

# Parts of my identity

## Coming out as a gay Indian man

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# VARSITY

## Graduate Union calls for action on postgraduate student 'housing crisis'

**Charlotte Lillywhite**  
Senior News Correspondent

A report compiled by the Cambridge University Graduate Union (GU) has called on the University to "alleviate" the housing pressures that many postgraduate students at Cambridge face, through "standing up for housing, fair rent and no hidden charges".

The GU's report states that the University must "talk to Colleges to reduce rent," and "build more purpose-built student accommodation" with the help of the City Council.

The report stressed that while undergraduate housing has been a point of widespread debate and discussion within Cambridge, issues related to postgraduate housing are often overlooked.

It highlights the burden housing can add to graduate students' financial difficulties, with many either partially or entirely self-funding their courses.

The overall average weekly rent for UK students stands at £147 per week, according to a NUS-Unipol Accommodation Survey 2018. This consumes more than half of most postgraduate grants,

with most PhD students renting for a whole calendar year. In Cambridge, single room rent ranges from £400 to £740 per month across colleges - and according to the report, most postgraduate funding schemes offer a maintenance stipend of which more than 50% usually goes towards rent.

The NUS recommends that no more than half of income be spent on rent.

The report cites the Big Cambridge Survey 2018, which saw high numbers of postgraduate students report low levels of satisfaction with issues relating to their accommodation. Only 45% were satisfied with the value for money of their accommodation, while just 43% felt that the house prices in Cambridge were fair. However, 64% of students reported feeling satisfied with the quality of their accommodation, and 67% were content with the impact living in college or at the University has had on their student life.

The GU's report also criticises the decline in affordable rooms for postgraduates, highlighting the rise of studio rooms, which have doubled their stock

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▲ The Graduate Union report stressed that postgraduate housing issues are often overlooked (EDWIN BAHRAMI BALANI)

## Cambridge family facilities provision like a 'lottery'

**Charlotte Lillywhite**  
Senior News Correspondent

For student parents, choosing colleges and living in Cambridge can present unprecedented challenges due to current University and College provision of family facilities. The University operates the Childcare Office, which provides information on a variety of issues relating to family life in Cambridge, as well as three workplace nurseries for student parents. However only six out of the University's 31 Colleges offer accommodation to families: Queens', Gonville & Caius, Girton, Churchill, St. John's, and Trinity. Three college nurseries currently serve six colleges.

Daria Mitko is a Master's student studying law, and lives in Cambridge with her husband and two-year-old son. She had to switch to Caius after it emerged that the original college she was accepted into, Hughes Hall, does not provide family accommodation.

Feeling that student parents are "an underrepresented minority in Cambridge", Mitko ran for the role of Parents' and Families' Officer at Caius MCR. She sought to work with her college to make it "more inclusive" for families, and to

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# Eva Schloss 'People can never get what it was really like, but you must convey your story'

**Jacob Arbeid** speaks to the Holocaust survivor about her life, and the importance of education in perserving memory

**E**va Schloss is an extraordinary woman. That epithet gets thrown around a lot today, but the 89-year old Holocaust survivor and step-sister of Anne Frank has lived a life truly beyond the limits of ordinary human experience. She has traversed half of Europe in the century when the continent tore itself apart, and was subject to torture, starvation, and the death of her brother and father at the hands of the Nazis. And yet Schloss has emerged as one of the most important advocates for Holocaust education today, with an undiminished passion for justice and indeed a fierce sense of humour.

Eva Geiringer was born in Vienna in 1929. This was the Vienna of Freud and Zweig, a cosmopolitan city which had become a haven for native Jews and German-Jewish refugees alike. This changed in 1938 with the German annexation of Austria. A growing climate of militant antisemitism forced Schloss's - then Geiringer's - family to flee across Europe: first to Belgium, before finally settling

“Schloss stresses that we can and should still invite survivors like her to talk, ‘as long as they’re still around – which won’t be very long’”

in Amsterdam, in the same apartment block as the Frank family. They spent nearly four years hidden before they were betrayed. The family was taken to Auschwitz, where her father and brother perished, while Schloss was put to ex-cruciating work in the camps.

