve Sherlock, Highways England's archaeology lead stated that "this is potentially the earliest evidence of that process taking place in the UK." Lara Gonzalez, an Archaeobotanist who discovered the evidence when working at the site, said: "it's incredibly exciting to play a part in uncovering the fascinating history of the Cambridgeshire landscape."

### QUITE INTERESTING

#### Sandi Toksvig to be Honorary Fellow

Girton College celebrated its 150th anniversary by announcing on Twitter that comedian and presenter Sandi Toksvig would be made an Honorary Fellow. Toksvig, best known recently for her roles on QI and The Great British Bake Off, studied Law, Archaeology and Anthropology at Girton College. The Girton College website reports that Toksvig will be visiting in May to contribute to events "embracing the theme of inclusive excellence".

### PRIDE AND JOY

#### Cambridge to hold first Pride event

Plans have been released to launch Cambridge's first Pride event this summer on June 8th. The announcement came at the start of February as a celebration of LGBT history month. Originally the event was planned to take place in summer of 2018, but was pushed back. A crowdfunding page, with the goal of raising £4,000, has been set up by The Pink Festival Group, who are organising the event. Currently over £400 has been raised. The page lists its plans as including a stage, parade and food stalls, all of which will be free to attend.

### GRAND DESIGNS

#### Plans to redesign Pembroke College

Cambridge City Council have received proposals to expand Pembroke college, which includes the demolition of a lecture block in Mill Lane for new student accommodation, as well as a court featuring common rooms and a cafe. Under the proposals, the Emmanuel United Reformed Church would be converted into a lecture and performance space. Andrew Martindale, an inspector for Historic England said buildings lost would be justified by improvements.

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## News

# Cambridge Extinction Rebellion highlights global ‘criminal inaction on climate breakdown’

**Molly Killeen**  
Senior News Correspondent

“By failing to tackle climate change in a meaningful way, the social contract is breaking”, says Nathan Williams of the Cambridge branch of Extinction Rebellion. On the 31st of October 2018, the new environmental group declared the beginning of a campaign of mass civil disobedience in response to “the UK Government’s criminal inaction on climate breakdown.”

Their message is one of urgency, and focuses on the threat that our “voracious appetite for resources as a globalized economy” is posing to the planet’s ecosystems and, by extension, many species, including humans. Human extinction, they argue, is a possibility, but the grief of this realization can, in fact, empower people to take action to prevent it.

The group emphasises how tactics of nonviolent civil disobedience and the readiness of its members to be arrested have gained them considerable attention. In November, 85 people were arrested after thousands blockaded five of London’s bridges.

Inclusivity is an important aspect of these actions, Williams says, and the events organized so far have been attended by people of all ages. This is all a part of Extinction Rebellion’s philosophy of ‘regenerative culture’, a way of



bringing individuals and groups within the community together. He cites these tactics as one of the key reasons for the group’s success thus far: “the way that we can win is by taking to the streets and building a non-violent direct action movement that clearly comprehends the

▲ **An Extinction Rebellion ‘slow cycling’ protest in Cambridge last month** (JOE COOK)

enormity of the crisis.”

Extinction Rebellion’s mission, however, goes beyond just climate activism, and its reach extends considerably further than the UK. Their focus is not just on environmental issues and they seek to work with a broad range of justice-oriented groups. Climate change, they argue, is a result of “a destructive economic system that has injustice, oppression ingrained within it”.

Their approach focussed on systemic change avoids criticizing individuals or making people feel guilty about their consumption or the choices they make on a day to day basis. Instead, they seek to target, as a whole, “a system that doesn’t allow us to live in a more ecologically balanced way.”

In April 2019, efforts will be extended internationally, with branches around the world temporarily coordinating their actions in what Williams predicts will be a mass mobilization effort “unlike anything the environmental climate movement has seen before.”

Part of their efforts to address government failures to tackle the climate crisis is an insistence on the democratization of the decision-making process when it comes to finding solutions, particularly via citizens’ assemblies.

The group has three demands: government honesty about the urgency of the crisis, a commitment to reducing the UK’s carbon emissions to net zero

“  
[They target] a system that doesn’t allow us to live in a more ecologically balanced way  
”

by 2025 and a wartime-like mobilization, to be democratically overseen by citizen bodies. As long as the different branches of the organization adhere to these goals, and comply with the principle of nonviolence, they are free to exist with extensive autonomy.

The Cambridge branch has had, therefore, great freedom in determining city-specific goals and designing action through which to forward them. Ultimately, Extinction Rebellion Cambridge seeks the declaration of a ‘Climate Emergency’ by local authorities, a move which would make it easier for them to push for clean-energy solutions and to hold government to new environmental standards in any building and infrastructure projects it might embark on.

Extinction Rebellion Cambridge is also seeing increasing student involvement, and representatives of the group have attended recent Zero Carbon Society meetings. The group also supports the ongoing University divestment initiative, and stands with the student movement. The longer the university waits to divest, says Williams, “the longer they show themselves up as not really understanding what the future looks like.”

The group hopes to work and mobilize in conjunction, with student campaigns to reach this end sooner. Divestment is “absolutely inevitable”, insists Williams, if the University wants to end up “on the right side of history.”

# Cambridge rough sleeping figures show no improvement since last year

**Chloe Bayliss**  
Senior News Correspondent

A count of rough sleepers that took place in November, published last week, has revealed that the number of those sleeping on the streets of Cambridge had risen to 27 in 2018, a marginal rise from 26 in 2017. Of those counted in 2018, none of them were believed to have been under the age of 18.

The count, carried out for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government took place early in the morning on November 23.

National figures show the UK has seen numbers of rough sleepers fall in the last two years – with the number at 4,677 in 2018, down from 4,751 in 2017, a 2% decrease for the first time in 8 years.

However, despite this year’s increase, Cambridge has seen relatively significant improvement compared to the

“  
[Rough sleeping] is too often treated like a ghost in the room for fear of being misunderstood  
”

national picture since 2016: nationally rough sleeping has risen by 13% since 2016 (despite last year’s 2% decrease), whilst in Cambridge figures have gone down from 40 rough sleepers from of 2016 count, a decrease of about a third in two years. However, recent counts are still significantly higher than the number in 2010, when only six rough sleepers were recorded in Cambridge.

Executive Councillor for housing at the Cambridge City Council Richard Johnson said that whilst there was a small rise, the City Council was still working well to tackle the problem of homelessness in Cambridge, stating it is important to “set [the figure] in the context of previous years.”

However, Councillor Tim Bick, representative of the Liberal Democrats in Cambridge and one of the authors of a report on rough sleeping in Cambridge published last year, believed that the issue of rough sleeping is “too often

► **A count in November 2018 found that 27 people were sleeping rough in Cambridge** (LUCAS CHEBIB)



treated like a ghost in the room for fear of being misunderstood.” He called for a Cambridge Charter on rough sleeping, stating that “Cambridge is underplaying its potential to make a positive difference to a tragic situation”.

The other author of the report, Liberal Democrat Councillor Nichola Harrison, stated “these scenes of human misery on our streets is something none of us should have to accept as normal.”

Johnson, however, rejected the idea of a Cambridge Charter on rough sleeping as suggested by the report, arguing that it would only “duplicate” efforts already in place, and waste resources.

Daniel Zeichner, MP for Cambridge, stated that the number of rough sleepers in the UK has become a “national shame”. Commenting on rough sleeping in Cambridge, he said that the “City Council and voluntary agencies do a fine job, but confront a rising tide of misery caused by the Government’s calamitous and callous welfare and housing policies.” He called for “greater commitment from central Government”.

The release of these figures come after an announcement that Whitworth House, the only female residential home in Cambridge, will be closing due to a withdrawal of council funding.



# Seven May Balls to pay ‘Real Living Wage’ next May Week

Katy Bennett  
 Senior News Correspondent

Seven colleges will be paying the Real Living Wage of £9 per hour at their May Balls this year, *Varsity* has found, while at least three colleges will be paying lower than the National Living Wage of £8.21 per hour. Over half of Cambridge’s colleges are set to hold May Balls or June Events this summer.

The Real Living Wage of £9, calculated by the Living Wage Foundation, is different to the National Living Wage, which is set by the government and constitutes the minimum wage for over-25s. The Real Living Wage is based on the real cost of living in the UK, and numerous companies choose to pay it, although it is not enforced by the government. From April 2019, the National Living Wage will rise from £7.83 to £8.21, while the National Minimum Wage after April 2019 will be £8.21 for over 25s, £7.70 for over 21s, and £6.15 for over 18s.

The May Balls which are set to pay at least the Real Living Wage this year are Darwin, Downing, King’s, Pembroke, Homerton and Sidney Sussex. Of these, Homerton pays the highest – perhaps explaining its popularity with applicants this year – offering a minimum of £13 per

hour, and £16.50 per hour for clean-up workers. Homerton’s May Ball Committee informed applicants that the odds of simply getting an interview to work at the 2019 event were slimmer than those of getting into Cambridge.

After being contacted by *Varsity*, Emmanuel also increased its wages to align with the Real Living Wage, stating that: “We would never want a member of our team to feel unappreciated or undervalued”.

Churchill, Robinson and Queens’ will all pay above the April 2019 National Living Wage. Churchill’s Spring Ball takes place in February, when the National Living Wage is still £7.83, while Robinson states that added to this will be a “premium to compensate for the unsociable hours”.

Queens’ May Ball President Rob Glew told *Varsity* that: “Queens’ May Ball is determined to create the best possible environment for our guests but also for our workers.

“Our committee has two dedicated personnel officers who, alongside the recruitment process, spend much of their time creating methods for our staff to feel appreciated and truly enjoy their night working the Ball.”

Churchill Spring Ball President Benjamin Sawyer said that “the ethical treatment of workers is very important to Churchill” and informed us that they will be providing workers with their own break room and refreshments. Sawyer defended the committee’s decision to set wages below the Real Living Wage, saying that: “seeing how [the ball] is not intended to be [students’] means of primary employment to sustain a living, we feel this is fair.”

Gonville and Caius and Jesus will pay below both the Real and National Living Wages, offering wages of £7.50 an hour and £8 an hour respectively, with wages adjusted for those over 21.

Jesus May Ball Presidents Kate Fitzpatrick and Jacquie Rowe stated that “Jesus College May Ball offers its workers many perks, including free Ball food and soft drinks during their shift,” which the committee believes supplements the lower wages.

*Varsity* were unable to find clear shift times for Trinity Hall’s June Event, but its overall lowest pay is £50 for the night (or £58.50 for over-21s) and, based on a probable shift time of 6-7 hours, this looks likely to be below the Real Living Wage. Its presidents, Daniel Surkes and Rebecca Hartley, stated that: “As a committee, our budget is based upon ticket sales only. Due to the need to allocate funds carefully to ensure our event goes ahead, we have decided to keep ticket prices competitive and attainable; in doing so, we have followed national living wage figures rather than [real] living wage figures.”

St John’s May Ball will pay at least the national minimum wage for over 18s and the National Living Wage for over 25s. President William Dean informed *Varsity* that: “The St John’s May ball is committed to offering good working conditions for all students”.

He added, “as this is a one off event, the national living wage carries no weight here and we believe our wages are fair when seen in light of this being

a one off event with a unique employee make-up.”

*Varsity* was unable to find figures for Corpus Christi, Magdalene, Peterhouse, Selwyn, Wolfson and Hughes Hall. However, Peterhouse informed *Varsity* that this is because their wages are not yet finalised, while Trinity confirmed that it would at least be paying “an hourly rate that accords with the Government’s national wage guidelines” alongside offering its workers meals and the ability to ballot for a ticket next year.

Corpus Christi, Magdalene and Selwyn did not respond to *Varsity*’s requests for information.

*Varsity* has also reached out to Wolfson and Hughes Hall May Ball committees.



▶ Trinity’s May Ball will pay at least the national minimum wage next year (JOHANNES HJORTH)

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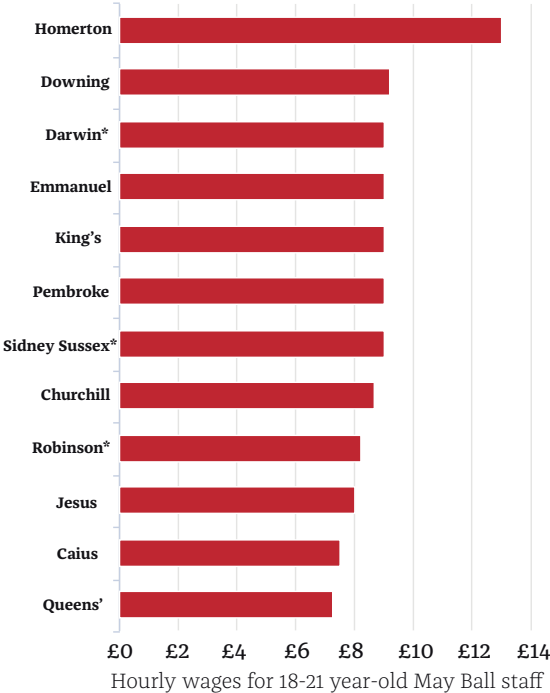
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### Ballin’: Homerton comes out on top for May Ball staff wages

Source: May Ball Committees or website information. (Colleges labelled with an asterisk (\*) pay their workers at least the wage value listed)





## News

# ‘It’s just a headache’: Market Square vendors share their frustrations

► Continued from front page

racks will also be introduced.

Meanwhile, there are voices calling for the preservation of historic elements of the market – including the cobblestones and the fountain at the centre of the square. ‘Friends of Cambridge Market’, a Facebook page dedicated to the history and operation of the market, expressed “fear” over the possible removal of the cobblestones, demanding to see the Council’s detailed plans over the retrofitting of Market Square flooring.

Cllr Lewis Herbert confirmed that the Council has set aside £100,000 for the project. The outcome from the consultation period, as well as any changes to the proposed design, will be considered by the Scrutiny Committee in the City Council.

Varsity has talked to several vendors on their views about the current situation of the market and the potentially upcoming changes.

Gabory\*, owner of a stall selling marinated and grilled meat, told Varsity that he has known about the upcoming changes and “will be glad” if the Council’s proposed changes come through, but feels that to his knowledge, they are “ages [away]” from happening.

He cited the biggest problems in the market as slippery cobblestones and electricity failures disrupting his

business as he has to restart the generator during the day.

However, when asked about losing historic aspects of the market, Gabory did not express concerns. “Look around, what is it [the market] like?” He stressed that more value would be placed on the historic elements of the market, such as the condition, if they were in better condition, but the current state of the market is “just a headache”.

Looking to the future, Gabory said that he would like to have a fixed stall and a covered market. He cited the impact of rain and poor weather on the operation of his stall.

“I’m going to be happy if the street between us [the stall and the aisle] is covered with a glass roof, as when it is raining people just disappear and the market is dead, straight away, until the rain stops,” Gabory added.

Apart from concerns over the cleanliness and accessibility of the market, there have also been stories of vendors complaining about fried food vendors driving business away from their stalls. Nutan, owner of a souvenir stall opposite a stall selling fried food, told Varsity that in her thirty years working in the market, she has seen a rise in the number of food stalls, which has affected her business. She finds that she has to spend extra time cleaning her stall when she comes back for business after the weekend, for there are “always burger bits and lots of

“*When it is raining, people just disappear and the market is dead, until the rain stops*”



smoke” from the operation of food stalls on weekends.

She welcomed the upcoming changes to the market, agreeing that the biggest issues in the market lie in the cobblestones being slippery, having witnessed two customers slipping in front of her stall. She also commented that the market is not clean enough, making it “unhygienic” for food. However, despite her support for the Council’s proposed changes, she noted that the Council “has been talking in the past” without

▲ **Market Square is being considered for renovation**

(JESS MA)

any concrete action. Lynne, owner of greengrocers J&L Fruit Veg, told Varsity that she felt the market had declined in cleanliness in her thirty years as a vendor. The Cambridge City Council will decide whether to fund a detailed project plan in 2020/21, subject to favourable public response in the upcoming consultation session. An agreed upon design could potentially commence work in 2021/22. \*This stall vendor, along with others, were referred to by their nicknames or first names.

# Senate House discussion sees clash over future of Investment Office

Noella Chye, Rosie Bradbury and Kiran Khanom

Tuesday’s Senate House discussion on the topic of ‘the future of the Investment Office’ centred on the topic of divestment.

Over the course of the almost two-hour discussion, over ten students and several academic staff called for dramatic change to Cambridge’s Investment Office, which oversees the university endowment fund’s main investment pot, worth £3.3bn.

Speaking in proxy, two finance officials defended the office’s practices. One claimed that the investment office’s existing funding model has served it well over the last decade and that it “should be continued.” He added it has been implemented in other universities, including private universities in the United States with large endowments.

The University currently operates under a “fund of funds” investment model, in which it invests in portfolios of funds managed by fund managers.

In his speech, the official claimed that the University must protect fund managers’ intellectual property, and that its ability to access these fund managers depends on not disclosing

the companies in their portfolios.

The majority of the student speakers, members of the pro-divestment group Cambridge Zero Carbon, focused their speeches around the University’s decision last June against full divestment, rather than the future of the investment office in particular.

“This University which normally exists to serve the next generation proves itself happy to cooperate with those who pose the greatest threat to it”, said Beth Barghava, a member of Cambridge Zero Carbon and one of the three students who went on a six-day hunger strike leading up to the University’s Council decision last Easter term.

George Breckenridge, a student representative on the Council of the School of Physical Sciences speaking in a personal capacity, echoed the sentiment, arguing: “The aims of the Investment Office must be fully aligned with the mission of the University to society both now and into the future.”

“That cannot and does not mean maximising economic returns – it means maximising returns to society”, he continued. Dr Daniel Thomas, a research associate at Peterhouse in the Department of Computer Science, and Dr Jason Scott-Warren, a reader at Caius and newly-elected member of University Council, echoed these sentiments, with Thomas stating



▲ **The Senate House on King’s Parade, where Tuesday’s discussion was held**

(LOUIS ASHWORTH)

that the “we must never desert the moral high ground, or we will be covered by the rising seas.”

Dr Scott-Warren described that in his observations of Council, “the overall picture is of risk aversion and revenue maximisation”. The discussion follows revelations last week that two members of the working group tasked with recommending the University’s position on divestment were simultaneously involved in proposed donations from BP and BHP Billiton (the latter proposed donation was later rescinded).

Several speakers discussed the recent revelations. Cambridge Zero Carbon member Sophie Thorpe argued that they “completely discredit[s] the working group process, and calls into question the credibility of this institution”.