After eight months, the camp was liberated by the Soviets; Schloss was reunited with her mother and they returned to Amsterdam. For decades, Schloss refused to tell her story: like many survivors, it was simply too painful. Yet in 1986 at a Holocaust memorial event, she was prompted by the now-unlikely figure of Ken Livingstone to say a few words, and since then she “hasn’t ever stopped talking”. She co-founded the Anne Frank Trust UK and has written several books about her experiences, including one she promised to her late brother Heinz.

I’m sitting with her in a lobby at the Cambridge Union, a few minutes before she is set to give a talk. Encouragingly, the chamber is packed: there is not a single seat left, and students crowd the upper deck. I ask her what life was like before, in the brief interval between her arrival in the Netherlands and the Nazi invasion. As someone with Dutch Jewish origins, I’m keen to gain an understanding of what life was like before the war. She fondly recalls playing on the swings with Anne Frank, and the weekly markets at the Jordaan, a once working-class neighbourhood now known for its art galleries and hip eateries. She recalls the Dutch as friendly, but then as the war went on it became increasingly difficult to know. Her family was ultimately betrayed by a nurse, posing as a resistance



◀▲ Eva Schloss, step-daughter to Otto Frank, was born in 1929 in Vienna, Austria to a Jewish family.

(THE CAMBRIDGE UNION)



# News



member: “she betrayed not just us, but many, many people”. After the war, she was put on trial: she received only four years imprisonment.

This figure was shocking to me; later, researching the postwar Netherlands, it made more sense. In the wake of the war, the Dutch, keen to preserve national unity in the face of economic devastation and decolonisation, preferred to stick to the myth of a country free of collaborators united in resistance to the Nazis. This is a story that has unfortunately made itself known repeatedly across Europe: from Marine Le Pen’s denial of the French role in the Holocaust, to Poland’s criminalisation of the mention of Polish collaborators, to the German AfD’s attack on Berlin’s Holocaust memorial as a ‘monument of shame’. More than any of those interred in the camps, it seems many believe the primary victims of the Holocaust to be their national pride.

I ask Schloss her view on the collaborators she faced in the camps: do they have a moral question to answer for? “Yes, definitely”. In Auschwitz, she recounts having more contact with the *Kapos* (non-Jewish camp prisoners, mostly political prisoners and criminals from all over Europe) who maintained the day-to-day activities of the camp, than with the Nazis themselves. “They would mistreat you...instead of keeping them in prisons they [the Nazis] put them there to do a job, and they were obviously enjoying what they were doing”. She recounts how the *Kapos* would have a stove they used to cook potatoes: “the smell already made us wild from hunger”. Occasionally, the Jewish inmates would be given the water used to cook potatoes; to the inmates on starvation rations, even this was “wonderful”. Often, however, “they called you and you came; and then in front of your noses they threw it down and didn’t give it to you. You know, *extra cruelty*” she says.

“For decades, Schloss refused to tell her story: like many survivors, it was simply too painful”

She grimaces, and I can see why: as much as the camps were witness to far more stomach-churning horrors, there is something visceral about this act – perhaps a reminder of the basic capacity of humans for unnecessary cruelty.

The place of the *Kapos* in European historical memory has been similarly fraught. Primo Levi, perhaps the most famous Holocaust survivor to publish his experiences, wrote that one of the key facets of Nazi practice was turning some victims into accomplices. The binary thinking of victim and perpetrator was difficult to apply in the camps, which were simply so far removed from human decency. The *Kapos* inhabited the ‘Grey Zone’ between the two, and were difficult to judge as a result.

Many, such as Polish writer Tadeusz Borowski, suffered intense guilt after the war. Yet Borowski himself believed this guilt was rightfully suffered, and in *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* published a collection whose description of gratuitous camp violence is difficult to read, and was indeed poorly received by Poland’s postwar Communist government, who wanted a clear tale of good-and-evil. The question of those forced to collaborate with the Nazis remains a moral minefield, but as Schloss’ testimony shows, it is one we must engage with if we are to even come close to understanding the practices which allowed the Holocaust to take place.

Schloss continues to narrate the traumas she faced: “the illnesses, and the starvation, and the lice...” It is simply unimaginable, even for somebody who has grown up surrounded by stories of the camps. I ask her whether we can possibly seek to convey the horrors of the camps to generations that have not experienced them. “Well, you can just tell your story. When you tell it, it sounds bad but when you *live* it” – she pauses – “it is still something...quite different.

That’s why people can never get...what it was really like.”

She says she herself, even after so many years, cannot understand how young, educated people could be complicit in the camp system. “The commander of the camp had his family there; on Sunday morning he went with his children to church, and in the afternoon he came back and looked over the children on the transports...and sent them to the gas chambers. How can a human being do that? This is really something we still can’t comprehend.”

What can students do to keep the memory, and the understanding of the Holocaust alive? Schloss stresses that we can and should still invite survivors like her to talk, “as long as they’re still around – which won’t be very long”. Technology has also offered a solution – in 2017, a project for the Sternberg Centre in California asked Schloss and other survivors thousands of questions, and used hundreds of cameras to record their responses and build up a hologram display. Visitors to various partner exhibitions around the globe can ask questions into a microphone and have them answered by 3D renditions of each survivor. For all its technical brilliance however, Schloss stresses that the exhibit is “not the same as if a real person tells you the story”.

She is also keen to emphasise that it is not a substitute for actual history lessons: she now has to return to the US to record a 25-minute talk on her story and the Holocaust for those who do not even know what the latter is – “if you don’t even know, what can you ask?” As shocking as this is, wide-scale ignorance of the Holocaust is not uncommon; left untended, it often leaves people vulnerable to distortion of the facts and even denial. An Opinion Matters poll last month revealed that 1 in 20

Britons does not believe the Holocaust took place and many more believe that the numbers have been inflated, or that Jews ‘exploit’ the Holocaust for political gain. Prejudice is always difficult to disentangle, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that this has a hand in rising levels of antisemitism, with violent antisemitic assaults having risen by 34% in the last year alone.

In Alan Bennett’s play *The History Boys* the teacher Irwin, who believes in playing fast and loose with the truth in the pursuit of Oxbridge admissions success, sets his students to ponder whether the Holocaust can be written about like any other historical event. “Of course,” says one “it has causes, consequences...just like the Dissolution of the Monasteries”. But one pupil objects: in an outburst he declares “but the difference is that you didn’t have family who died in the *Dissolution of the Monasteries*”. Irwin later apologises – “the Holocaust isn’t just another topic of history” he says – “yet”.

As a history student and descendent of Holocaust survivors I think back to that scene a lot: as time passes, it seems impossible to stop events being regularised, flattened as the mere consequence of causes and cause of consequences. The people who lived and died, suffered and struggled, become obscured by distance.

But the horrors that Schloss describes don’t bear forgetting: to admit defeat here would be to open the door to them being seen as banal – or worse, to ignorance and denial. In an age of mounting antisemitism and general prejudice, this is the last thing that is needed. And if we are to prevent the Holocaust becoming ‘just another historical topic’, it will be because of the actions of people like Eva Schloss, who more than anyone deserved as quiet life but who made the decision to speak out – not for their sake, but for ours.