A spokesperson for the University said

“*The aims of the Investment Office must be fully aligned with the mission of the University*”

last week that “the allegation made [that the proposed donations influenced the divestment working group] is wrong”, and that the working group was set up “to hear from all sides of the debate.”

Following the resignations of four senior members of the investment office in September, a search committee was set up in November to “look for a candidate who would be able to continue the current fund of funds model of the IO”, according to meeting minutes from the committee responsible for making the University’s key decisions, called University Council. Interim arrangements for the investment office have been put in place during the search for new members.

The issue of a perceived lack of transparency in the Investment Office’s operations has gained traction recently.

Speaking at the discussion, CUSU Women’s Officer Claire Sosienski-Smith spoke on a perceived gap in accountability, calling for “an Investment Office that is accountable to the entire university, including its students”. In May, Cambridge’s divestment working group recommended in its final report that the investment office become more transparent about its investment processes through an annual report, with “information on environmental and social funds”, as well as an “informative website”.



# Only eight Cambridge colleges paid all workers above 'Real Living Wage' in 2018

► Continued from front page

Living Wage, currently £7.83, which is the minimum wage to which all those over the age of 25 are legally entitled.

According to data revealed in the 'Taylor's Table', which was compiled by Joe Cook and Abdullah Shah, only eight of the University's 31 constituent colleges employed no staff on wages below the 2018 Real Living Wage valuation of £8.75 per hour: Queens', Trinity, Sidney Sussex, Selwyn, Murray Edwards, Newnham, St Edmund's, and Emmanuel.

The lowest wage on Emmanuel's pay scale is £8.00, however, as of the date requested in the FOI requests, Emmanuel college did not have any casual workers, so did not then employ any staff on hourly wages below £8.75. Two further colleges, Wolfson and Clare Hall, gave approximated figures, of "0-1%" and "0-5" workers respectively.

The Taylor's Table rankings were calculated from information regarding the wage practices of all 31 Cambridge colleges, correct as of 15th August 2018. Colleges were ranked on three indicators: the lowest hourly wage, the number of staff members paid under £8.75, and the percentage of staff paid under £8.75, excluding academic and administrative staff.

Queens' College, the only officially accredited Living Wage employer, ranked 1st on the Taylor's Table, with a minimum wage of £9.08. Trinity came in second, with a minimum wage of £8.96, and Sidney Sussex followed, paying a minimum hourly rate £8.87.

Robinson College ranked lowest. 58.7% of non-academic or administrative staff at Robinson were paid below £8.75 per hour, representing 128 employees.

The College also had the joint-third lowest hourly wage, £7.38, equal to that of Clare and Magdalene. *Varsity* has reached out to Robinson College for comment.

Only two colleges paid wages below £7 per hour. Christ's and Churchill employed staff on £6.73 and £6.80 respectively, as of 15th August 2018. Both colleges, however, claim to have since increased staff pay.

The Christ's College bursar told *Varsity* that the current lowest hourly rate for staff at Christ's is £8.50, noting that the college "reviews its rates of pay regularly". This value, however, remains below the Real Living Wage valuation, of £9 outside of London.

A spokesperson for Churchill College said that, "in light" of the figures which will be revealed in the Taylor's Table, Churchill "undertook a complete strategic review of employee pay scales last year", affirming that "as of 1 October 2018 all Churchill College employees are paid above the minimum wage."

Once more, however, it must be noted that the minimum wage for those over 25, also referred to as the National Living Wage, remains below the Real Living Wage.

Christ's and Churchill rank 26th and 28th on the Taylor's Table respectively.

Magdalene College tied with Churchill at 28th on the Taylor's Table, with 47% of non-academic or administrative staff paid below the Real Living Wage valuation of £8.75, as of 15th August 2018. The college also, along with Robinson and



◀ Robinson College ranked lowest on the campaigners' living wage table  
(LOUIS ASHWORTH)

Clare, had the third lowest minimum hourly wage, of £7.38.

Speaking to *Varsity*, Magdalene College's Assistant Bursar said, "The college has made positive steps with its staff in the lower pay groups, awarding pay rises significantly higher than the rate of inflation and that of other pay groups in each of the last 5 years."

They claimed that permanent college staff currently receive pay equal to "99% of the real living wage", and argued that the Real Living Wage "ignores other significant benefits provided by the college, such as, contributory pension scheme, staff absence policy, staff meals and staff bonus."

However, in the same FOI request, Magdalene said that they gave no cash benefits to their lowest-paid workers.

The creators of the Taylor's Table said that "due to the complexities of comparing between colleges" it was decided that the benefits that colleges offer to their workers, in addition to wages, would not be included in the table, although this question was included in the initial Freedom of Information requests.

Furthermore, many of these benefits do not apply to temporary staff, who are often the workers facing the greatest amount of financial insecurity. Trinity's housing allowance, for example, is specified as applying only to "permanent staff".

The campaigners also noted that these benefits "should not be used as a way for colleges to distract from the fact they do not pay a living wage", explaining that, unlike fair wages, "bonuses and non-cash benefits cannot be relied upon in this because of their changing and non regular nature."

The student campaigners behind the Taylor's Table began work last July. The Taylor's Table is the latest effort in the ongoing campaign to encourage Cambridge Colleges to become officially accredited Living Wage employers, following the example set by Queens' College in 2014.

They said, "We think there is great potential for colleges to change their practices. While we acknowledge that this will not be an overnight process, we are optimistic that they will come to the realisation that their current wage practices are exploitation."

The Cambridge Living Wage Cam-

paign said, "This table shows just how many colleges are failing their staff in terms of pay. Colleges will spend thousands of pounds on extravagant dinners and academic prizes, yet refuse to pay their staff a Living Wage."

"If colleges want to prove they genuinely care about their staff they should seek Living Wage accreditation as a bare minimum."

Speaking about the findings displayed in the Taylor's Table, CUSU President Evie Aspinall asserted that "to pay less than the [real] living wage is to fail to give staff fair or adequate remuneration for their work and severely impacts on their quality of life."

Daniel Zeichner, Labour MP for Cambridge, emphasised the high cost of living in Cambridge, affirming his support for the ongoing Living Wage campaign.

He said, "We live in a great City – it needs to be great for everyone."



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## News

## ANALYSIS

# Academic room ballots — are they effective incentives?

**Elizabeth Haigh**  
Deputy News Editor  
**Kyoka Hadano**  
Senior News Correspondent

The four colleges which topped the 2018 Tompkins table all use an academically prioritised ballot system to determine students' rooms for subsequent years.

## The numbers

Only eight out of the 31 colleges at the University use this system, of which Christ's, Pembroke, Trinity and Peterhouse occupy the top four spaces in the table respectively. The other four colleges with academic room ballots – St John's (8th), Gonville & Caius (14th), Corpus Christi (15th) and Fitzwilliam (19th) – place within the top 20.

This is broadly reflected in all results from recent years, with 5 of these Colleges in the top 10 average rankings over the past 5 years, and 4 in the top 10 for the past 10 years. Trinity College tops both lists, with an average ranking of 1.4 from 2014 to 2018 and 1.3 from 2009 to 2018.

Pembroke, Christ's and Peterhouse also feature in both top 10's, with St John's placing joint 8th for the last 5 years but narrowly missing out on a top 10 spot over the longer period. However, although two of the remaining colleges, Caius and Christ's, hold a 13.9 and 13.1 average ranking respectively over the last 10 years, Fitzwilliam is the exception with an average ranking of 20.5.

By contrast, some Colleges which do not use an academic ballot system consistently place highly.

Emmanuel College, although only 9th in the 2018 table, had the second-best average of 3.9 over the last 5 years, with Churchill not far behind Pembroke in 4th with an average of 6.2.

## How it works

Following the decision of St Catherine's College in February 2017 to abolish their 'scholar's ballot', these eight colleges are becoming increasingly isolated in the way in which they prioritise those who receive a First in their end of year examinations.

While the system varies from college to college, the fundamental principle remains the same: those who do best in exams are given priority in choosing their accommodation for next year. This contrasts with the randomly generated order favoured by most other colleges which use a ballot.

At Trinity, Senior Scholars (those who received a First in a year other than first year) are given first choice in the ballot. This is followed by Junior Scholars (those who receive a First in their first year), then the remaining undergraduate body.

A College spokesperson commented that the allocation system has been developed in consultation with the Student Union, and that "Trinity College operates a room allocation system that is fair and sensitive to student needs."

Similarly, Corpus Christi reserves 20 of its best rooms for Scholars and In-



▲ A prize room seen in Trinity College, awarded to students who receive a First (LUCAS CHEBIB)

termediate Exhibitioners (students who achieved a high 2:1).

Fitzwilliam College recently introduced a group balloting system to minimise the anxiety involved in choosing rooms and crystallising friendship groups.

Dr Paul Chirico, Senior Tutor at Fitzwilliam College said: "Scholars are offered priority in the ballot if they chose to enter individually rather than in a group. Many regard this as a substantial reward for their academic achievement, an additional incentive".

He added that "we recognise that the hard work of some other students is not rewarded so fully through the exam system, and we seek to provide every one of our students with an excellent room in which to live and work, and as much choice as possible in its location. To this end we continue to invest heavily to enhance the accommodation available, with an ongoing programme of refurbishment and expansion."

"The purpose of the system is not to encourage students to work harder"

However, Peterhouse takes a different approach, taking both extra-curricular as well as academic achievements into consideration when allocating rooms. An algorithmically-operated points based system rewards students not only for their examination grades, but for activities including sporting achievements, holding committee positions in societies and contributing to Cambridge theatre or journalism.

A student at Peterhouse, who wished to remain anonymous, told *Varsity*: "I think it works but it has its flaws". They pointed out that the system means that "it's in your hands to get a moderately good position [in the ballot]."

"I understand why the system is there but there's a lot of pressure to do well both academically and extra-curricular wise, that can make things difficult," commented Lara Mandell, another student at Peterhouse. But she nonetheless commended how "it's not based solely on academics."

"The issue with the ballot system here is that you can't just get points for being part of a society, even if you attend regularly, you have to be on the committees, and this can be difficult due to time commitments."

A spokesperson for Peterhouse stated that, "the College is very happy that a broad range of achievements and contributions should be recognised and as an academic institution it would seem strange to exclude academic achievement."

## Not the only incentive?

Dr Robert Edward Hunt, Senior Tutor of Christ's, told *Varsity* that the room ballot system is not so different from many other aspects of the College system that favour those with the best exam results, such as prizes awarded in Easter Term.

He explained how "The purpose of the system is not to encourage students to work harder". He conceded that although some students might be encouraged to work harder in order to receive priority in the ballot, "many students will not be influenced."

He argued that the prioritised ballot system, despite rewarding students for academic achievement, is an old system not designed to create better exam results.

This idea of the ballot system as not intrinsically creating better results is supported by the consistent achievements of those Colleges which do not

use such a system, such as Churchill and Emmanuel.

Among the prizes to which Dr Hunt refers, many of the most generous awards are also granted by colleges which still retain the academically prioritised balloting, and can vary drastically vary from college to college.

St John's award each student to receive a First in any undergraduate year between £400 and £600. At Trinity, students are given a prize of £350, while at Pembroke, the prize is currently worth £250 for first year students and £300 for subsequent years. While some colleges reward students differently, such as with money off their next college bill or with book tokens, other colleges offer no such rewards at all.

## Academic ballots: also a financial division?

In being granted prioritised access to a choice of rooms, Scholars' rent can be considerably more expensive than that of other students – thus, many are only able to capitalise on scholars' rooms if they are in a financial position to afford more expensive accommodation. This means that some students, despite having achieved high academic results, cannot take advantage of College rewards due to their financial situation.

Both Christ's and Peterhouse highlighted that, similarly to all Cambridge Colleges, there is a range of hardship grants to which students in financial difficulty can apply.

However, there is currently no provision at colleges specifically for higher rent charges incurred as a result of having prioritised accommodation choice. Corpus Christi is the exception to this; offering a rebate of £100 a term to Scholars to help with rent.

Nonetheless, according to a *Varsity* investigation into the variation of rent costs carried out last year, only three of the Colleges which use this ballot system, Fitzwilliam, Corpus Christi and Caius, charge above average rent, indicating that although Scholar Rooms are often more expensive, their accommodation is in general more affordable than Colleges which do not use such a system, most noticeably than Newnham and Robinson.

Peterhouse told *Varsity* that while the NUS recommends that 25% of housing stock should cost less than half of the maximum maintenance loan in order to be affordable, 82% of their accommodation falls into this category.

Senior Bursar at Gonville and Caius College, Robert Gardiner, told *Varsity* that "there are established ways that concerns about domestic and accommodation matters can be raised by students including the Gonville & Caius Student Union, regular meetings with students and student surveys."

"The room ballot preferences have not been raised in recent years. In relation to the cost of accommodation, the college makes bursaries and grants available for students in the case of hardship." But he also added that the College "takes account of individual requirements based on personal circumstances".

“By contrast, some Colleges which do not use an academic ballot system consistently place highly”

“Many students are only able to capitalise on scholars' rooms if they are in a [good] financial position”



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# Features

## Out in Cambridge, but in the closet back home

### An anonymous student on growing up in a homophobic environment

Content note: This article contains mention of homophobia and unwanted physical contact

After coming back from the summer break, I caught up with a friend of mine in college, making small talk about my home country and what I did there for fun – chit-chat really. But, as the conversation progressed, it shifted to the topic of whether or not I was ‘out’ to my family. I’d been asked this question many times before, so the answer was almost automatic:

“Every flight back, I feel like I’m shoving it deeper inside”

“No.” I could attribute why I’m not ‘out’ back home to so many things. It could be because I’m afraid that the attitudes back home towards homosexuality aren’t as progressive as they are here in the UK. It could be because my parents have made homophobic comments in the past and thrown around homophobic slurs so willingly that I’m uncomfortable with talking to them about my sexuality.

But, if I’m being honest with myself, it’s because I never actually factored coming out of the closet into my grand scheme of things. It was always: go to school, get a job, and do a smattering of other things in between. Coming out wasn’t one of those things. This, I guess, brings me to my friend’s response: “I think you’re really brave.” I didn’t know how to respond. I mean, I was grateful for her response but in my head, even though it’s kind of twisted to think of it this way, being out here in Cambridge is a privilege and I wouldn’t be able to do so had I not come here in the first place.

All of this isn’t to suggest that for my whole life I had to be celibate. I did go out and I did meet boys. But we had to sneak around and stay away from prying eyes, afraid of being found out. I’m so used to it that now that I still haven’t been on a single date. Or maybe there’s a different reason for that.

When I was younger, my parents would always say they couldn’t wait for the day I’d give them grandchildren. I’d stay quiet. At that point, I already knew I would never be interested in girls, but the heteronormative idea that dating was only possible between a boy and a girl stuck with me in the back of my mind, and maybe this is the subconscious thought preventing me from forming something with another boy. Whenever I snuck away with other boys, I had to make sure no one found out. Not any of our other friends, and especially not any of our family members.

So, it was really surprising when my mother confronted me about one of the boys I’d run off with whenever we were together. But first, I need to explain this in the context of my relationship with my parents, which has always been somewhat strained. My father was very infrequently home and when he was, he’d be dismissive of us or disrespectful towards my mother. When I told him that my teachers and classmates were treating me differently because of my ethnicity, the only thing he did was ask me why I couldn’t make myself appear like less of a mixed-race kid – so I turned to my mother because I thought I could trust her.

But as I grew older my interactions with my mother began to make me feel increasingly uncomfortable. When my mother asked me whether or not I liked boys, I thought I would be able

to fight back; to call her out for being a horrible person. But I didn’t. I denied it. Even though I didn’t think denying the fact that I’m gay would affect me that much, it did. Even though coming out was never part of my plan, my denial felt like I was shoving that piece of me deep inside, so no one would find it. And every summer, every flight back, I feel like I’m shoving it deeper inside and I dread that every time.

Coming to Cambridge has really enabled me to open up about my sexuality and experience the joys of being out. I don’t have to hide any part of me, and I don’t have to worry about anyone of my family finding out, because I’m leagues away from them. Cambridge has become something like my own hideout, free from prejudice.

Despite the positive responses I’ve received after coming out to friends in the UK, I still hesitate before telling someone new about my sexuality. There’s always this thought at the back of my head that I should keep my sexuality secret, that I should find a way to avoid the subject.

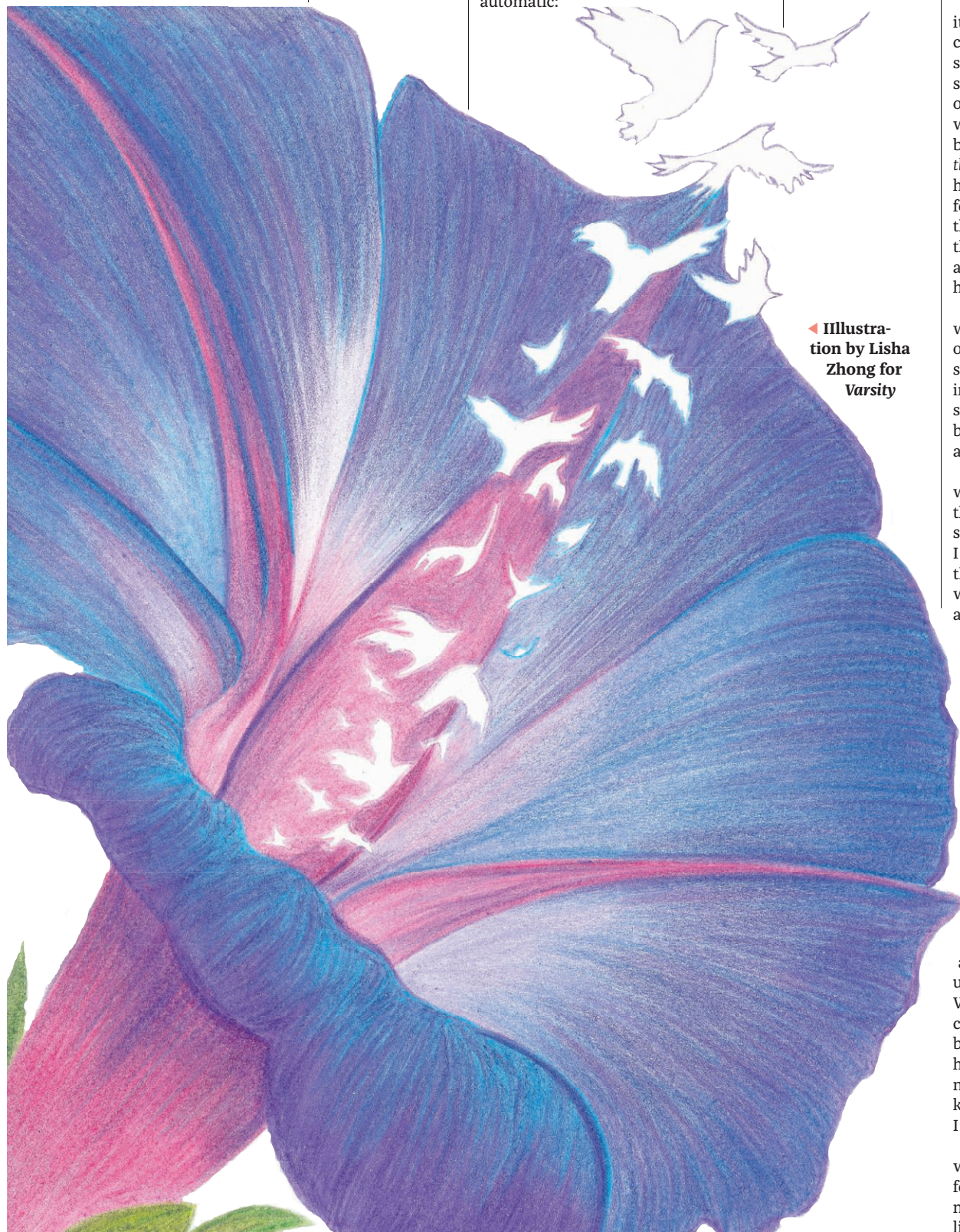
To clarify, I’m not saying that I’ve encountered explicit homophobia here in Cambridge. It’s just that, sometimes, when I’m speaking to people from back home or who have the same ethnic background as me, they make comments that make me second guess what I should be thinking and how I should respond. *Maybe they just aren’t phrasing it properly.* And sometimes I question myself. *Do I have a right to feel uncomfortable?* The latter statement pops up in my head a lot here.

There’s this conflict between what I know I’m allowed to feel offended by and what I should speak up against, and doing what I’ve always done back home: turning a blind eye to this type of behaviour and keeping quiet. But not everything is gloom and doom. My friends back home weren’t the best. The hate speech that would come out of their mouths whenever I was near them would affect me, but I’d smile and play along.

So, I’m grateful for the friends I’ve surrounded myself with in Cambridge, and I’m grateful that I can be happy here, even if it’s just for nine months every year.

I’ve met people who are in the same situation as me, but with one difference: they still don’t feel comfortable with being out here in Cambridge. They’re afraid, as I sometimes am, that the people back home, no matter how many thousands of miles away, will somehow find out.

That even here, they’ll be ostracised. I know that you can’t force someone to be comfortable with something, but I hope that maybe if they read this, they themselves will come to the conclusion that there’s still a way to be okay with who you are.





# Life in Cambridge as an LGBT+ Catholic

**Eleanor Smith** talks about experiencing loneliness, affirmation and community as an LGBT+ Catholic

Content note: This article contains mention of homophobia

Most of us, when we first come to Cambridge, have some kind of reinvention in mind. For me – as for many others – that was coming out. Though I was already out to my family and a few close friends, I had stayed quietly, determinedly closeted at my Catholic secondary school. It wasn't the sort of place that preached hellfire and brimstone; but I knew my classmates and the administration, and I knew very well I had no assurance of support or safety if I came out.

In Cambridge, I felt considerably safer. But I hadn't anticipated the emotions that would come with coming out over and over again: sickening fear, hesitation, a strange, protective defensiveness. I was deathly afraid of being *seen*, now that it was finally an option, and judged unworthy – weighed in the balance and found wanting. Floating in a sea of bi-ace-queer uncertainty, feeling I didn't look or act 'not-straight' enough, I anticipated being dubbed 'bad at being LGBTQ+'. And choosing to identify as Catholic didn't help with that. I kept all my feelings about sexuality and faith in the same private, vulnerable place in my heart, and that vulnerability was terrify-

“Meeting other people who just got it, no explanations needed, was an unimaginable relief”

▼ LGBT+ Catholics march at Pride at 2004 (IHAR)

ing. Nonetheless, I managed to come out in various awkward ways – Over curry! Through bad puns! In the middle of Memorial Court! – and I started looking for a religious community in Cambridge. Back then, in 2014, I could only find one LG-BTQ+ Christian group (at St Edmund's), and it seemed to have been inactive for years. I began attending Mass at Fisher House on Sundays: the smell of incense and the familiar responses helped with my homesickness, but I couldn't help feeling like a double agent there. Everyone seemed so devout, so doctrinally sound – would they disapprove of me if they knew?

I tried out some other churches, in case that would help, but I hadn't picked a good week to try St Andrew the Great: 'The grace of God's adoption isn't for everyone' is a message guaranteed to get any queer Christian's hackles up. My brief experience of Holy Trinity was very similar. Truth be told, I felt uncomfortable around vocal, enthusiastic Christian student communities. I felt – and still feel – how I think many queer Christians do: alienated by a faith seemingly without doubt, without the same desperate need to wrestle with Scripture, to go searching in the wilderness for your own space in your religion, since no one else seems to have made one for you.

The space you make can be a very lonely one, and in Cambridge's pressure-cooker environment, it can take a heavy toll. I have vivid memories from second year of sitting in the library, crying silently, unable to write because looking at an exchange of views with CICC in the Tab had made me feel so hopeless that I couldn't think. It felt like something

breaking inside me: I still feel it every time I run across traditionalist Catholic Twitter. In third year, going through a crisis of faith without knowing who to talk to, I was achingly lonely. For a while, my life fell apart in slow motion, one unread email and neglected laundry bag at a time.

Yet I also found unexpected sources of affirmation and community. Father Mark, at Fisher House, was one of them – I came out to him and was met with great warmth and kindness. My college chapel was another. It was there that I heard Alice Goodman preach on Pentecost, comparing the people who flew home to Ireland to vote for equal marriage to the Jewish farmers coming to Jerusalem for Shavuot. Jamie Hawkey, the Clare dean during my time there, turned out to be a warm, supportive listener, and very willing to lend me books! When I prayed, uncertainly, trying to let God in where I'd been afraid to before, I turned to the words of the Compline service I'd sung at Clare: *Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.*

“The space you make can be a very lonely one”

In the same year I cried in the library, I found a new LGBTQ+ prayer group in Cambridge – Centurion. As I loitered outside the Eagle, waiting for the first meeting, people would come up to me saying “Centurion?” in a hushed tone of voice, like a password. It made me think of the early Church in hiding. Meeting other people who just got it, no explanations needed, was an unimaginable relief; praying with them, singing the Taizé chant *I am sure I shall see the goodness of the Lord*, reminded me of why I'd stuck with Christianity in the first place.

I would love to say that I've completely integrated my faith and my sexual orientation. Truthfully, I'm still looking for a space to do that in, to feel like a whole person, open without fear. But I know now that I am not alone in looking; and if I'm in the wilderness, well, God's presence there is well-known.

Note: the Centurion group is inactive this year, but there remains a supportive Facebook group: if you're interested, contact the author of this article at [es648@alumni.cam.ac.uk](mailto:es648@alumni.cam.ac.uk).



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## Features

# The myth of 'choice'



**Holly Bracewell** argues that the idea that describing sexuality as a 'choice' is both insensitive and ultimately violent

*Content Note: this article contains discussion of violence, abuse, homophobia and sexual assault*

A few days ago, I was sent a picture. With a simple white background and two short lines of text, I didn't expect anything shockingly hateful – it wasn't, after all, a tweet by Piers Morgan. It read: 'Just because I disagree with you, does not mean I hate you. We need to relearn that as a society.' My first reaction was to laugh at the idealistic suggestion of a harmonious past and to question precisely when it occurred. Then, I found out what the picture was a response to: the LGBT+ community.

I'd hazard a guess that most people who identify as LGBT+ have been presented with the question of why we 'chose' our sexuality and/or gender identity at least once since coming out, if we have, in fact, been able to come out. Or

“Presenting in a manner true to one's identity requires immense bravery, not a choice”

we've been hit with a statement along the lines of 'I don't dislike you, I just don't approve of your lifestyle choices.'

Having received many of these comments from family, friends, housemates and strangers alike, I usually respond that there is research evidence showing that sexuality is not a choice. It actually has a biological basis. This time it was different. While my tolerance for such questions was already low by this point, the assertion that I needed to 'relearn' the art of compromising to accommodate such LGBT+ phobia tipped me into a rage I have never before experienced, prompting me to respond.

The response read: "Before you decide what I should and shouldn't feel and what I supposedly need to relearn, let me explain why your 'disagreement' with the community, and my own identity, is inherently hateful and why it therefore makes people (unsurprisingly) feel hated. To tell us that our identity is a choice undermines the things we've fought for, the things we've endured, and the situations that continually threaten our wellbeing through the physical and emotional violence of others. It takes only a fleeting look at history and current news to see the unspeakable persecution that has been and continues to be suffered by the community. Presenting in a manner true to one's identity requires

immense bravery, not a choice; no one would subject themselves to such cruelty simply to be 'different'.

To this day, we must determine whether it is safe to be 'out' in new situations because of the prejudice, discrimination and intolerance that grows in views such as that sexuality and gender identity are things we chose. On a minute personal level, since coming to Cambridge I have been physically attacked for my sexuality; I have been intimidated to hide my identity; I have been told I don't deserve to exist; and I have been made to feel unsafe in my own accommodation.

Yet these experiences pale in comparison to those I have heard about from fellow students during my time as LGBT+ Officer, and pale even further when you consider the extent of the violence enacted against the community every single day. If you think we would choose all of this, that our 'lifestyle' is something we selected, you are sorely mistaken.

Your subsequent suggestion that we must 'relearn' compromise to accommodate your homophobia is insensitive, hateful, and ultimately violent. It demands that we accept a reduction in our value in light of an unwavering and fundamental part of our identity.

The day I was locked in a room by someone who did things I in no way consented to, who said he was show-

▲ Illustration by Kate Towsey for Varsity

“To tell us that our identity is a choice undermines the things we've fought for”

ing me why I shouldn't again *choose* to be attracted to women, is the day I learnt never to compromise with acceptance. I refuse to diminish that memory to accommodate your disagreement with who I am, when that exact narrative is used to justify the hatred and violence my community experiences every day. The entire community has suffered immeasurably for that view and will continue to do so. There will be no acceptance of LGBT+ phobic opinions – they are our oppression.”

I never received a response to my message. I tell myself that's because they had no argument to come back with, no further way to rationalise their discrimination against the LGBT+ community, but part of me worries that I may have pushed them further into their prejudice.

However, this is not an issue I can afford to compromise on – such a concession on identity would endanger countless individuals. Sexuality and gender identity are not lifestyle choices that someone can simply disagree with. And I refuse to 'relearn' a falsehood, especially a falsehood that justifies violence against my community. I can only hope that this article reaches at least one person who disagrees with our 'choices', and that reading this prompts in them a new understanding and compassion.



# Negotiating silences



## Aidan Thomas on confronting and reconciling the combination of his sexuality and his religious upbringing

*Content Note: this article contains discussion of homophobia and homophobic slurs*

Growing up in a church community, it was something of a surprise for my twelve-year-old self to suspect that I might be gay. Of course, this realization didn't occur overnight – it was the accumulation of many months of wondering why the image of Katy Perry naked on a cloud in the *California Gurls* music video just wasn't doing anything for me. This journey of self-discovery was further complicated by the fact that my father, like his father before him, is a vicar. Unless I experience some kind of 'Prodigal Son' revelation, this trend seems unlikely to continue much further down the family tree.

My dad led a Protestant church in a mild-mannered Surrey village. Contrary to popular depictions of Christianity, sermons on the evils of homosexuality weren't really a feature of my Sunday mornings. In fact, the only occasion on which homosexuality was mentioned was when same-sex marriage was being debated, and frankly I don't remember

“I'm blessed to have parents who are willing to listen, as hard as it is for me to speak”

a word of it because I never particularly paid attention during services. While I'm thankful I didn't have to listen to anti-gay bile in my formative years, I also didn't hear *anything* about what it meant to be gay. This silence was deafening.

I didn't find any answers in secondary school either. Schoolkids, merciless in their pubescent angst, sought to punish any form of difference. The word *faggot* was tossed around aimlessly, meaninglessly; even I probably indulged in it from time to time.

Ironically, though, I spent as much energy hiding my religious background as I did my sexuality. It wasn't exactly cool to be Christian in school and those who were religious were easy pickings for teasing. My dad was a visible Christian figure in the community, but since I had no intentions of making secondary school any more grueling than it had to be, I did everything in my power to hide this. Friends didn't come over to my house or meet my parents. I feared being spotted walking into church on Sunday mornings.

However, the nature of my dad's job meant that the church was ever-present in my home, even as my own attendance steadily declined. Overwhelmed by the pervasiveness of the religion I rejected, I retreated onto the internet. There I found acceptance and understanding, but also a greater awareness of the violence faced by LGBT+ people worldwide, often instigated by religion.

My resentment towards the faith I had once held grew stronger. I spent

▲ For Aidan Thomas, silence has permeated discussions of his sexuality (LUKE ELLIS-CRAVEN)

“I spent as much energy hiding my religious background as my sexuality”

more time alone in my room, distancing myself from my family and their beliefs. I developed a caricature of Christianity in my head: ignorant, narrow-minded, condemning. A deep-rooted anger formed inside me.

Fast forward several years, and I am now out at home. My parents are wonderful people, truly loving and generous, which I am deeply grateful for. It would be disrespectful to those in more difficult family situations for me to downplay the love they have shown me since coming out. Rather, what I've found that is that 'coming out' was not a standalone event, but an ongoing process of negotiation between my parents and I, which shapes our everyday interactions. They've accepted my relationship, but we steer clear of the word 'boyfriend'. I still go quiet when gay characters appear on TV, watching my parents for any sign of discomfort or disapproval.

In the two years since coming out, we've had two, maybe three, conversations regarding sexuality. The most recent was prompted by an article on teaching primary school kids about LGBT+ rights, which my mum and I disagreed about. It didn't take long for the situation to escalate. Perhaps this is the consequence of years of actively suppressing such a fundamental pillar of my existence: it takes a while to summon the emotional flood, but when it finally strikes, you're going to need an Ark.

We fire questions back and forth between each other. There are some questions that ignite such anger in me that

I cannot hold them back: “How can the church stay silent on the persecution of LGBT+ people worldwide?”. We quickly agree that there is nothing biblical about homophobic violence.

There are other questions, questions that have nagged away at me for years, that my parents could not answer even if I dared to ask them. “Where do you think I'll go when I die?”, for example. I keep that one to myself.

The discussion is intense, and it's clear that my passion is getting the better of me. Mum gets defensive and it hits hard: “You really hate Christianity, don't you?”

I disagree, strongly. My parents probably wouldn't believe it but I'm actually a big fan of Jesus. The Jesus I grew up with taught values, beautiful in their simplicity; compassion; charity; forgiveness. But I concede that her perception of me reflects the years of silence I allowed to develop between us – an act of adolescent self-preservation that has stunted me in adulthood. Every day I spent locked away in my room, living online, was a day I allowed misunderstanding to take root.

Growing up, I didn't know what they believed about homosexuality, but I never allowed for the possibility that there could be reconciliation between my sexuality and their religion. We may not always agree, but I'm blessed to have parents who are willing to listen, as hard as it is for me to speak. Slowly but surely, I'm learning to overcome the silence, one conversation at a time.



# Opinion



## Why are extra-curricular activities valued more than extra income?

The ban on part-time work at Cambridge is paradoxical given the encouragement of extra-curricular activities

Belle George

One day in the summer before starting at Cambridge I sat filling out several forms sent to me by my college. I remember feeling irritated by the task – it was my day off, the weather was peachy, and I didn’t want to spend an hour inside laboriously filling out my medical, financial and personal details.

It was a fairly monotonous task (yes, I will pay for any damages to my room; no, I don’t have any allergies) until I read through a form which contracted me to not undertaking part-time work during my degree at Cambridge. It was my college’s ‘conditions of membership’ form, which read, in accordance with University policy: “No undergraduate student is allowed to undertake teaching or other regular paid work during term time without the written permission of her Tutor.”

What that form triggered in me was a feeling of resentment towards Cambridge as an institution that seemed designed for students who had grown up with the privilege of never needing to ever earn their own money. I got my first part-time job the summer I was thirteen: awkward and gangly standing behind a checkout in my local supermarket. Over the course of the coming years I worked

most of the classic teenage jobs: waiting tables, scrubbing pots, pulling pints and catering weddings.

Let me labour the point: I don’t resent having had to work as a teenager. The form struck me as symbolic of an ingrained assumption about the financial backgrounds of students likely to apply to and attend Cambridge.

I always expected that I would continue to have a part-time job at university, which was an idea that my parents fully supported. I have a vivid memory of my mum imploring me not to quit playing the piano, not because she enjoyed listening to me butcher Bach, Chopin and Mozart, but because of “the easy money you’ll be able to make teaching little kids to play while you’re at uni! Trust me Belle, it will beat working in a bar.”

And there I was, sitting at the table signing a contract promising I wouldn’t have a job while at Cambridge. It seemed almost patronising – by that point I’d juggled jobs and studies for six years. I thought I was fully apt at managing both my time and my bank balance. Cambridge’s ban on part-time work put an end to this juggling act.

Cambridge’s stance on students working is clearly stated on their financial

support webpage. “The University takes the view that our students should not work during term-time – it’s important that you have an appropriate work-life balance, and we offer a wide range of financial support to ensure you don’t have to.”

It’s true that the bursary system is incredibly generous in comparison to financial support offered by the majority of other British universities: Oxford and Cambridge combined are estimated to spend a total of £23 million on bursaries for lower income students each year. It’s also true that the sheer workload compressed into short eight-week terms means we would have far less time to have a job, if we were allowed them.

On arrival, I quickly realised that I was encouraged to split my time between extracurriculars and academic work, as part of the aforementioned “work-life balance”. Unlike paid work, there are no formal limitations on the number of hours undergraduates can devote to extracurriculars. As long as they can keep up with the monumental number of academic deadlines, students devote themselves to pursuing sport, drama, student politics, activism or any other of the multitude of activities we are lucky to be able to engage in. A friend

of mine who is the JCR President told me she does an average of three hours of JCR admin each day. Our first boat for rowing currently have over fifteen hours of training a week, a number set to increase after winter finishes. If the reason for not wanting students to work is because of the time it takes away from studying it is paradoxical to allow students to devote so much time to extracurriculars.