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VARSITY

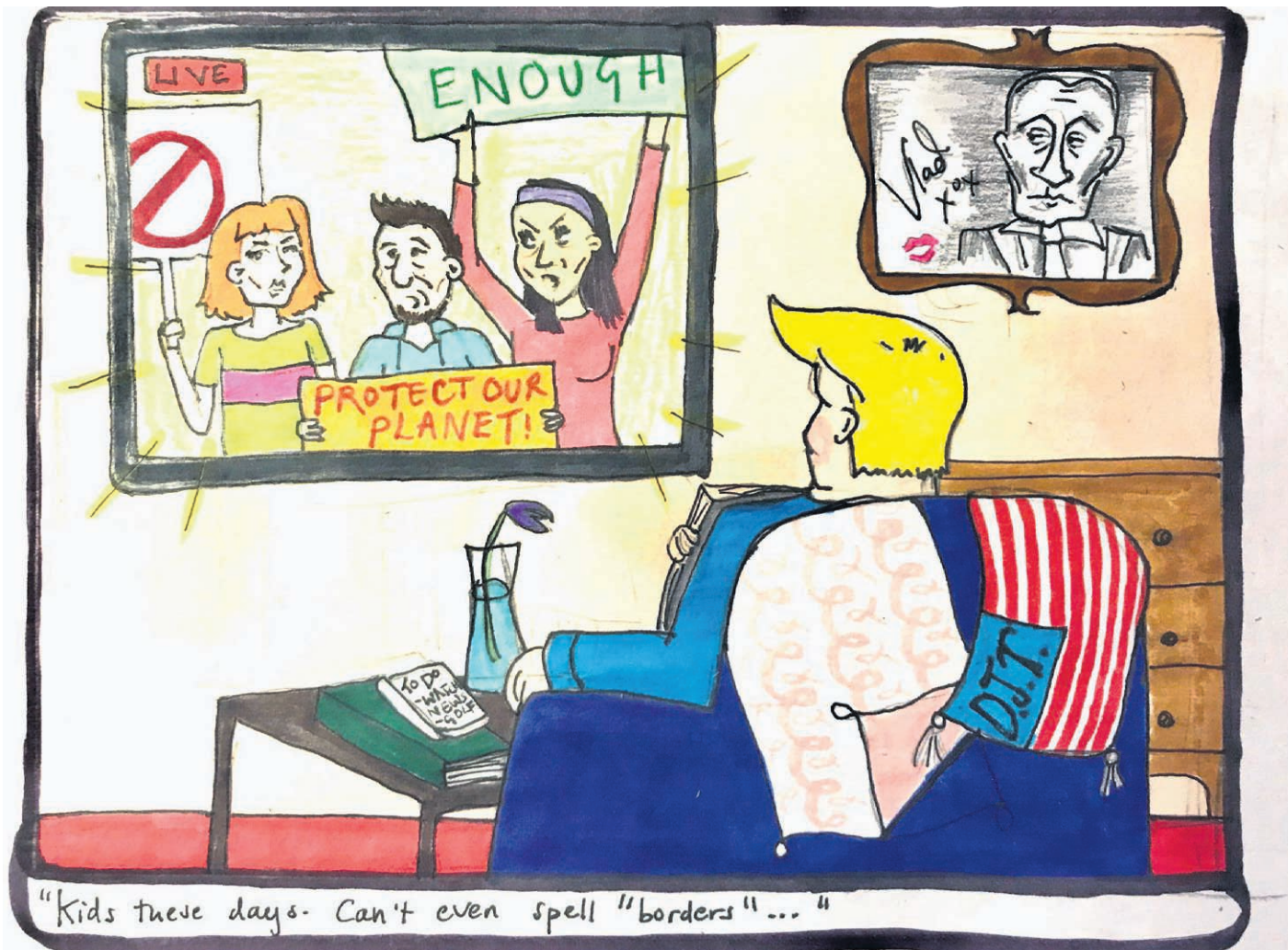




## News

### Comic timing: Cambridge's student cartoonists

► Following this week's youth climate strikes, Lara Erritt looks at protests from the White House



► Chloe Marschner's 'Scambridge' on Cambridge and its insurmountable reading



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## THE EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD



## SUN SETS ON SUNDIALS

### Clock running out on sundial science

Dr Frank King, a self-confessed “time enthusiast”, fears that sundials are going out of fashion. The 76-year-old chair of the British Sundial Society lamented that “sundials are old hat”, describing his struggle to find people who share his love of the timepiece, which to him represents “the perfect collaboration of science and art”. Dr King has designed sundials across the UK, including for Selwyn and Pembroke colleges, and as “Keeper of the Clock” is responsible for looking after the university’s official clock on Great St Mary’s Church.

DELATED DEBUT  
**Cambridge lecturer  
finishes to-do Liszt**

David Trippett, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Music, has completed a three-year project deciphering a 115-page unfinished Liszt manuscript, which can now be performed. Liszt began work on the piece in 1845, but abandoned it before completion. Until recently, this material was viewed as indecipherable, but Trippett spent months decoding it, resulting in the 170-year-late completion of *Sardanapalo*, Liszt's only mature opera.

## THE MAD HATTER Fashionista's fabulous legacy

An extravagant hat designed by the author of the world's first "fashion bible" has been recreated by Cambridge University. The ostrich-feather headress was made in 1521 for German accountant/fashion-icon Matthaus Schwarz, and took six months to recreate. The 1-metre-wide hat features 32 ostrich feathers and was created for Schwarz's first meeting with the Archduke of Austria. Over his lifetime, Schwarz commissioned 137 portraits of himself in his designs, which were then compiled into the Schwarz Book of Clothes.