This is not to say that extracurriculars are redundant; on the contrary, they are undeniably valuable. They make the university experience more fulfilling by forging bonds between different students and expanding our scope of activity beyond our academic subjects (as well as keeping us sane, arguably). However, the policy banning part-time work suggests that spending your free time earning money is somehow inferior to choosing extracurriculars, feeding into the assumption that Cambridge simply isn’t a place for students from lower income backgrounds.

Working part time during your degree should not be seen as lesser than devoting your spare time to extracurriculars. The policy which bans Cambridge students from having part-time jobs is a luxury that many lower income students quite literally cannot afford.

“  
Having to sign a contract promising I wouldn’t have a job while at Cambridge seemed almost patronising  
”



# Proposed immunity for veterans of Northern Ireland is undemocratic

The Tory proposal to grant immunity to veterans of Northern Ireland would be a tragic miscarriage of justice

Peter McLaughlin

Last week marked the anniversary of one of the most significant and darkest events in recent British history. In 1972, as a response to the introduction of internment without trial in Northern Ireland, a protest was organised in the city of Derry for Sunday, the 30th of January. Among the 10,000 present were MP Bernadette Devlin and Father Edward Daly, future bishop of Derry. The Parachute Regiment, present due to fears of rioting, opened fire on the protestors and killed fourteen people, on a day that quickly became known as Bloody Sunday.

Jackie Duddie was mortally wounded as he ran away from the soldiers, his killer taking deliberate aim at the teenager. Michael McDaid and John Young were shot in the face while going to the aid of the injured William Nash: all three died. Jim Wray was shot in the back as he lay motionless and wounded on the ground, crying out that he could not move his legs. All those who died were innocent, yet no justice has been brought against their killers. Now, nearly 50 years on, the government seems to have committed itself to making sure none ever will.

The idea of protecting ex-servicemen from prosecutions relating to their time in Northern Ireland was proposed by a group of Conservative backbenchers,

“All those who died were innocent, yet no justice has been brought against their killers”

most of whom had served in the armed forces. However, it has now become mainstream in the party. Theresa May has described the bringing of prosecutions as “patently unfair”, and Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson used the phrase “witch-hunt”. A third of all Tory MPs (including Sir Michael Fallon) signed a letter last October echoing these sentiments, calling for the government to “put in place a lasting legal protection” for servicemen “wherever and whenever they serve”. Such legislative action is seeming increasingly likely. In December, Williamson announced that the Ministry of Defence “are very close to . . . finding a solution and making sure former and serving personnel will not go through the strain, the worry and the trauma of fearing a knock on their door.” The plan to ensure that ex-military personnel aren’t ‘dragged through the courts’ could become reality within a few months. And that would be a tragic miscarriage of justice.

It is widely recognised that the government has duties towards those who serve in its armed forces. But these duties do not extend to allowing them to kill with impunity, or to engage in collusion with terrorist groups, as happened throughout the Troubles. One of the fundamental commitments of a liberal

democracy is that its security forces are subject to oversight and are accountable to the people they are supposed to serve; this includes abiding by the same laws as the people. Those who abused their position must be held responsible for their actions.

The idea that all Army personnel in NI served their nation well, and that opposition to them could only arise out of anti-British sentiment or republicanism, is a popular one. But it is one that fails to understand the gravity of what took place. Growing up in Derry, a city that has been shaped by its experience of the military, the horrors of Bloody Sunday were imprinted on my mind as early as I can remember: the murals, the photographs, the stories. I still remember my teacher describing to nine-year-old me the chaos and fear of the march. When one comes to appreciate that at least 151 unarmed people in NI were killed by the security forces in just five years between 1969 and 1974, the stark reality ought to speak for itself.

Yet, clearly it does not, as the statements of politicians (quoted above) all too readily show. The problem is a dearth of proper Northern Irish representation in UK political discourse. It is all too easy for British politicians (and voters) to see Northern Ireland as a backwater,

or worse, a colony, whose interests need not be taken into account. This is exacerbated by the immense partisanship of the province’s own politics, which means that we are almost solely ‘represented’ in Westminster by the abstentionist Sinn Féin and the DUP. There is nobody to speak up for us, nobody to be the voice of the victims of the security forces and their families, and nobody to challenge the nationalistic narrative that informs and sets the context for political discussions about the Armed Forces.

Liberal democratic nations, committed to justice, must check and oversee their security forces, and when their soldiers kill civilians and collude with violent terrorists leaders must subject them to the full force of the law. To give immunity to those who broke the law in NI is fundamentally undemocratic. It is done on the basis that they are ‘our’ veterans, who served ‘us’, who fought for ‘our’ safety: yet they were not Jackie Duddie’s veterans; they did not serve the people of Derry; and they certainly did not fight for the safety of the innocent, whose deaths they are responsible for. If we truly believe in justice, in peace, in democracy, we cannot uncritically believe that everyone who served in NI served well. The victims of the security forces deserve better.

# Don’t assume we all arrive at Cambridge with the same amount of cultural capital

Inequality of cultural awareness isn’t a detriment, but it is something we need to be talking about

Olivia Emily

When I arrived in Cambridge and attended my first few lectures, I would hear academics talking about canonical texts they assumed we’d all read, or at least had an awareness of. Beowulf, Anne Askew, Julian of Norwich: these were all names thrown around my first-year English lecture and supervision rooms which I had to Google later. I felt inferior, head completely still in a sea of nodding faces. Education goes beyond the UMS marks we get on paper, and instead includes a cultural awareness and educational privilege that many aren’t aware that they have.

A lot of students come to Cambridge already in possession of a lot of cultural capital, meaning that they have an education that has been embellished by intellectual and artistic stimulation before they come to university. For example, some students may have been exposed to educational trips to museums or galleries and discussing intellectual topics throughout their adolescence. Then again, a lot of students (myself included) come to Cambridge having never experienced this, and subsequently feel inadequate. I never noticed this inequality before Cambridge, and it seems to me that this is a conversation we should be having.

I registered that I would have to play catch-up long before actually arriving in Cambridge. When I started thinking about applying and attended access talks about the application process, I was suddenly expected to have a lot more than simply knowledge of my A Level curricula.

I was expected to have cultural awareness to embellish my personal statement and dazzle in an interview.

With very little time before actually applying to university, I had to get into the habit many people pick up during adolescence: to read and discuss the news over dinner, not watch TV soaps; to read broadly and to read old texts, not just things I could find in my local Waterstones; to find discussion groups and classes to attend, even to visit museums where manuscripts were stored. It felt uncomfortable to try to change the habit of a lifetime, to teach myself to read books that the people around me had never even heard of, let alone read. I had to delve into the depths of the internet to find recommendations. In that sense, the modern generation has its own blessing: What did people like me do before the internet?

Perhaps, despite its flaws, this is where proposed foundation years will help, allowing students to catch up on

the intellectual canon before starting at university. But then again, I don’t believe this emphasis on the canon is entirely necessary. With English, for example, while I understand the importance of looking back at pivotal texts and learning the foundations of literature, university courses are so preoccupied with them that we begin to ignore the beauty of texts outside the canon.

When writing my personal statement, I made a point of including ‘non-literary’ texts. *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent* — books I grew up with and wasn’t ashamed of having read. There is a certain stigma around mainstream, popular novels, especially those written in the 21st century. But what’s wrong with reading current material? Especially if they acted, at least for me, like bookish gateway drugs and led me to more ‘valuable’ reads, like *The Handmaid’s Tale* or *1984*.

I felt an immense pressure to enrich myself with the works of the canon. But how do you know when you’ve finally reached that magical threshold of being ‘well-read’? For me, I tortured myself with Restoration literature and modernist prose, books that were somehow ‘better’ than those of my youth. But I could have gone so much further. I could study all I wanted for my A Levels to get full

“I could study to get full marks in an exam, but how could I get full marks in ‘culture’?”

marks in an exam, but how could I ever get full marks in ‘culture’? Culture simply cannot be exhausted, but the whole prospect exhausted me.

Since arriving at Cambridge, I’ve felt this pressure double. Sometimes it feels like I’m living half the Cambridge experience, spending my time learning about things everyone already knows about while they’re off learning even more. It can feel like a constant cycle of catching up, but the fact that those around me have an awareness of different types of culture has, in its own way, been enriching.

When others speak about their favourite films or paintings, I become more interested in these things. Similarly, others learn from my awareness of pop culture and more modern forms of literature, like the Twitter poetry phenomenon. University is a patchwork of everyone’s shared knowledge and experiences, no matter how high-brow, modern or niche.

As detrimental as it can sometimes feel, I’m not ashamed of never having encountered Chaucer before coming to uni. And while playing catch-up can feel like a burden, I recognise my own strengths and have the benefit of having more to learn – of not having wasted some of the best life experiences on my childhood.



## Opinion

## What difference does an hour at the gym make?

The scrutiny surrounding the introduction of a women's hour has revealed a poor understanding of privilege

CN: This article contains a reference to rape and racist language

The initiative for a women-only hour in Girton gym was met with a backlash on Facebook last week, with some claiming that the policy was a case of reverse sexism. We have all heard this rhetoric before, but often dismiss it as the rantings of a few isolated individuals. The show of support these remarks received online has been saddening. This was not the opinion of a lone pariah voice, but evidence of a wider culture which the announcement of women's hour simply lured to the surface.

The coverage this story has received in the national news proves that this is a culture which extends beyond Cambridge. The *Times* published an article with the headline 'Cambridge University students are embroiled in a gender row', and linked this incident to the incomparable events concerning rape threats at Warwick University. The *Daily Mail* talked rather provocatively of "fury" and "bitter rows" that had been "sparked". The essence of the debate is lost in antagonistic media sensationalism. By positioning events within a wider context of a right-wing culture war against a 'PC' or 'snowflake' generation, these stories distort and undermine what the conversation is really about: giving women a bit of space in a patriarchal world. Far from being better informed, readers of

coverage such as this become miscalibrated. What's more, students have been subject to abuse following this national coverage.

What is one hour at the gym? For women and non-binary people at Girton, it is an hour where they can exercise in comfort. For the opponents to the change, it represents a backwards step towards inequality and the demonization of all men. It is as though those opposed to the change think that women choose to feel uncomfortable, but I can assure you: women would love nothing more than to feel comfortable at a gym no matter who was inside. We have not chosen to be cat-called when bending over to pick up a weight, or to be interrupted mid-set by a man who tells you how to 'do that exercise better', before asking 'how often you come here' and for your +44.

There are inherent issues within our conversations about gender if they end in a zero-sum competition about victimhood. Both men and women suffer under patriarchy, but sexism is a form of structural oppression where men are placed in a position of economic, political and cultural power above women. Any man who attempts to find a point in their history where they have been systematically oppressed due to being male will be left wanting. Yet the response to the introduction of women's hour revealed that ignorance surrounding sexism is rife beyond Girton gym. One student

argued that his experience in the tech sector revealed that female applicants are valued more than males based on gender instead of competence, resulting in qualified males being at a disadvantage in the workplace. I want to remind this student that the tech world is still a man's world: a 2018 report shows how female employees make up 26% (Microsoft) and 43% (Netflix) of the workforce at two major companies. Before our conversations around gender can advance, we must tackle the foundations which build such misconstrued viewpoints.

Each counter-argument was connected by a crucial lack of understanding that our differences and history create barriers to participation. We must ensure equity first as a means of reaching equality. Gender quotas do not discriminate against men, but rather readjust the disparity caused by years of systematic misogyny. Quotas are only a quick-fix solution, yes, and one that hides the complexities of the structures that enable men to retain power. But how else is one to provide opportunities for women today who still face discrimination? One student who opposed the women's hour offered an alternative: posters to encourage respect. However, posters are emphatically not enough. Attitudes don't change overnight, as over a century of women's rights activism serves to remind us. Active measures must be put in place to correct imbalances.

The male students in opposition to

women's hour fail to realise the effects of their privilege. This results in the perpetuation of social structures which grant certain groups an unearned advantage. Such blindness was proven most shockingly when one student expressed their opposition to the women's hour through an analogy which rested on the racist depiction of black people as inherently violent. Women's hour, it was claimed, was equivalent to calling for a 'black-free hour' out of fear assault. Notwithstanding that the comparison of race to gender is profoundly false, in using such an analogy this student reinforced a stereotype which has been used as a justification for the exploitation of black people. The dangerous implications of this are outside the scope of this article, but this exposes a clear case of unchecked privilege on many levels.

The reaction to the women's hour at Girton gym represents misconceptions about feminism; most crucially, that equal measures always result in equality. Because women start from a position of disadvantage, positive discrimination is fundamental to reaching equality of outcome. A women-only hour at the gym is a short-term solution, but one that our experiences of harassment and male scrutiny make necessary. One female student summed it up perfectly in her online response: "If you won't listen to our arguments, listen to our experiences. When these things don't exist, perhaps women's hour won't need to either."

“The reaction to the women's hour represents misconceptions about feminism”

Anya Cooper

## Sex education in the UK has been limited and insubstantial – this has to change

The reform of the sex education policy requires new starting principles

The defining moment of the sex education I received at school was explaining to a teacher what a dental dam was. At the age of 14, I had never come across one of the mysterious stretchy rectangles before, and yet I knew more about them than adults responsible for teaching about sex and relationships at school. This incident is emblematic of the deficiencies of sex education in general. It tends to leave students with gaps in their knowledge pertaining to non-heterosexual sex, consent, pleasure, and healthy relationships. In my experience, it focused on prevention rather than positivity, which meant that it was both fearmongering and lacking in nuance.

Netflix's newest comedy drama *Sex Education* brings this issue to light, with its outlandish plot of a teenage boy whose mum is a sex therapist, but it's something which will make the news in the next few months. In 2017, a duty was placed on the Secretary of State for Education to make sex and relationships education compulsory at schools; a welcome move indeed, but one which raises fraught questions of the 'appropriateness' of what would be included on the curriculum. This is particularly true given that all children from the

“My offline education about consent came only in freshers' week. That is far too late”

age of four will be taught about 'safe and healthy relationships', provoking concerns about when certain elements will be introduced to each age group. It will be debated in Parliament in the next three to six months, but given the current political climate, it's safe to say that the latter end of the scale might be more realistic.

So, what should be on the new curriculum? Should we keep the hilariously awkward tasks of putting condoms on phalluses? Perhaps – but I think the curriculum should aim above all to espouse values, rather than prescribing activities and outlining knowledge which we deem to be essential.

Of course, certain topics are paramount. Protection against STIs and unwanted pregnancies is essential for young people. But, the first principle should be an insistence upon the non-negotiable, inalienable right to consent. My offline education about consent came only at university, in freshers' week consent workshops. That's far too late. Schools and colleges need integrated education about consent so that young people know their rights and can consider their boundaries, both sexual and non-sexual; they could perhaps take inspiration from campaigns like 'Caius

for Consent'. It's essential that consent forms the foundation upon which sex education is built.

Inclusivity and comprehensivity should also be key facets, ensuring that assumptions aren't made about the types of sex that students will be having, nor about the partners that they might be having it with or the sexual health niggles that might arise. If you're going to teach about condoms, you should also teach about all fluid barriers, in the same way that discussions about contraception include other options. I distinctly remember a female teacher offering her arm to us so that we could feel the implant embedded there, giving us a tangible insight into one of the choices available.

Another should be openness. In a culture where a sex scene during a family film night is often an excuse to make a cup of tea, a real culture shift is needed to make sex a less blush-inducing topic. Talking about sex and relationships with educators and family is healthy, given that the context is appropriate, and developing the ability to communicate openly, honestly and efficiently is the most invaluable skill. However, talking also teaches us how to listen and respond in a way that shows respect for others.

Being able to negotiate boundaries, both physical and emotional, can only come from being able to talk and listen.

Most pressing for a curriculum meant to be implemented from 2020 is the shifting sphere of sex and its relationship with the internet. Change moves too fast for any stringent rules, but some self-evident areas to consider include porn, revenge porn and sexting. I think tone is important when discussing such issues, which is made problematic because of the diffuse nature of sex education as taught by individual schools. In discussing the manifestations of sex on the internet, the curriculum should impress upon teachers the fact that judgement rarely leads to open and honest conversations.

When I explained, red-faced, to that teacher what dental dams were, my ideas about what sex education should look like were limited to the vague descriptor of 'more inclusive'. Six years later, everything that I've read and thought about since then has only added to the list of the ways in which sex education can improve to serve students as they navigate through life. Improved sex education is imperative. We owe it to the next generation of schoolchildren to ensure that they feel included and informed.

Cait Findlay



# vulture

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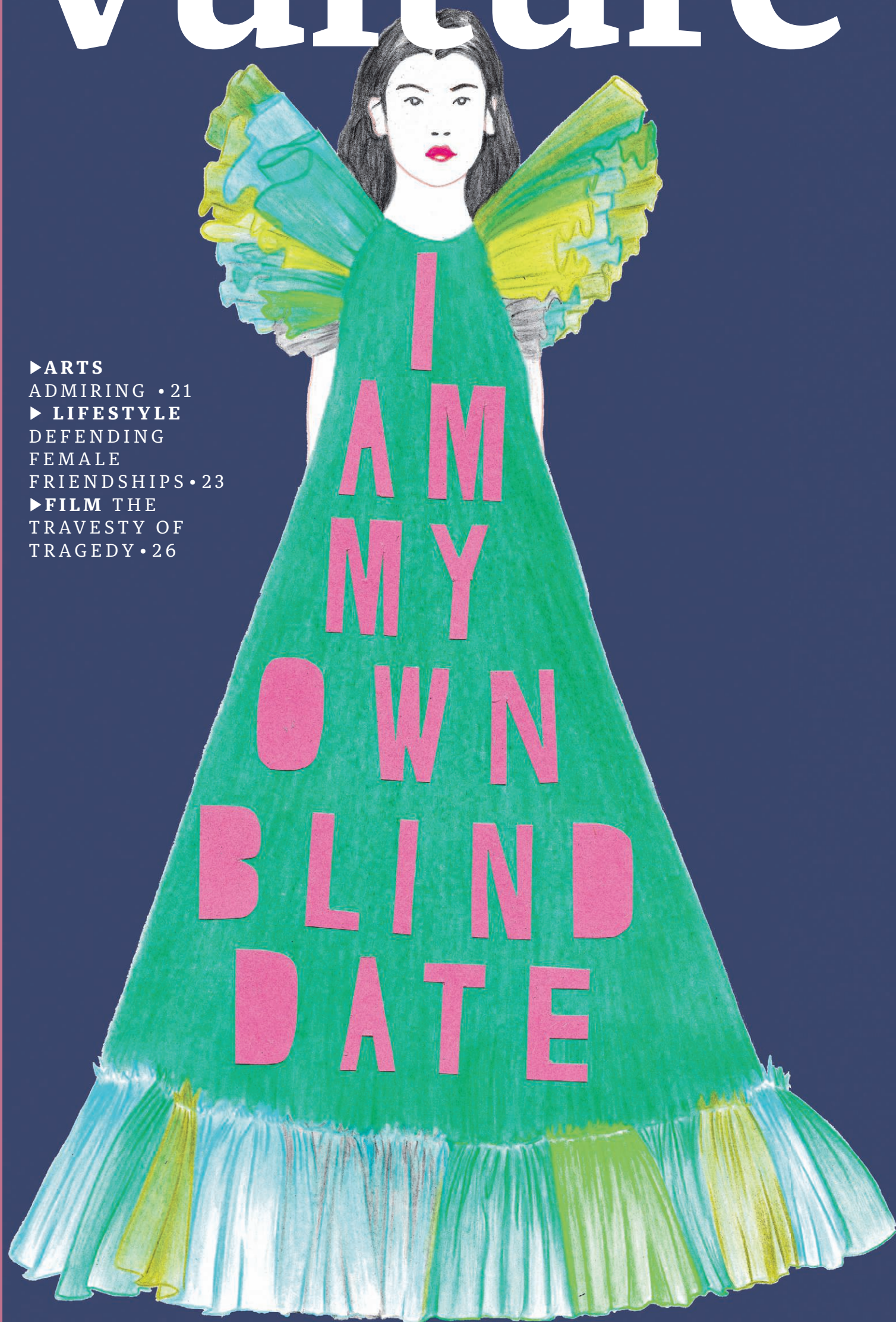


Illustration by Lisha Zhong



# Fashion: a man's world?



▲ **Society is fostering an exclusive ideal that serves to alienate most young men**

(EMILY WHITTINGHAM)

## Caterina Bragoli Fashion Columnist

In clothing, we are increasingly challenging the claustrophobic restrictions of gendered expectations. However, we are rarely offered a glimpse into the problematic standards that men face in a similar climate of hypermasculinity. I spoke to Cambridge students Matt and Dan, who shed light on the progression of the male ideal standard away from this to a less restrictive, more all-embracing image.

The fashion industry can become inextricably associated with the female gender. This pairing surfaces in the main event of the fashion calendar: Fashion Week. Fashion Week is dominated by womenswear designers, while the earlier 'Men's Fashion Week' often draws significantly less attention. However, fashion remains a crucial mode of self-expression for young men globally.

"My relationship with clothes is like they almost become a part of me," says Matt, linking specific items to specific memories, like music festivals.

Clothing seemingly has an ability to retain important moments or memories. "The nice feeling of having a new item of clothing and wearing it in and for it slowly to become part of you," is something Dan expresses to be of equal importance.

It is crucial to consider aspects of the fashion industry that are rarely voiced. Social media's tendency to flood us with images of an often unattainable female image is equally relevant when assessing the problematic standards which also exist for men.

The conversation generated around beauty standards is largely directed towards women, while neglecting vital problems from an alternative angle. A similar culture of conforming to the established hypermasculine ideal has been gradually cultivated over time. By presenting a pre-conceived perception of masculinity, society is fostering an exclusive ideal that serves to alienate most young men.

Social media plays a fundamental role in this ceaseless tirade. Social media has become an archive of images and campaigns that often endorse the same, specific body type, age and skin colour. Streamlining a diverse population into one image is undeniably going to have severe repercussions.

That being said, is our online world the key issue? "Partly because of social media, we can all live in our own worlds; we see the same images and they are projected onto you because you're their target demographic," says Dan, accounting for the fact that we can often greatly influence our personal experiences with social media.

"I don't see *that* many male representations that aren't already catered towards my interests." This leads me to ask, in this way is social media helping subvert traditional modes of advertisement, reducing the impact of specific male beauty standards as we show less interest in them?

Undeniably. It's also our culture that fosters a hypermasculine body image. "With male body image expectations, it's not like that exists in a vacuum and isn't disconnected from problematic male behaviours and attitudes towards women," comments Matt.

The heteronormative roles that society requires binary genders to adopt are fraught: long-established hierarchical positions have filtered through into the fashion and beauty industries. Of course, this has shaped the way men are portrayed.

However, increasingly these heteronormative ideals are being challenged, thus altering the way in which men are perceived. Not least through fashion on the runway and in our lives.

"I think it's changing because of #MeToo. I think there's more value being placed on the understanding, empathetic male role than before".

Dan's emphasis is on the role of recent campaigns challenging problematic expectations or behaviours that may have been normalised. The idea of what it means to be a man is constantly evolving, influenced by the changing socio-political climate.

Despite the ushering in of change, the process of altering such a cemented aspect of society is challenging when some men feel

silenced. "There's this whole masculine issue of being tight-lipped and not talking about this", says Matt. This "tight-lipped" trait that some men feel pressured to adopt stems from historic conceptions of hypermasculinity, yet as this image changes, voices are starting to be heard.

Generating conversation and sharing experiences of such tentative topics invites progress, and this is a response that needs to be widely recognised. Can problematic male beauty standards compare to the untold levels

of pressure that women face?

"I do think with men there's more variance on what society says you can be, as with women there's fewer archetypes", comments Dan. "There needs to be more of an investigation into male beauty ideals", concludes Dan, prompting a broader discussion. Traditional male gender roles, and the way that this feeds into the fashion and beauty industries, are evolving: our progressive social climate questions conformity - pushing to be representative of more than one ideal.



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# The influence of architecture

It was Fitz's often under-appreciated architecture that drew **Molly Windust** to apply to the College

As far as Cambridge colleges go, Fitzwilliam College isn't famous for its architectural grandeur. In fact, the Modernist dark brick courts in place of Gothic or Renaissance buildings have often been subject to criticism. However, I would argue that the eclectic mix of architecture and the surrounding gardens creates an open, communal atmosphere that drew me to apply. Fitzwilliam's 200 year architectural journey is an ongoing one, with over six architects designing various aspects of the college. The original buildings were designed in 1960 by Denys Lasdun, whose vision of Fitzwilliam college remains present to this day.

This vision began with the concept of a snail shell. Lasdun wanted the buildings to be organised in a spiral shape, allowing for a sense of flow. Within the Lasdun spiral the courts are open, not closed, breaking with the classic closed-court Oxbridge architectural tradition. Despite small changes during construction, the college retains a spiral like structure, unfurling outwards. This helical shape is mirrored across the college, with the cylindrical external wall of the chapel forming the central core of the snail shell. The 2003 Olisa Library tower also has a spiral staircase flowing downwards, filled with desks; here the spiral is repeated internally in the staircase, and externally in the column shape of the library tower. The subtle, intrinsic links between the varying architecture throughout the college unites the structures into one organism. Comically, there are also large snail shaped hedges scattered around the shrubbery.

What seemed imperative to every architect who has worked on Fitzwilliam is the importance placed on the external environment. The gardens running through the courts are filled with cherry trees, whose pink blossom stands delicately juxtaposed to the dark brick. The Auditorium, with a glass box reception allows for the external to become the internal as the transparent structure lets the large oak and surrounding gardens to almost enter the buildings. The residential blocks seem to act as mirrors for the gardens through the bright green copper cladding that reflects nature. This eclectic mix of architecture and gardens creates an environment of undisturbed quiet, just a minute away from the busy Huntington Road. It was this expansive habitat that drew me to apply to Fitzwilliam.

Lasdun was inspired by Le Corbusier's use of horizontal structures and planes creating a "play of half lights and heavy shade with the accent running not from top to bottom but horizontally from left to right." Although heavily influenced, Lasdun deviated from Le Corbusier's utopian city ideal, the Ville Radieuse, as he believed buildings should have a continuity with their historical surroundings. Lasdun's use of the horizontal was not only in form but in theory, he attempted to usurp the traditional hierarchy of Cam-



▲ "The scallop-shaped windows in their crystalline transparency allow the sky to be seen through them." (MOLLY WINDUST)

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The subtle links  
between the varying  
architecture throughout  
the college unites  
the structures into  
one organism”

bridge buildings within a college, ensuring that the senior common room was made of glass and therefore visible to undergraduates at all times.

Lasdun's use of the horizontal is most famously seen in Fitzwilliam in his work on the vault above the Buttery. Rising above the square dining hall is a glass extension, formed by cast concrete intersections enveloping scallop-shaped windows. The concrete seems to mimic tracery seen surrounding stain glass windows in Gothic cathedrals and the lancet shape of the glass adds to the cathedral-like effect. The height and delicate shape of the roof catches your attention, much like the dome of a mosque or the spire of a cathedral. What makes this structure surprisingly different, therefore, is its horizontal nature. Of course, the buttery is far from a religious building, but it is a communal one and thus brings people together under this elevated, sculpted construction. Lasdun has managed to make the hall triumphant yet also subtle, delicate and ornate. He has mastered the ability of catching someone's eye from above, without creating a daunting or overtly intrusive structure.

The structure is transformed by the weather. The scallop-shaped windows in their crystalline transparency allow the sky to be seen through them. The sculptured roof seems to reflect the weather, illuminated with bright blue skies, almost lifting the vault upwards. On more rainy and dismal afternoons the

vault stands quietly grey, but it never loses its transient lightness. The white exterior and cast concrete blend together forming a natural composition of colours that stands out against the college's other buildings. This is my favourite architectural feature in all of Cambridge, I think its composed, stilled presence, which is visible throughout the college, brings a perfect centre to Fitzwilliam's environment.

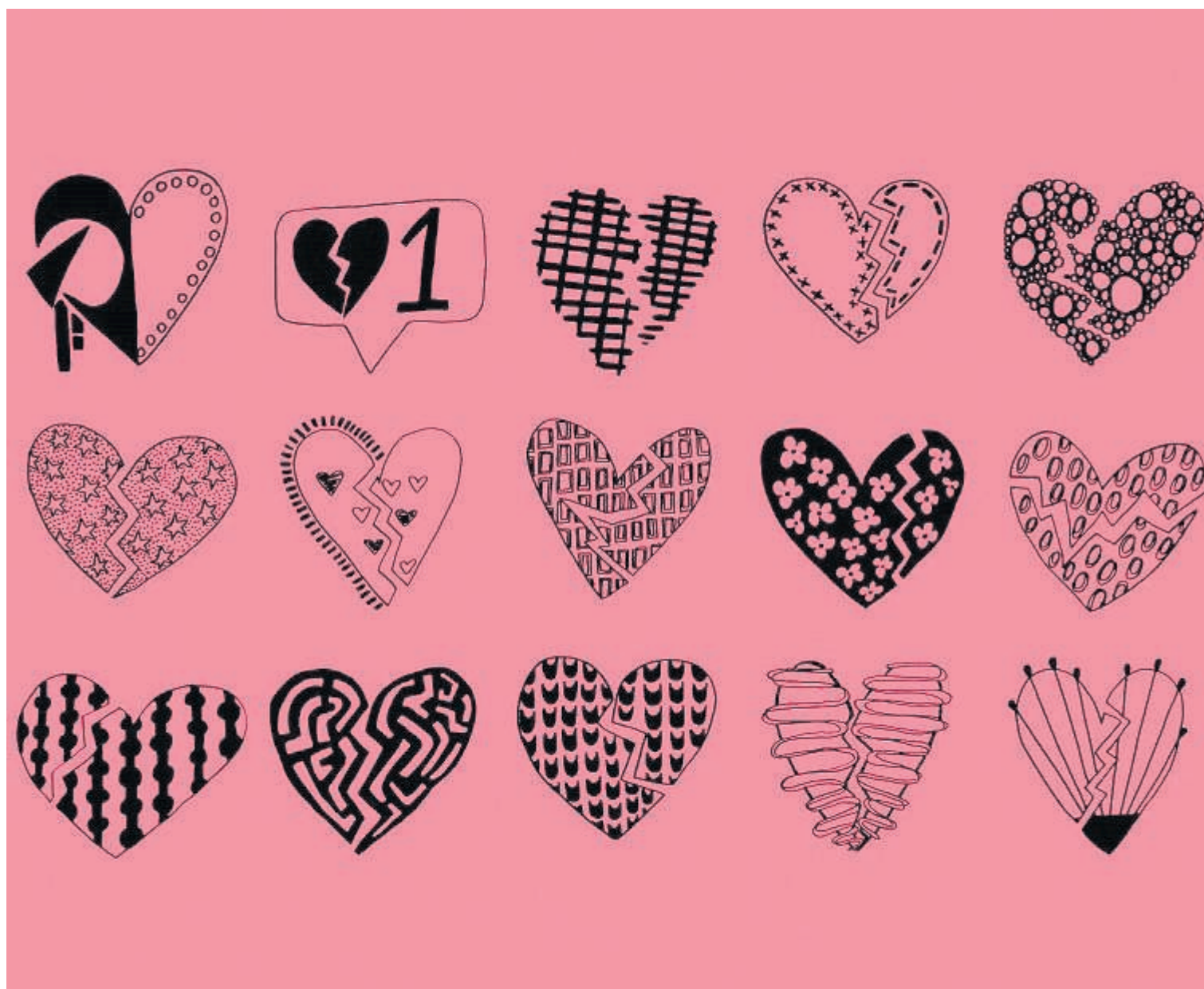
Fascinatingly, Lasdun expanded this use of the horizontal in his design of Christ's College's The Typewriter. He uses interlocking spaces, through cantilevered platforms which are made to intersect the buildings with the landscape. These layered platforms, reminiscent of Grecian amphitheatres, simultaneously stratify the building whilst allowing it to flow, directing human movement. The strata allow the individuals walking on them to become audience members and the city becomes the performance. His work again brings in elements of the environment, as the layers of interlocking rooms reflect contour lines, layers of soil and hills. Previously damned for being incongruous to the environment of Christ's I think The Typewriter does the opposite, bringing the environment into the very structure of the building itself.

Overall I think Fitzwilliam's architecture, for me, remains an exciting part of everyday college life, as each building changes as you follow the spiral around the courts. The cumulative effect is one of a warm, intriguing and open environment.

“  
Warm,  
intriguing  
and open  
”



# How to survive a break-up



▲ It takes two for a relationship to fail, and criticising and blaming yourself will not change anything (KATE TOWSEY)

## Tips from an anonymous third-year student on how to put yourself back together after a break-up

At the start of Lent Term of my final year at Cambridge, my boyfriend of three and a half years broke up with me. I was totally devastated that the relationship had come to an end, yet also acutely aware of what an important time of my life I was in. I was determined not to let the experience define my final months at university. I thought long and hard about what steps to take to stay strong and move forward as productively as possible. If you are going through something similar, I am so sorry and I hope you find my tips useful in this tough time:

### Cut contact. Totally. I mean it.

Fact: the person who hurt you cannot heal you. Believe me, I know it is so difficult to cut contact. Who will you confide in? Share memories with? Send pics of cute dogs to? The answer is not your ex. They may have been your best friend but they aren't anymore, and if you try to reach out to them the likelihood is that you're only going to be disappointed.

They aren't going to slip back into being your bf/gf: you are going to be rebuffed or even worse... left on 'read'. You may come up with countless excuses as to why you need to contact them but be honest with yourself and ask: will it change anything? (Spoiler: no.) Use all of your self-control and stop drafting messages or stalking their social media. You will be able to move on more quickly with fewer reminders and you will be proud of yourself for being strong. Unlike most things in life, with break-ups you regret the things you *did* do, rather than the things you didn't.

### Be as gentle as you can with yourself.

Your brain will find ways of blaming yourself for what has happened. You will remember all of the times you were not a perfect partner, or you will convince yourself that you're not good enough. Please recognise that this is neither true nor productive. It takes two for a relationship to fail and quite often no one is really at fault. Criticising and blaming yourself will not change anything and will not help you heal.

### Write a list of all of the things that made you incompatible/what you're going to gain from being single – look at it often.

I am not recommending a *Mean Girls* style burn book: in fact, please try to view your relationship with your ex as a positive experience. OK, so it didn't work out, but don't taint the happy memories or regret the time you

invested. That being said, you need to adjust to the change, so do write a list of all of the reasons why your ex was not 'the one'. Don't be savage but be constructive, and ask yourself what was missing rather than criticising what you had. Look at this and convince yourself that this break-up is freeing you up to find that perfect person one day. Write another list noting what you're going to gain from being single at this period in your life, you've got total freedom – you can read more; work out more; travel anywhere at a moment's notice; spend less time on your phone. Show yourself that being single is a totally liberating experience.

### Love your friends; let them care for you.

Losing your partner should not make you feel unloved. I know they may have rejected you (their loss!) but I promise going through a break-up will show you how many people still bloody love you! If you're a naturally independent person then it can be difficult to rely on people for support, but something I learned early on in my break-up is that it is important to let people care for you. To speed up the recovery process, let your friends know exactly how they can help you. I asked my friends to forget the flowers and chocolate (which I thought might make me feel too sorry for myself) and I told them that I would feel most sad and need their support in the evenings. A best friend actually forced me to sleep

on a camp bed on her floor for the first few nights and she played a podcast to help me fall asleep – a total queen: if that isn't love I don't know what is!

### Hair, make up, clothes (whatever makes you feel amazing!)

I am not saying you're not allowed to wallow in your PJs, eating ice-cream and watching countless episodes of *Friends*. But in my experience, making an effort with your outfit/hair/make-up will make you feel more put together and act as an armour on the tough days. At this difficult time I thoroughly recommend a bit of retail therapy: a face mask should not be the extent of your self-care, but superficial acts of kindness to yourself will act as a reminder that you are young, beautiful and deserve to feel fabulous!

### Be prepared to push through but congratulate yourself on every small task completed

University is a tough place to go through a break-up: with countless commitments and deadlines you probably don't think you have time to be sad. But remember the saying 'a stitch in time saves nine' and do give yourself a few days off, watch some feel-good films, go on a long walk in the fresh air, visit home – essentially whatever you need to do to deal with the initial shock of the break-up. Talk to your DoS; I promise no matter how intimidating they may seem, they will understand and want to help you cope with your workload. Unfortunately, in life we often have to start picking up the pieces of ourselves sooner than feels natural, and you will have to start going to lectures before you are completely over the break-up. Make sure to congratulate yourself on every small task you achieve every day: getting ready in the morning, walking to lectures, sitting through the lecture, reading 10 pages. Whatever you do in this period of time is so impressive and a testament to your strength. You might not feel you are being as productive as you need to be, but every time you put one foot in front of the other you are moving forward.