## LOOP-DE-LOVE

### Mystery pilot charms Cambridge

This Valentine's Day, a mystery pilot captured the hearts of Cambridge by drawing love hearts across the blue sky. The hearts could be seen for miles and appeared seemingly "out of the blue", hovering somewhere above Newmarket Road. As well as several hearts, the mysterious artist drew a smiley face. The identity of the pilot remains unknown, but they undoubtedly brightened the day of numerous Cambridge students.

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## News

# King's College Council decides against student proposal to fly transgender flag

Chloe Bayliss  
Senior News Correspondent

In a meeting on Tuesday, the King's College Council unanimously decided against a motion proposed jointly by the King's College Student Union (KCSU) Vice President and LGBT+ officer to fly the trans flag at the end of LGBT history month on the 28th February.

The motion was presented to the King's College Council, a group of college fellows and members of college who manage the daily business of the college and report to the King's Governing Body. The motion stated that the transgender flag should be flown by the college above the Gibb's building to "raise awareness of this [the transgender] section of the LGBT community, often one that is overlooked or less well recognized in society". It also stated that as King's College over the past few months has been the "target of anti-LGBT and transgender protestors", it would "send a powerful message that King's is looking forward to the future of society in support of all people in equality."

"The University has a large LGBT population to this day all of whom are deserving of a sign of recognition and a reiteration of acceptance... It [the flag] places a spotlight on a particular LGBT community that has experienced harassment and marginalization through history."

“It [the flag] places a spotlight on a particular LGBT community”

Talking to *Varsity*, the vice-president of the KCSU, who sits in on the council, outlined the reasons the motion was rejected. She said that after the flying of the EU flag, the college were reportedly concerned with the 'proliferation of flags' being flown at King's. There was also speculation that the flag was not 'official' enough to be flown, as there have been different variations of the trans flag.

The college was also worried that the motion was 'reactive' against recent anti-transgender protests around King's, including one protestor who frequently protests on King's Parade holding banners referencing biological sex. According to the vice-president, the council did not want to take part in action that could potentially provoke those protesting.

In response to the decision at the meeting, she said, "it was frustrating as they were saying it was too political to fly the trans flag. For us it was a symbol of solidarity, not a political statement. We were looking beyond politics to a make a statement that said everyone was accepted."

Relating this motion to the one passed to fly the EU flag, she said: "If the college were worried about making a political statement, then why would they fly the EU flag? The EU is an official, political body, whereas this would simply have been an open statement of solidarity. It's disappointing that one cause was deemed more worth of a symbolic flag



flying than another."

Though the college did not agree to fly the trans flag, Michael Proctor, provost of King's College, sent an internal statement of solidarity to the members of the college, which was also sent to *Varsity* in response to a request for comment. It stated: "The College has a liberal and inclusive philosophy and believes fully in the rights of all minorities to receive respect from others and the right to live without interference. It strongly deplores any manifestations of disrespect or prejudice from whatever quarter."

Though the council rejected the proposal to fly the transgender flag, the statement did say that "the LGBT+ flag [is] to be flown on 28 February." In an email, the provost said that there was "no formal vote at the meeting" but rather "it was agreed that the more appropriate way of demonstrating the College's support for Trans students would

▲ **King's College Council decided not to fly the trans flag above the Gibb's building**

(LOUIS ASHWORTH)

be to fly the LGBT+ flag".

In a statement to *Varsity*, the KCSU LGBT+ officer said: "King's is meant to be an open, inclusive space and this vote just shows that what goes on behind the scenes is very different from the shiny exterior that is sometimes promoted."

"I'd like to make clear that the Council's decision does not represent the entire student body and that any trans or non-binary student who is either already here or thinking about applying should know that KCSU is actively putting all our power into solving this issue", he added.

One anonymous student at King's told *Varsity*: "I'm glad they took our concerns on board but the reasons they gave for flying the LGBT flag instead (eg. that the LGBT flag was 'widely recognized and accepted') are also true of the trans flag, so it feels like a giant cop out to refuse to support trans people specifically."