### Killer playlist required – no sad songs, only empowering badass songs

Music is a wonderful thing. Whatever you're feeling, there is a song out there to remind you that you are not alone. To pick yourself up please flood your brain with empowering songs.

Let yourself be indoctrinated with self-love and positivity. Sad songs might be helpful when you need to have a quick cry (this is totally fine and understandable) but they will not help you to move forward. Instead opt for some bangers (I can personally recommend *7 Rings* by Ariana Grande and *Brave* by Sara Bareilles!)

### Do not move on until you're ready!

A break-up will leave a hole in your life that your ex-partner once filled. It is important for your self-esteem and for your future relationships that you fill this void yourself.

There is no prize awarded to you or your ex for moving on first. Do not rush into a relationship or look for someone to act as a quick fix. You are all you need, I promise, and one day you will look back on this process as important and formative.

I know it feels so hard but you will get through this and you will be stronger for it. Take it one day at a time, smile at every opportunity and remember you are an amazing person with much to look forward to!



# In defence of female friendships

## Sophie Weinmann debunks the stereotype of the competitive female friendship

From *Gossip Girl*'s Serena and Blair to the endless alleged celebrity frenemies and feuds, female friendships in the media are rarely portrayed as simply supportive, empowering and healthy. They're full of jealousy, comparison and resentment and, in most cases, it's the women involved that are blamed for it – they're catty and spiteful, instead of being a product of the long history in society where women have been pitted against each other.

We're taught from an early age to compare ourselves to other girls instead of embracing our different strengths and weaknesses. In an environment like Cambridge, where being ambitious and competitive is encouraged and often expected, it might be easy to fall into that pattern, but over the past one and a half years, the female friendships I've experienced in Cambridge have been some of the most healthy, nurturing and supportive I've ever had.

How happy I am in Cambridge is in large parts due to the positive and empowering friendships I have been able to form with strong and confident women who inspire me every single day. From getting each other through work crises with food and coffee to celebrating each other's (academic and personal) achievements together, I've found my friendships in Cambridge to be compassionate and encouraging, not competitive or spiteful.

In theory, a lot of Cambridge friendships could be prone to competition and comparisons simply due to the situations we are put in: having supervisions together or doing similar extracurriculars. However, I've found discussing essays before supervisions or working on extracurriculars together to not just be an opportunity to spend time together in the hecticness of Cambridge termtime – where everyone is busy at all times – but also as a way of deepening friendships and being able to grow closer.

It's easy to feel intimidated because everyone in Cambridge seems to be doing so many impressive things all the time – whether it's vacation scheme applications, endless committee positions or academic successes. What I've appreciated most in my friendships is the point you reach when your friends are willing to let you see past that facade – celebrating each other's hard work but also opening up when things aren't going well. I've found the unique experience of the whirlwind that is a Cambridge term to be incredibly valuable in forming deep bonds that rest on mutual understanding when it comes to essay crises, work piling up or week five blues.

Most self-help books or advice columns will tell you that you can't love someone until you love yourself first – we attribute that to romantic relationships because that is what we understand love to mean predominantly. But the way I see it, a lot of healthy (female) friendships depend very much on being at peace with oneself and one's flaws – it's inse-



▲ How happy I am in Cambridge is in large parts due to my positive and empowering friendships (ALISA SANTIKARN)

“They've gotten me through my lowest points”

curities and self-consciousness that give rise to jealousy and envy in friendships.

Going back to the image of catty and superficial female friendships, often the reasons women are pitted against each other or portrayed as envious and jealous are centred around men and the heteronormative and mononormative understanding of love. Similar to the idea of superficial or unhealthy female friendships, the need for a romantic relationship is put into our minds early on. When it comes to building an emotional connection with someone, with assurance and support, and having someone you can completely rely on and trust, we are taught to seek out romantic relationships. However, in reality, which of those things are we unable to find in platonic relationships?

Often, we spend so much time thinking about romantic relationships that we forget the value of platonic ones. Emotionally, aren't they just as fulfilling? We feel the need to distinguish between romantic and platonic relationships when, in reality, they're fun-

“It is my female friendships that I have found most fulfilling in my time at Cambridge”

damentally both about building emotional connections.

In many ways, friendships are less restrictive and put less pressure on us than the traditional idea of exclusive romantic relationships. The idea of monogamous romantic love creates the expectation that we need to have one person to lean on in all situations and contexts, whereas platonic relationships leave room for varying interests and different types of friendships.

Why is it that we allow for these different needs to be expressed in different relationships when it comes to friendships, but we perpetuate the mononormative idea that we need to find “the one” in a romantic context?

Personally, it is my female friendships that I have found most fulfilling in my time at Cambridge – fundamentally they haven't just brought me my happiest moments, they've also gotten me through my lowest points, and I wouldn't want to swap them for anything.



# The Bastardisation of grief

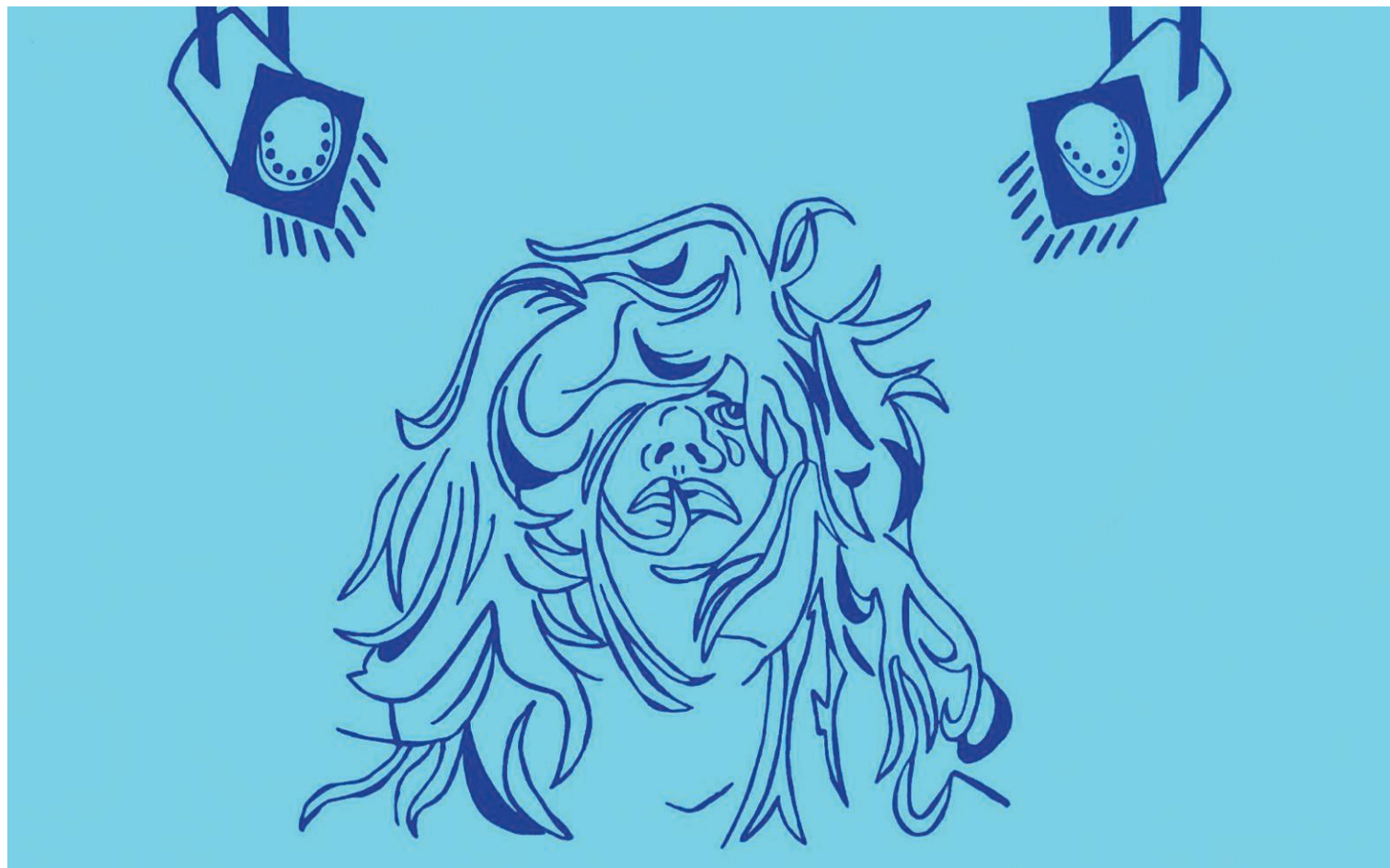
Rowan Hall Maudslay discusses the importance of grounding new writing in authentic experience

Earlier this term, student-written play *Bastard* was met with acclaim in the Cambridge student press. The play takes on a number of hugely complex themes, focusing broadly on masculinity and fatherhood, while also delving into concepts with greater weight: the discovery that a parent is not a biological relation; having a parent in prison; experiencing the death of a father at a young age. I'm someone who should be able to connect with *Bastard* in a myriad of ways: I'm a man the same age as the male protagonist, my mother is not biologically related to me (and I've never met my biological mother), eponymously: I am a bastard. Most significantly, my father died six months ago, an experience I and the writer do not share.

To me, *Bastard* is a play that illuminates a serious problem within student-writing: student-writers – young, and often without the resources or time needed to undertake meaningful research – tackling highly-charged substantive topics of which they have little direct personal experience. This produces pieces which can appear staggeringly insincere to those who do. Death becomes a plot-device; grief a tool for character development. This isn't really an article about *Bastard*: it's an article about different kinds of loss, and the relationship between writer and subject matter.

A *Varsity* reviewer gave *Bastard* five stars, writing that the author “nailed grief”, while in the same paragraph noting that they didn't have a “shared experience” of what they were seeing. I speak only from my personal experiences and what medical professionals have told me, and I'm not claiming that this is somehow objective or “correct”, but I personally thought *Bastard* offered a clichéd portrayal of grief, divorced from my lived reality. Grief, to me, felt exploited and aestheticised in the pursuit of an emotional reaction. My issue with the play was nothing to do with the performance, presentation, or writing-style – all of these areas deserve the praise afforded by reviewers. My issue is with the choice of subject matter itself. This can be said for any of the parts of *Bastard* to which I have a personal affinity, but here I wish to focus on its portrayal of grief.

I sometimes wonder if I would be able to meaningfully explain what losing a father will feel like to a slightly younger version of myself. I'd use terms like “feelings of emptiness”, but these are just words, and a younger me would be incapable of translating them into cognitive understanding. He's lost a few pets, so he would probably naïvely try and imagine those feelings magnified. I'd mention the things I know he couldn't anticipate, like how much he was about to grow, in ways he couldn't even begin to understand. In truth, he will be a different person afterwards. He'll quickly learn the distinction between sympathy and empathy, and a lonely chasm will appear between him and his friends, friends who are fortunate enough not to have experienced



▲ “Our identities shape what we should and shouldn't write about” (KATE TOWSEY)

the same life-changing event. Without losing a father at a young age, it's impossible to understand how you would respond to it, because the *you* that is contemplating it wouldn't be the same *you* afterwards. It's not so much a case of “you don't understand”, more that “you can't understand”. Before you experience it, the apparatus needed in your brain does not exist, the neural pathways untrodden. You can sympathise, but you cannot empathise. No amount of explanation or research can change that.

Who can blame an audience member if watching a play about such events triggers them to draw an isomorphism between what they are watching and the losses in their own life? It would be fine if younger-me watched a play about a father dying and was reminded of that time my pet died. Cry away, younger-me. But a writer projecting their losses onto other losses, and tackling these issues in the guise of understanding – that is problematic. Perception is fine, projection is not. If younger-me thought that, armed with the experience of the death of a pet (or perhaps a different relative), I could extrapolate and write about the loss of a father with any level of fidelity – that is absurd. The image produced will be blurred and confused. There are so many different kinds of grief, each complex in their own right, and impossible to map between. You can grieve the loss of a phone, of a pet, of an aunt, of a child, of a father or a husband.

When writing about complex topics like the death of a father, without a subjective experience to draw from, you'll necessarily be basing your writing on a murky cloud of hypotheticals: a meta-language surrounding the experience, formed from other people's tellings of it. In the case of death and grief, there are so many of these. In a film, you can expect undersaturated colours, and sad music in a minor key crescendoing in. One thing that's stood out to me is the disproportionate

amount of emphasis our culture places on the exact moment of certain events, rather than the long aching stretches in between. A film will cut from diagnosis immediately to death, then straight to the funeral speech. This isn't what real life feels like; this is what decades of a form's cliché have told us real life feels like. Writing like this further propagates false truths, and builds warped perceptions into an audience's psyche. Real life doesn't skip from diagnosis to death, and I wasn't expecting there to be a three-week wait from then till the funeral; only describing the edges does not paint a full picture. While research can certainly help, it would be impossible for a writer to view it in isolation of their own perception and all the misguided cliché surrounding a topic like grief.

Our identities shape our relationship with the stories we may tell. I recognise that grief is very different from these examples, and I do not wish to equate them, but as a white man, I wouldn't feel comfortable writing something which implicitly proclaimed understanding and commented on racial or feminist struggles from a BME or female perspective. If I commented on, say, the nature of femininity, and a male audience connected with it and built their understanding of femininity based on that, I'd be appropriating and misshaping a narrative that isn't mine to shape.

While I can sympathise, I cannot empathise: I haven't lived it. I'd argue that, while clearly not in a political sense, being someone who has lost a father at a young age is a form of personal lived identity. You carry the pain with you always, it defines you, it changes the way you look at the world. You're in a tiny minority among your peers. It's not someone else's identity to toy with, exploit, and make into entertainment. Doing so amounts to grief tourism – using the pain that other people have lived through merely as a device in search of an emotive response from

an audience.

To this, you might roll your eyes: “so what *can* I write about?” This line of thinking is reductive, and it is not a question I can answer; I only mean to highlight an issue seen from my experience. That said, there is so much we as humans all share, that each of us can draw from. We also have our own perspectives: individually, our lives are filled with profound beauty and sadness that only we have seen. Recent critical and award-ceremony hit film *Roma* is testament that telling a story seen through your eyes can be more truthful and moving than resorting to the unknown, perhaps to something thought to be stereotypically moving, like losing a father. That isn't to say you have to be quite as literal as Alphonso Cuarón and write autobiographically. Ultimately, there is no easy answer. The best I can suggest is to be cautious and sensitive to what people who have lived through certain events would feel if they were sat in your audience. Do you have a good reason to be writing about their story? Will you do their experience justice? Will you risk oversimplifying and misrepresenting things, and upset or offend them?

If you write about something significant of which you have no direct lived experience, falling instead on cliché, you appropriate and re-shape a narrative that doesn't belong to you. In using narratives like these to manipulate an emotional response out of an uninformed audience, you aestheticise them, all the while changing the way the audience views the issue. It wasn't even really *Bastard*'s portrayal of losing a father at a young age that willed me to write this piece, it was that it left reviewers and an audience thinking that the author “nailed grief”. It was sitting in a room listening to the crowd applaud, all thinking they got it, thinking they got *me*. Should we be more careful about what we write about? This bastard certainly thinks so.



# Chatting truths with White Lies

Ahead of their gig at the Junction, lyricist and bassist Charles Cave chats to Miles Ricketts

With their new record *Five* (it does indeed happen to be their fifth), White Lies are embarking on a bold new adventure. While they have been gradually expanding their sonic palette in the decade since their debut album, 2009's *To Lose My Life...*, *Five* marks the wildest example yet of their diverse influences and tastes. Stretching their post-punk roots to incorporate electronica, krautrock and, yes, pop, the Ealing trio have never seemed more comfortable in testing their limits.

**Roughly how long did it take to come up with the album's title?**

A couple of weeks, believe it or not. I was sending some ideas round for the actual artwork, and using 'Five' just as a place-saver. Of course it follows on the heels of many records (Peter Gabriel, Led Zeppelin and others that did the same thing). Usually I'd be against it. I think an album should be named after the song or lyric that captures the feeling of the whole record, but in the case of this one

that wasn't possible. The songs take so many different turns and moods that to name it 'Kick Me', for example, or a lyric from 'Time To Give', would give unfair weight to one of those songs, and take something away from the others.

**What were the core influences on the recording of *Five*?**

Harry [McVeigh, frontman] and I listen to more music when we're writing an album than at any other time. And we really listen to everything. Metal, classical, prog, pop. I remember listening to a lot of Krallice [NYC black metalheads] back then, and also had recently discovered pianist Jan Johansson and his record *Jazz på Svenska*. And lest we forget Ariana Grande put out the song of the year - 'No More Tears Left To Cry' - so I was really enjoying that too.

**'Tokyo' might be the most open-hearted pop song you've released yet. Did you ever draw back from its catchy synths, or did you just roll with it?**

You have to roll with it. Always let a song lead you. The moment you start to pull things back, you're actually compromising your integrity, not maintaining it. I think it was Picasso that said, "Ah good taste! What a terrible thing! Good taste is the enemy of creativity."

**The new video for 'Tokyo' is equally arresting, with an array of visually stunning**

**scenes. What's the story behind the video, and do you still enjoy the creative process of constructing music videos?**

I enjoy the process of making a music video in that I enjoy handing over all creative freedom to another artist. We've now made four videos with director David Pablos and it's still such a joy to work with him, and to see his vision for our music. It was a fascinating week in Tijuana with him and his team. A sort of anthropological awakening that we haven't had since visiting Nikel in Siberia for the 'Farewell to the Fairground' video ten years ago.

**It's been ten years since your debut album, *To Lose My Life...* What do you feel is the biggest change in your music since then?**

Nuance and humility. The songs on *To Lose My Life...* were written with secondary-school poetry still coursing through my veins. There was little subtlety to that record, and in many ways that's why it worked so well for that time. It's the perfect 19-year-old album to a degree. It captures a sort of very British teenage angst well, I think. It would be impossible to write a record like that again - at any other time than 18 or 19. Such a potent age to be making creative work. I often say it's like diary entries. Think how different your diary entries would be now from the ones from your final teenage years. That's what happens to creative pursuits too.