However, despite the backlash against the council's decision, it has prompted a discussion about the use of symbols within the college. Another student told *Varsity* that "although the anti-trans protests are discriminatory and unacceptable, the college has become a bit 'flag-happy' recently."

"Many people, myself included, would not recognise this flag and I'm unsure whether prioritising bits of cloth over concrete action is the best way to address the issue."

# Caius graduate student pushes for family-friendly changes in College

Continued from Front Page

contribute to making positive change within the University.

Speaking to *Varsity* about her efforts to improve the provision of family facilities within the University and its constituent colleges, she believes that with the variation in available facilities across the colleges, Cambridge is in some sense "a lottery" for student parents' experiences in the University.

Mitko believes that Cambridge is more inclusive for student parents on a University level, with the Child-care Office providing information, and three workplace nurseries. However, on a college level, she believes that there needs to be more "awareness and change".

Currently, there are no baby-changing units or high chairs in her college, while children and babies are also pro-

hibited from Second Hall, offered every evening at 7:20pm.

Mitko is thus looking to implement baby changing units in both female and male restrooms across Caius, as some other colleges, such as Hughes Hall, have already done. She is also seeking to change Caius' dining policy to give student parents the opportunity to eat in Second Hall.

Although Mitko understands that this may be "more controversial" than the implementation of baby changing units, and notes that "not all people would, for various reasons, enjoy babies and children in hall".

However, she sees the current approach as "completely disregard[ing]" student parents when children "are allowed in pubs in the UK, not to mention [a number of] other places".

She is therefore hoping to work with the College to make a "compromise" on the situation, encouraging a move to-

wards being more "inclusive" and welcoming to student parents. The dining policy she wishes to implement does not cover Superhalls, which is the formal hall equivalent at Caius, saying that she understands these are "more solemn and adult events".

However, Mitko emphasises that "normal [Second] hall is just a hall" and she wants to be "present" and give her family "the chance to have this experience". She argues that there is "great room for all sorts of compromise". For instance, the policy can be limited to a gallery in Caius' Hall if necessary.

She believes this will not just benefit people with young children, as many other students who have mature families in Cambridge are similarly unable to bring them to Hall due to Caius' dining policy.

Similarly, this issue affects undergraduates, many of whom have younger siblings who are prohibited from dining

“[Student parents are] an under-represented minority within Cambridge”

in hall. Mitko emphasised that "everyone would benefit from making [the] College a more friendly, modern and inclusive place".

Despite these challenges outlined by Mitko, Caius is one of only six colleges to offer accommodation to families.

After receiving unanimous support from the College's MCR and widespread support from the JCR, she is meeting with Caius' Master, Dr. Pippa Rogerson, in hopes of encouraging the College to work with her on the issue.

Rogerson confirmed to *Varsity* that they will "discuss child friendliness issues further".

She has also spoken to the Graduate Union on the issue, hoping this change can be implemented across all colleges. She sees it as a great opportunity for children to be "at the forefront of a positive change", and she is "very hopeful" that her own College, which she "loves", will be leading the change.



# Affordable housing: 'a basic right for every student' argues GU

Continued from Front Page

in the UK since 2012-13. It specifically points to Girton College's Swirles Court, which offers only en-suite rooms. The 325 rooms, purpose built for graduate students, were the first completed stage of Cambridge's £350m Eddington suburb in North West Cambridge.

16 Colleges told the GU that they predicted an increasing demand for self-contained studio flats over the next five to ten years, while eight Colleges believed demand would remain the same.

The report highlights research undertaken by the Cambridge Centre for Housing & Planning Research, who predicted that 8,959 student rooms will need to be built by 2026, to support Cambridge's current planning framework - which "envisages an expansion in postgraduate numbers of 2% per year in the next ten years".

The GU also identified "the general need for additional purpose-built accommodation services [...] in defined areas that are within walking or cycling distance of teaching facilities".

The report argued that new housing "should be tied to the University, through either a long-term lease or long-term nomination agreement, much like the Lodge Property Services were asked to manage all properties at Eddington and are part of the University Accommodation Service".

The GU recently asked colleges about their plans for expanding postgraduate accommodation over the next five to ten years, and found "highly mixed" responses. Murray Edwards is planning a 20% expansion and Lucy Cavendish 10%, but 15 colleges are planning less than 2% expansion, and five colleges are not planning any expansion at all.

Private options can sometimes be much cheaper than college accommodation, but postgraduate students, according to the GU, tend to "rely more on the latter than the former" due to a host of problems.

For one, offers are often received late in the year, when much private accommodation has already been let, and so "the easiest option is the most attractive for the students". Hotel accommodation may also be too expensive to rent in

“  
[Housing is needed] in defined areas that are within walking or cycling distance of teaching facilities  
”

the interval spent searching for private housing. Upfront rental fees and the necessary costs of establishing a home privately are also often not covered by funding bodies.

Furthermore, the GU report argues that international students may not "have the cultural understanding of renting in the UK to be able to make safe decisions about where to live", and may be deterred by "horror stories of student exploitation".

A spokesperson for the Office of Intercollegiate Services, the body responsible for providing support to the University's 31 constituent colleges, said they "welcome the concerns raised in this report, and welcome the Graduate Union's input into how they could be addressed".

They added that "the financial challenges of university life are well known" and noted that colleges are "continually" seeking ways to support students in making the right decisions for themselves, including "providing clearer information on accommodation costs".

The GU stated that they are "motivated to work towards helping create meaningful change on postgraduate housing in the Collegiate University, and campaign for the provision of affordable and accessible housing for the postgraduate students in the University of Cambridge". They stressed that "affordable and decent housing must be a basic right for every student".

Mrittunjoy Guha Majumdar, Vice-President of the Cambridge University Graduate Union, said he is working closely with the Accommodation Services to find ways to tackle this problem. He said that they were actively looking into ways of encouraging colleges to make housing charges clear possibly even before the student accepts an offer from their college. He added that they were "actively looking into ways of helping students with private accommodation" by making available facilities such as an online platform hosted by the GU, which "shall help bring potential housemates together".

He added that they were "seeking a phased deposit scheme from private providers who advertise with the University Accommodation Centre to distribute the deposit for a room over three months instead of having it upfront."



▲ A Graduate Union reports centres around the importance of "decent and affordable housing" for graduate students (EDWIN BAHRAMI BALANI)

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## News

# Digital mentors The rise of online tutoring among Cambridge students

**Oliver Rhodes**  
Deputy News Editor

Figures from MyTutor, the largest online tutoring platform in the UK, indicate that over 500 Cambridge students currently use the platform to earn extra income, of a total of 8500 students drawn from 25 British universities.

Despite this, the University's guidance on financial support states that "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."

Figures from the Sutton Trust further indicate that around a quarter of high-school students received some form of private tuition in 2018, of which a rising proportion is online tutoring.

Varsity reached out to Cambridge students to gauge their experiences with online tutoring, both as tutors and tutees.

Offering cheaper rates to tutees, MyTutor is the most popular online tutoring platform in the UK, catering to the wider demand for tuition for UK-based qualifications.

Daniel Mayers, a second-year Geographer at Downing, has been teaching A-level Geography and a range of GCSE subjects on MyTutor since early 2018. He tutors primarily because it provides a flexible source of income during term. For GCSE-level tuition, which constitutes around 60% of the platform's demand, Daniel began by charging £18 per session, of which he received £10 after platform deductions. Tutors price their lessons according to bands, and can raise their prices after acquiring sufficient experience.