**What's your favourite item from the merch**

**table?**

Ooooooh. It would have to be the book we've had made in collaboration with RNIB. A braille book of all the lyrics to *Five*, presented in such a wonderful way. It's the first time a band has ever done it. Ask at the merch stand for one of the last 500 copies, or check out our website for one. There's a few left, but once they're gone, that's it!

*White Lies' new record Five is out now, and the band play the Cambridge Junction on 13th February. Tickets can be purchased at [www.junction.co.uk](http://www.junction.co.uk).*



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# The travesty of portraying tragedy

Considering recent depictions of crime, Tom McIntosh worries that cinema is exploiting acts of evil for entertainment

As long as there has been drama, there has been tragedy. The classical unities of theatre, first contemplated by Aristotle some two thousand years ago, highlight tragedy as the foundation on which a piece of dramatic art is constructed; it drives the narrative, develops character and, most importantly, encourages the audience to feel. Yet when tragedy lays its roots in real-life events, especially those which are still raw for many in our generation, or our parents' and grand-

parents' generations, the emotion conjured by it quickly sours – rather than being poignant, it can often stir up painful feelings, or even feel derisive.

Such is the case with *Detainment*, Irish filmmaker Vincent Lambe's Oscar-nominated short about the police interrogation of James Bulger's murderers in 1993. In my hometown of Liverpool, two-year-old James's senseless and brutal death is still a sore subject. The names of Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, the two then ten-year-olds responsible, are unspeakable for some – poison-tipped reminders of a crime which incensed a nation and generated a landmark debate about how our legal system treats minors. It was thus natural that Lambe's film would be met with resentment when for many, the wounds caused by Thompson and Venables have not healed, nor indeed will they ever.

▼ **ITV's *Manhunt* stars Martin Clunes as a former Detective Chief Inspector, based on real life events** (ITV/YOUTUBE)



▲ **Zac Efron brings uncomfortable charm to the real-life murderer Ted Bundy in Netflix's latest cinematic purchase** (NETFLIX/YOUTUBE)

No one knows this more than James's parents, Denise Fergus and Ralph Bulger, who have publicly expressed their disgust at the film and Lambe's lack of consultation with them before it entered production. Fergus has even called on the Academy to withdraw it from consideration for an Oscar, a plea which seems to have fallen on deaf ears. In an appearance on *Good Morning Britain*, Lambe defended his "humanisation" of the killers by suggesting that only by understanding them as human beings can we prevent such crimes happening again. This may or may not be a valid point – I would feel unqualified to give judgement either way – but, how can Lambe in good faith sweep aside the feelings of two grieving parents, even in the name of art?

*Detainment* offers nothing new to the James Bulger case; it traces the steps of previously covered ground with regard to the "condemn less, comprehend more" argument. If anything, it simply serves to capitalise on our ghoulish fascination with death. It transplants the shame and horror of my city from twenty-six years ago and repackages it with a Hollywood gleam, serving it up to the ghoulishly fascinated without considering those still picking up the pieces so many years on.

Further afield, the trailer for the Zac Efron-led Ted Bundy biopic *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil, and Vile* has prompted ire on social media. In the trailer, the former Disney heartthrob seduces, schmoozes and, crucially, slaughters his way through a series of seemingly enchanted women. *American Hustle*-esque blues music soundtracks Efron's Bundy simpering for the camera and slipping out of a window away from the police like the scrappy anti-hero of a black comedy, rather than a prolific murderer of women and children – one who relished in the media attention he received. Bundy's God complex, indeed, is something acknowledged in the trailer – at one point, he asserts he's "more popular than Disney World" – so why is it appropriate that we massage his ego in this way, albeit post-humously?

It would be remiss to suggest that the portrayal of Bundy as charismatic and personable

is entirely baseless; indeed, this was part of the reason he was so effective as a killer. But this does not negate the fact that the families of his uncountable victims are still alive to mourn for them today.

The murders are not some ghost story from a bygone age – this is 1970s America, etched within the memories of a vast proportion of the population. From this preview alone, it would seem director Joe Berlinger's interpretation of Bundy as a Dexter-lite ladykiller has a tawdry quality.

It aims unabashedly for the millennial audience who popularised *My Favourite Murder* – a "comedy-crime" podcast, for the uninitiated, which flippantly ends each show with the tagline "Stay sexy, don't get murdered". To reinvent such brutal crimes for a swooning modern-day audience feels sordid, and once again ignores the fact that there are real people behind the eye-catching gore. It begs the question, how would America feel about a film that recast the terrorists behind 9/11, for instance, as lovable rogues? Or is it only charming white murderers who are afforded such a portrayal?

It is not my belief that true crime and disaster is untouchable within the remit of drama. ITV's fantastic series *Manhunt*, starring Martin Clunes as the detective responsible for capturing Levi Bellfield, brought the focus out of the crime scene and into the office, forgoing gratuitous death scenes for fascinating police procedure. Not only was it well-executed, but it was effective, as more potential victims of Bellfield came forward following its airing. Returning to something with a more local flavour, Jimmy McGovern's 1996 *Hillsborough* used fictionalised characters to give a refreshingly honest depiction of what really happened on that fateful day, twenty years before the ninety-six Liverpool fans and their families saw any true justice in a court of law.

Tragedy is not something to be hushed up in art, brushed under the carpet and unspoken of. Nor, however, is it the job of the artist to glorify those responsible, particularly when there are some among us who are still struggling to move on.



# Finding fashion in film

**Marie-Louis James** runs through the most iconic movie fashion moments

**A**wards season is upon us, and with it all the talk of who-dressed-who and sartorial hits and misses. But before the red carpet rundowns begin, take a look back at some of the best films for style-'spo of all time: casual and haute couture alike, from cinema's early days to the latest releases!

**Funny Face (1957):** Though any Audrey Hepburn film could go on this list, *Funny Face* takes the cake, following the story of a bookstore employee turned glamorous high fashion model. As if the story alone weren't enough to cement this musical's status as an unforgettable ode to 50s elegance, Fred Astaire is Hepburn's co-star, playing a fashion photographer. From Greenwich Village to Paris, viewers are swept off their feet as Hepburn's ingénue shows off haute couture looks designed by Edith Head and Hubert de Givenchy.

One of the most distinct looks from the film is, ironically, Hepburn's "off-duty" musical number ensemble: all-black mock neck, cropped cigarette trousers, socks and ballet flats. An even more memorable moment, however, is the red Givenchy gown Hepburn wears as she holds a scarlet taffeta stolen while descending the marble stairs of the Louvre. With Hepburn as his muse, Givenchy also famously designed the unforgettable little black dress Holly Golightly wears in the opening of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961).

**Rear Window (1954):** Grace Kelly's outfits throughout Hitchcock's mystery thriller almost break the suspense of the film. Playing the protagonist's girlfriend, Kelly visits Jimmy Stewart's character during his recovery from a broken leg, leaving him to sit in a wheelchair and observe the suspicious happenings in his neighbours' windows.

As he connects the mysterious events he sees before him, Kelly punctuates the film with her visits and striking outfits, ranging from casual dress-suit to negligee to a stunning black and white gown designed – again – by Edith Head. Known as the "right off the Paris plane" dress, Kelly's mid-calf skirt replicates Dior's 'New Look' silhouette, gathered at the waist with sprouting filigree embellishments and a simple black V-cut bodice.

Edith Head worked with Hitchcock on many films. Arguably the most famous costume designer of Hollywood's Golden Age, she holds a record eight Academy Awards for Best Costume Design. Head is also cited as the inspiration (along with Anna Wintour) for the iconic "Edna Mode" character in Pixar's *The Incredibles* – and though the latter is not a fashion film, it should certainly get brownie points for paying homage to such a vital figure in film fashion history!

**Clueless (1995):** Our generation will forever dream of the computerized outfit-maker in Cher Horowitz's wardrobe as the ideal way to get ready for school. The American high school restaging of Jane Austen's *Emma* is filled with plenty of 1990s style-'spo, from matching tartan sets to "it's Calvin Klein!" white bandage dresses.

As she strolls around Beverly Hills, Fendi shopping bag in one hand and flip phone in the other, every one of Cher's outfits is a sig-



▲ **Phantom Thread, Clueless and Marie Antoinette** (ALISA SANTIKARN)

nature look. Even her gym getup paved the way for the Kardashian bike-short craze that every designer seems to be incorporating into collections today. Throw in a fabulous makeover scene and the film has such a cult-following that Iggy Azalea and Charli XCX recreated its fabulous looks in their music video, 'Fancy'.

**Phantom Thread (2017):** Set in 1950s London, *Phantom Thread* follows the story of an aging couturier and his muse. The carefully researched designs throughout the film show the detailed craft behind a dressmaker's brilliance, a creative process filled with frustration, disputes, and an almost religious reverence for the garment itself.

Part of the charm of Daniel Day-Lewis's character is that he is conservatively "anti-chic" and refuses to adapt his creative vision to any passing trends. As a result, the designs throughout the film are regal and almost antediluvian – though it must be said that Day-Lewis's performance as a difficult genius is what makes the dress-making process so fascinating, rather than the end results themselves. Mark Bridges, the Oscar-winning costume designer for the film, has said that Day-Lewis's character was inspired by a variety of historical figures, in particular Charles James, America's first couturier, Christian Dior, and Cristóbal Balenciaga.

**When Harry Met Sally (1989):** Part of the magic and charm in *When Harry Met Sally* is how we see the two main characters' interactions over three different periods in their lives: college-era, then five years later, and finally another five years later after both have just ended long-term relationships. Their styles adapt accordingly, switching from late 70s Farrah Fawcett layers to mid-80s perms, and the characters' physical transformations are very much an integral part of the story's timeline.

Though seemingly an unlikely choice for a fashion film list, both *Harry* and *Sally* provide countless nostalgic style inspirations for the

ideal autumnal wardrobe, boasting a non-stop array of chunky knits, Annie Hall-esque bowler hats, and mom-jeans.

**Marie Antoinette (2006):** The historical subject of the film is already famous as one of the first "influencers" in fashion history: as the last Queen of France, Marie Antoinette's sartorial choices single-handedly determined the vogues of royal courts throughout Europe. Director Sofia Coppola does not disappoint in doing justice to the over-the-top world of Versailles while adding her own rock-and-roll pizzazz to the lavish, pastel-coloured stylings of the film.

From sky-high powdered wigs to hoop skirts that barely fit through the palace doors, the film is a visual feast of luxurious opulence. Costume designer Milena Canonero won the Academy Award for Best Costume Design, one of four films – including Wes Anderson's *Grand Budapest Hotel* – for which she holds that title. Manolo Blahnik and Italian manufacturer Pompei 2000 supplied the shoes for the film, and its rococo exuberance wouldn't be complete without the macarons of the iconic Parisian bakery Ladurée.

**La Dolce Vita (1960):** Federico Fellini's 1960 film shows off Italian style in an unforgettable way. The man behind the film's overall aesthetic is Piero Gherardi: a modern Renaissance man of sorts, he worked on *La Dolce Vita* as costume designer, art director, and even set director.

As Marcello Mastroianni's protagonist undergoes seven days and seven nights of Roman life, the characters in *La Dolce Vita* embody the chic aspirational lifestyle of the 1950s and early 1960s, an intense period of change accompanying Italy's economic boom. The result is a cultural artefact of retro swimwear, cool sunglasses, and effortlessly glamorous little black dresses. From Anita Ekberg's swirling black gown in the iconic fountain scene to Mastroianni's impeccably tailored suits, it is no surprise that the film won an Oscar for Best Costumes.

**Gone with the Wind (1939):** This film is perhaps primarily remembered as one of the first moments in cinematic fashion history. Though it won ten Oscars at the 12th Academy Awards, the award for Best Costume Design had not yet been created, only introduced as a category almost a decade later in 1948.

It is likely, however, that *Gone with the Wind* would have won this award as well. The sumptuous Reconstruction-era gowns worn by Vivienne Leigh's Scarlett O'Hara have achieved cult status. Not only are they visually and chromatically stunning, but O'Hara's dresses also take on symbolic connotations as part of her character development in the film. The green Curtain Dress, for example, is said to symbolize Scarlett's will to survive, whereas the many red velvet gowns she wears in other scenes seem to eponymously be a part of her fiery, striking personality.

**The Talented Mr. Ripley (1999):** Clothing plays a crucial role in this psychological thriller, as the titular character becomes mesmerized by a glamorous and extravagant lifestyle he has fraudulently given himself. In this cat-and-mouse intrigue of identity theft, mid-century New York socialites meet the elegance of Italian '50s summer style. Thematic importance aside, both the female and male looks worn by Matt Damon, Jude Law, and Gwyneth Paltrow provide plenty of Riviera vacation style inspiration.

The film was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Costume Design, and the combination of crisp linen shirts, leopard print pillbox hats, and a dash of red lipstick immortalise the film for its glamour and style.

**Honourable mentions:** Giorgio Armani's designs in *The Untouchables* (1987) and *American Gigolo* (1980); Dolce & Gabbana and Miuccia Prada's contributions to the wardrobe of Baz Luhrman's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996); Tom Ford's direction in *A Single Man* (2009); and most recently, the profusion of luxury designer looks featured en masse in *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018).



# Science

## Ordering the elements

**Karoliina Pulkkinen** delves into the history of the periodic table

The UN has declared 2019 as the International Year of the Periodic Table, and issued a logo to accompany the occasion. The official image depicts a bearded man next to a sphere of chemical elements. The bolded symbol 'Md' highlights that the man is Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev, the Russian chemist who we so often associate with the periodic system of the chemical elements.

However, Mendeleev was not alone in discovering the periodic system. Although 2019 marks 150 years since Mendeleev's discovery, I suggest we should look at that logo, squint our eyes, and imagine another bearded man there. Before Mendeleev, Alexandre-Émile Béguyer de Chancourtois (1862), John Newlands (1864-6), William Odling (1864), Gustav Hinrichs (1869) and Julius Lothar Meyer (1864, 1868, 1870) created systems that historians recognise as the 'precursors' for the periodic table of today.

Considering that the logo picks up one discoverer in particular, it would be appropriate to ask *why*. What makes answering this question difficult is that the systems were similar. They all were discovered during the 1860s. Their creators organised their systems with both quantitative and qualitative data in mind. The quantitative data were the atomic weights, which gave (in Mendeleev's words) the "organising principle" that allowed for a "rigorous system" of elements.

But the numbers alone were not what made the system. Especially interesting was that the linearity afforded by atomic weight ordering was compatible with displaying groups of qualitatively similar elements. For the Italian chemist and author Primo Levi, finding analogous elements in the same horizontal row made

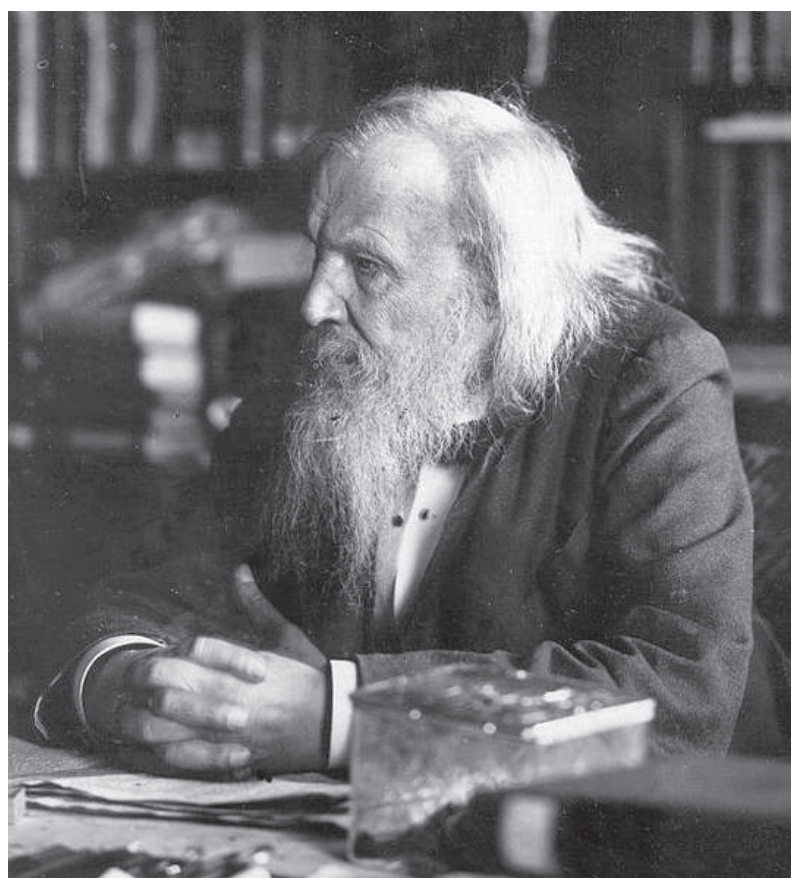
the periodic system even *rhyme*.

We may seek to understand Mendeleev's recognition as the principal discoverer of the periodic system from the subtle differences between the systems. For example, Newlands was the only one to use order numbers that stood in for the empirical atomic weights. This design choice made his system appear theoretical. The president of the journal in which Newlands sought to publish his piece refused his venue to anything that appeared too theoretical. Doing so would have been a sin for a field that put empiricism and observation on a pedestal.

Where Newlands replaced atomic weights with order numbers, Meyer used highly precise weights of two decimal points to highlight experimental success in weight determination. Meyer was the only chemist to use such precise atomic weights. The double digits are just one indicator of Meyer's attention to the quality of data. Meyer published a graph to depict the periodic relationship between atomic weights and volumes. Where atomic weight data was more dubious, Meyer drew the line of the graph with a dotted line and left gulfs on the graph where the data did not warrant assuming a generalised trend.

Apart from differences in individual design choices, the very formats for representing periodicity also varied greatly. Although tables were popular from the get-go, we can also find graphs (Meyer), screws (Béguyer de Chancourtois), and spirals with elements scattered like raisins in a Chelsea bun (Hinrichs).

The variety of formats and different design choices makes identifying the relevant differences between the systems difficult. Which one of the many differences between the systems made Mendeleev's special? Commentators usually evoke two attributes in particular: Mendeleev's was more complete and, crucially, he predicted the properties of



“Mendeleev was not alone in discovering the periodic system”

three missing elements with its help.

It is undeniable that Mendeleev's system was fuller. He discussed a greater number of chemical and physical properties than Newlands or Odling, and incorporated more elements than Meyer. Interestingly, Mendeleev also viewed completeness as an important requirement for a systematisation. Where using atomic weights as an organising principle allowed for a "rigorous" system, keeping in sight how elements formed compounds allowed for a complete system. Crucially, the more complete framework then helped Mendeleev to draw

▲ **Dmitri Mendeleev, usually credited with the creation of the modern periodic table** (WIKIPEDIA)

analogies from known elements to the properties of elements that would find a place in the system later.

However, the focus on Mendeleev's predictions and the completeness of his system has led some to evaluate the systems of other chemists for their (lack) of completeness and predictions. This is problematic because there were good arguments against including all the elements and using the system for making predictions. Not all the elements were equally well known, so when an element was recently discovered and not very thoroughly characterised, there were grounds for excluding it. This was Meyer's stance when he chose to only consider elements that he deemed well-characterised. Furthermore, although Meyer acknowledged that the periodic system could be used for making predictions, he saw that making predictions was only allowed to test the relationship between theories and empirical results. If the predictions were correct, then there were good grounds to believe that the theory might be useful for chemists in their future investigations.

Meyer was awarded the Davy Medal for his discovery jointly with Mendeleev in 1882, and a few years later, Newlands was awarded one as well. The complicated story of the discovery of the systems warrants that our celebrations marking its significance reflect that complexity. So when you partake in the periodic table-related celebratory events in 2069, in the 200th anniversary of the discovery, remember that we might as well broaden the celebrations from one year to a whole decade. And just as there is no single year when the system was discovered and developed, there was not just one person who formulated it. Several bearded individuals helped the elements find a home in the many graphs, tables, spirals and screws that constitute the early periodic systems of chemical elements.



### 'A game changer'

## Advances in breast cancer screening

**Ruby Ashraf**

Breast cancer research developments were brought to the fore over the past few weeks with the publication of an advanced algorithm, including new risk factors, for the early prediction of breast and ovarian cancer development. This is based on estimating the likelihood of having inherited two faulty genes (BRCA1 and BRCA2) and the increased risk due to lifestyle choices, including alcohol consumption and the use of hormone replacement

therapy medication.

With famous examples of celebrity publicity for smear tests and cervical cancer hitting headlines recently (Chloe Delevingne's story of abnormal cancer cells being detected at 21 years of age), this research highlights progress made in feminine health and cancer diagnosis, and may contribute to the UK's growing reputation as a leading centre for cancer research.

This research is being conducted under Breast Cancer Research UK and the University of Cambridge laboratory of

Professor Antonis Antoniou. This could increase the number of early detection and treatment cases per year, currently 55,000 in the UK. Importing this online assessment to GP surgeries will increase the accessibility and support for patients in the UK.

A high proportion of women carrying mutations in the BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 genes, combined with a family history of the disease, will go on to develop breast cancer. The impacts of this nationwide screening will enable people to determine whether they should seek testing much earlier, based on family patterns of previously detected cancers.

However, Breast Cancer Now also states that much more screening and testing would be required before this algorithm for testing cancers could "alter NHS practice."

“This [tool] should help doctors to tailor the care they provide”

Professor Antoniou (speaking on behalf of the CanRisk Programme, Cambridge) said these risk predictors may be an important step towards preventive treatment, to increase current standards of practice in British doctor's surgeries, commenting, "It could be a game changer for breast cancer because now we can identify large numbers of women with different levels of risk - not just women who are at high risk."

He added that the implications for changes in medical and treatment practice will come from this research and the widening availability of this risk assessment tool for patients and GPs, adding that "this [tool] should help doctors to tailor the care they provide depending on their patients' level of risk."



# The true cost of lost sleep



*With late nights and early mornings all too common in Cambridge, **George Milner** warns of the damage that sleep deprivation inflicts on*

Sleep plays a crucial role in our ability to form memories. Yet its importance both prior to and following learning is frequently overlooked, especially in the context of looming exams and deadlines.

Sleep can be divided into two stages: REM and NREM sleep. REM sleep, named in reference to the presence of rapid eye movements during it, makes up about a quarter of sleep in adults. The remainder of sleep is categorised as Non-REM or NREM sleep. This can be further divided into stages 1-3 of which stage 1 is seen as a link between sleep and wake, phase 2 is the first stage of true sleep and stage 3 is known as deep or slow wave sleep (SWS).

During the night the brain moves between these phases in roughly five ninety-minute cycles. Brain imaging techniques such as electroencephalography (EEG) can discriminate non-invasively between different sleep phases in experimental subjects. Fluctuations in

the net activity of many neurones in the same orientation produce 'brain waves' characteristic of different sleep phases that are detected by electrodes placed on the scalp. This ability to closely monitor brain activity during sleep has contributed significantly towards understanding the function of different stages of sleep and their distribution throughout the night.

A large body of evidence now links sleep with the three stages of memory formation: encoding, consolidation and recall.

Sleep is particularly involved in the process of consolidation which not only cements new pieces of information in long-term memory, but also enhances the strength of those memories. Memories themselves can be described as declarative, relating to facts, and procedural, relating to actions such as throwing a ball.

For memorising facts, an area of the brain called the hippocampus is of critical importance and it is thought that declarative memories are processed here. During sleep, however, short term memories are transferred from the hippocampus to a region on the outside surface of the brain called the neocortex. This transfer is not absolute, however, and the hippocampus can still play a role

▲ ILLUSTRATION BY  
KATE TOWSEY FOR  
VARSAITY

in storing memories made months or years previously. In contrast, procedural memory is thought to be less dependent on the hippocampus.

British neuroscientist Matthew Walker, who rose to popular fame with his book 'Why we sleep', demonstrated a link between stage 2 NREM sleep and learning capacity. This was accomplished by investigating learning and recall in one group that was allowed to sleep for two hours after a learning task and in another group that spent the same time spent awake. The results showed a 20% difference in recall ability in favour of those who had slept.

Of particular interest in learning are sleep spindles. These higher frequency brainwave oscillations are a feature of NREM sleep that last only a few seconds with each occurrence and juxtapose the slow, synchronous oscillations of neuronal activity otherwise shown in deep sleep. The number of sleep spindles, measured using an EEG, is correlated with levels of memory consolidation. Two hours of sleep which included a NREM phase was enough to improve the performance of study participants in simple memory tasks.

To complicate matters, in everyday life a greater percentage of time is spent in NREM sleep later in the night. This

“Evidence links sleep with the three stages of memory formation”

distribution results in an exaggerated loss of sleep spindles and hence impaired memory consolidation even with only modest sleep deprivation. With 40% of adults obtaining less than six hours sleep per night on average, this is an all too common occurrence in the UK.

In contrast, there is evidence that procedural memory is more heavily consolidated by REM sleep. Nevertheless, the contributions of NREM sleep and sleep spindles towards motor learning are also strong, adding further incentive to top up a night's sleep from six to eight hours. To make matters worse, even a moderately tired brain is also significantly poorer at encoding short-term memories in addition to consolidating them as long-term memories.

Increase sleep deprivation to thirty-six hours leading up to a learning task and the effects on declarative memory are stark. Even when sleep-deprived individuals were allowed two nights of recovery sleep before their recall was tested, a study reported that they showed a 40% decrease in recall from the learning task relative to those who were well-rested throughout.

Yet not only those who miss the occasional full night's sleep are impacted. Walker argues convincingly that it is the summative effects of less extreme yet chronic sleep deprivation that are 'most worrying from a societal perspective'. It has been shown that ten nights of six hours sleep per night reduced simple reaction times by the equivalent of a full night of deprivation. This impairment went largely unnoticed by subjects. The adage of 'you don't recover from illness at university, you just learn to accept a new lower standard of health' now gains greater meaning. Lack of awareness of cognitive impairment in sleep deprived individuals removes immediate feedback on sleep decisions and encourages the belief that an individual is getting away with cutting down on sleep when the truth is altogether different.

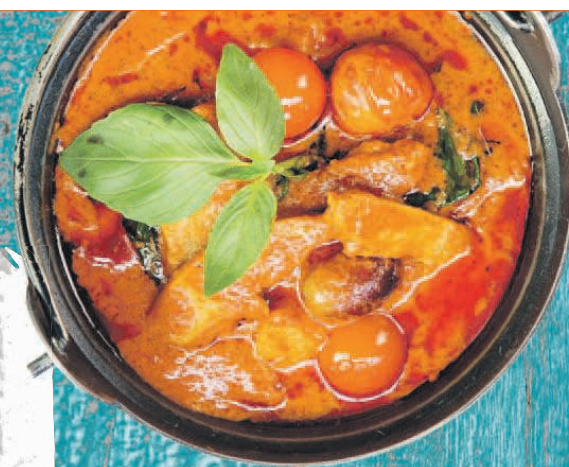
The synergy between sleep and learning is particularly prone to breakdown in the lead up to exams. Working late into the night, many students are undoing much of the hard work, both past and future, that they avoid sleep for to carry out in the first place. On the other hand, poor sleeping habits are not simply the function of individual tendencies. University life, with closely crammed final exams, in itself fails to facilitate appropriate patterns of sleep. Added anxiety created by these also serves to damage student sleep cycles. The strong links between sleep and both mental and physical health, make sleep deprivation not only counterproductive to learning but also directly damaging to individuals.

It would be inappropriate to blame faculties for all student behaviour, however. Sleeping in later or continuing to sleep for appropriate periods despite mounting priorities are still culturally associated with laziness and unproductivity. Sleep deprivation should not be seen as a necessary part of hard work and commitment. It is a sad irony that in exam season, when students have much to gain from appropriate sleep, many take deprivation to even greater extremes.





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# Badminton Blues edge out Worcester

**Michael Nguyen-Kim**  
Sport Reporter

Cambridge's Women's badminton team have sent an emphatic message to their Oxford counterparts ahead of next month's Varsity match, qualifying for the BUCS Midlands Conference Cup semi-finals with a 5-3 win over the University of Worcester on Wednesday afternoon.

Their victory was underpinned by a strong performance in the doubles, winning three of the four doubles matches. This was accompanied by two singles

▼ **The victory is promising ahead of next month's Varsity Match**

(TOM WADE)



wins by forfeit, giving Cambridge five wins out of a possible eight and hence the tie.

Cambridge's victory came as somewhat of a surprise. Prior to the match, Club President Tom Wade described the opposition as "quite strong", with Worcester currently sitting in 3rd place in the BUCS Midlands 2A League.

Cambridge, by contrast, were very much the underdog, occupying 3rd position in the lower Midlands 2B League. League form does not always translate into cup form though, and this was made evident by the home team's clinical showing at the University Sports Centre.

Cambridge's afternoon began fortuitously as Worcester were only able to field five out of a required six players. In a BUCS badminton tie, each of the two singles players plays two matches, as do each of the two doubles pairs. Worcester's missing singles player therefore gifted Cambridge an automatic two wins from the outset, setting them a target of three wins from the remaining six games to secure victory.

Early dominance from Neha Madhotra and Kim Chan furthered Cambridge's lead in quick order, with the

pair ruthlessly dispatching Worcester's Chloe Machin and Charlotte Davis in a rapid-fire 21-4, 21-4 straight-sets win. The influence of Madhotra in particular was quite clear, with the team captain dominating the court with her strength and mobility.

On the other court, Felicity Coan and Amy Chen recovered after a slow start, taking their game 19-21, 21-15, 21-14. After a series of unforced errors effectively gave Worcester the opening set, the Cambridge pair's powerful strokes allowed them to comfortably win the next two sets and the match.

Needing only one win from the remaining four games for the overall victory, Malhotra would have favoured her team's chances at this point. Their path to victory was momentarily blocked, however, by a superlative performance by Worcester singles player Sophie Males.

Needing to take both of her matches to keep Worcester in the tie, she seamlessly disposed of Cambridge's Rowena Duncan 3-21, 4-21 in a clinic of placement and power. This was immediately followed by a 3-21, 5-21 win over Cambridge's Ursula Shaw, which left the tie finely poised at 4-2 leading into the return doubles' games.

“This will engender hope among the Light Blues, who are seeking to win the Varsity Match for the first time since 2011”

Cambridge hearts were briefly sent aflutter when Malhotra and Chan lost their return doubles game 12-21, 22-24. With the overall score at 4-3, the prospect of a 4-4 draw and a subsequent countback was briefly in play. Order was restored, however, when Coan and Chan secured the final game of the tie in a 21-9, 21-8 straight-sets triumph.

The women now advance to the semi-finals of the Conference Cup where they will travel to Northampton in a week's time. Should they win, they will set up a potential finals berth against Oxford, who are still alive in the competition and who will play off against Leicester on Wednesday evening in a bid to join Cambridge in the semis.

Wednesday's result is the latest instalment in a recent uptick in form for the Cambridge women's side, who have won five of their past six matches.

This will engender hope amongst the Light Blues, who are seeking this year to win next month's Badminton Varsity Match against Oxford for the first time since 2011, held here in Cambridge.

## New to a Blue: Five star reviews for the Modern Pentathlon Club

*William Ross speaks to CUMPC captain Anna Gibbons about one of Cambridge's most dynamic team sports*

Running, swimming, show-jumping, air pistol shooting and fencing: at first glance, the five disciplines of modern pentathlon might seem a little surprising. The event, though, is inspired by the traditional pentathlon held during the ancient Olympics, in which five events were contested over one day - a short foot race, a javelin throw, a discus throw, long jump and wrestling, events which were designed to replicate the skills needed in battle.

Anna Gibbons, President of the Cambridge University Modern pentathlon club, is keen to stress the benefits of getting involved in this multi-faceted sport at Cambridge: "It is a great way to try something new, stay fit and meet lots of new people in the meantime." Indeed, the great variety in the sport means that there should be something for everyone: as Gibbons points out:

"We train across all five disciplines. We swim three times per week, with one session coached by a former Olympic athlete! For fencing, we fence with the City Club and run our own session too. Shooting is done with laser pistols so they are totally safe - we shoot static once per week, and then practice 'combined' once per week. In terms of

“The club achieved the highest score in its history in last year's BUCS”

running, we have just linked up with Cambridge University Triathlon Club to do a joint interval session.

We also attend Milton park run, and fit in a steady long run in our own time. Riding is done at a stables twenty minutes outside Cambridge, lessons are subsidised depending on athlete ability; most aim to ride around once per week. This year we are also introducing a circuit/core session too." The club has enjoyed great success in recent years, not only achieving its highest ever score in the club's history in last year's BUCS, but also convincingly winning last year's men's Varsity and losing women's Varsity by just 0.12%. Gibbons also points out that "on an individual level, we have a couple of individuals capable of competing at a national level."

Participation in modern pentathlon also offers a path to the promised land of winning a full blue. Despite the high standards reached by their most experienced athletes, the club also ensures that beginners have plenty of opportunities to get stuck in and experience the sport, holding a range of relaxed tournaments throughout the year including relaxed Winter and Summer Cuppers tournaments, as well as a Novice Varsity match in Michaelmas term.

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**Blues celebrate badminton victory.** Worcester sees defeat at hands of Cambridge women **31**

# Gown beats Town in enthralling night at the Cambridge Guildhall



Gown

8

Town

7

**William Ross**  
Sport Editor

Although it may not go along with the stereotype commonly associated with Cambridge students, Cambridge University Amateur Boxing Club (CUABC) is one of the world's oldest boxing clubs, and this week's Town vs Gown showcased amateur boxing at its very best. CUABC's boxers were rewarded with a narrow 8-7 victory against a 'town' team comprised of boxers from a range of boxing clubs around the country.

The first bout of the night saw CUABC's Dom Atherton come up short against a very strong and powerful opponent from Imperial Boxing club, who was able to land a sting of sustained blows in round two, winning victory after the referee stopped the contest.

Matt Elliot, though, was the first CUABC boxer to taste victory on the night, putting in an energetic display against his taller opponent, who struggled to cope with Elliot's athleticism throughout and the referee was left with little choice but to stop the contest in round two, much to the delight of the crowd.

CUABC's Steven McGregor put in a valiant display in the third bout of the

evening, but the referee stopped the contest in round two, with McGregor carrying a nasty-looking blood wound in his eye. In the next bout, however, 2018 Varsity lightweight champion Claudia Tam highlighted her credentials for this year's Varsity match with a comfortable unanimous points decision victory, showcasing her quick feet and dynamism.

CUABC's winning streak continued in bouts five and six, with victories for Cherry Tan and Athi Chellapa. Chellapa was particularly impressive, landing an especially huge blow at the end of round two, and winning a unanimous points victory.

The town team, however, threatened a comeback in bouts seven and eight. An entertaining and brave display from Jovan Tasev, who produced the night's iciest pre-bout stare, against a larger opponent eventually resulted in a unanimous points decision defeat, while Alex Liu was unable to build on a strong start in round one, losing on a very tight split decision.

Though CUABC's Ella Palmer eased past her opponent in bout number nine, bouts ten and eleven again saw CUABC defeat. Alistair Greenberg was edged out of a fiercely-contested bout by a split decision, while CUABC's Dan Zahedi was the first boxer of the evening to hit the canvas, as his explosive opponent came

“*The rest of the season will hopefully bring more success*”

out of the blocks firing on all cylinders, pummelling him with a number of vicious hooks and jabs.

Perhaps the highlight of the night came in bout number 12, as James Lee, 2018 Varsity heavyweight champion, was pitted against a strong opponent from Imperial Boxing club. The two did not disappoint, contesting a frenetic and high-quality three rounds of boxing. Though the first and second rounds were tough to call, Lee managed to assert his dominance in the final round, landing a number of vicious blows which left his

▲ **Ella Palmer of CUABC eased past her opponent**

(CHRISTIAN SWALLOW)

▼ **CUABC was victorious this week** (CHRISTIAN SWALLOW)

opponent staggering around the ring, and the unanimous points decision in favour of Lee was met with a standing ovation from large sections of the crowd.

To round off the evening, CUABC's Alex Stoilov and Seb Dex recorded comfortable victories to give Cambridge an unassailable lead against the 'Town' team, while Chris Lim lost the final bout on a unanimous point decision.

Speaking to Varsity after the event, CUABC's men's captain Judah Aiyenuro reflected positively on the evening:

“In the 3 years that I've been boxing at CUABC, this has been by far the best night of boxing I have ever seen. The crowd atmosphere was electric from start to finish and there were so many spectacular performances throughout the night. The narrow win over the town side doesn't take away from how well each and every boxer fought, considering it was the first bout for the majority of those competing.”

Thoughts now turn to the 112th Varsity Boxing Match on the 9th March, which is the world's longest-running amateur boxing event. Cambridge can take plenty of positives into the final month of training.

Certainly though, on the evidence of Town vs Gown this year's Varsity Boxing is not one to be missed.