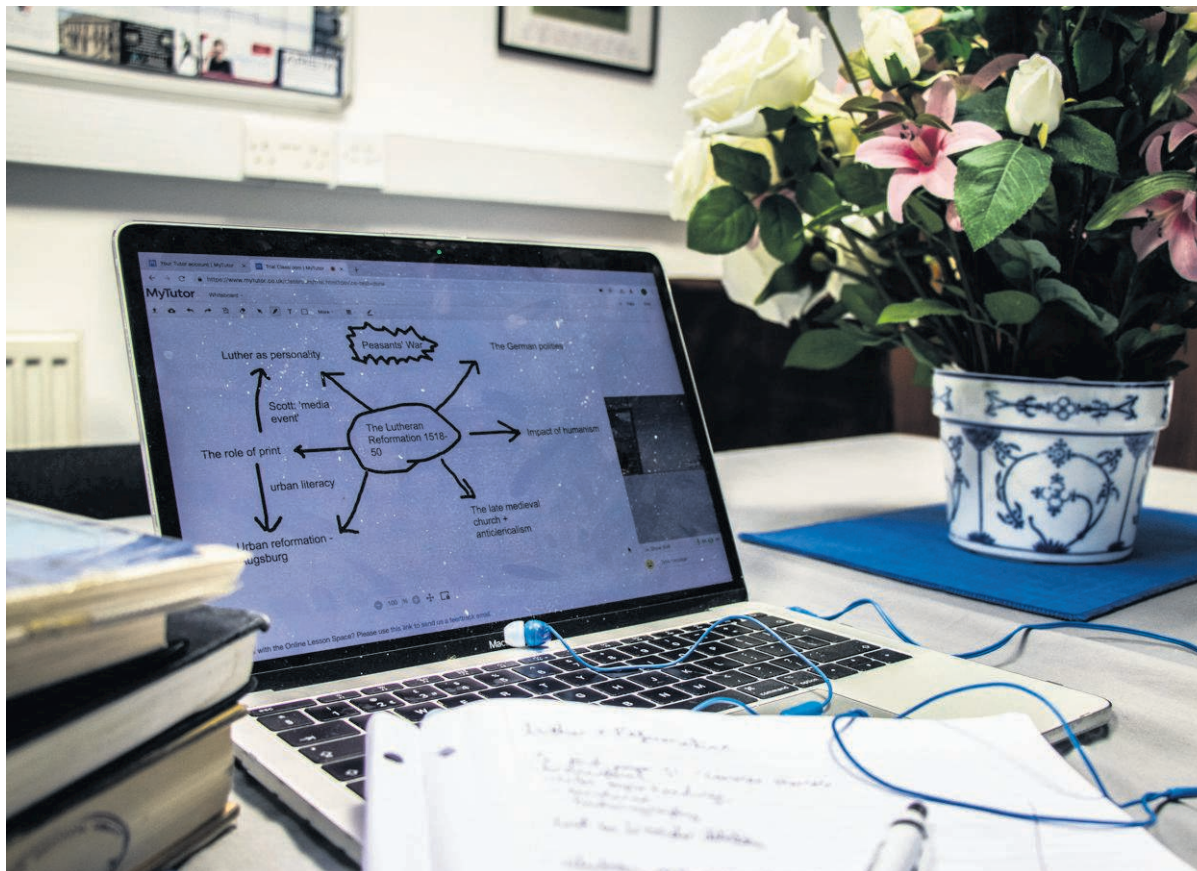
The minimum rate of hourly earnings of online tutoring is therefore higher than that of most other forms of work available to students. Wages at college bars vary between colleges, with Downing paying £8.50 per hour while Emmanuel offer just £5.90 per hour.

One student, who wished to remain anonymous, earned £30 an hour tutoring the International Baccalaureate on Elite IB. Their clients, who were mostly international students, paid between £40 and £45 for each session. "I have no intention of becoming a teacher – but it pays well", they told Varsity.

The platform selects tutors on the basis of academic credentials and a video interview. "If you're at Cambridge they basically give you a place on the platform", they said, adding that mentioning their institution in introductory messages helped them gain clients.

A University spokesperson stated that "no one should feel compelled to take extra work on because of financial difficulties. The University runs its own mentoring schemes as part of its widening participation and outreach activities and many students are actively involved in these."

According to the Co-Founder of MyTutor, James Grant, by mitigating travel costs and increasing the pool of tutors, online tutoring also provides a much



“  
I basically  
just used  
my IB notes  
”

cheaper service for tutees: "I see it as an important part of making education more accessible."

"These students are sharing expertise which is there for just a few years, because most people don't want to become teachers necessarily", he said, arguing that while "earning some money on the side can be really useful to pay maintenance costs, a lot of our tutors do it because they like helping people."

When asked to evaluate the quality of their provision, the students contacted by Varsity were sceptical about their performance. "Sometimes people think they're going to, you know, 'make a difference', but with online tutoring you just don't have the same connection with the person you're tutoring", Daniel said. "If it was someone you were teaching face-to-face, you'd have much more of a desire to see them do well."

While Elite IB states on its website that "we expect every tutor who approaches us to have extensive tutoring experience and outstanding testimonies from former students," the student did not have any teaching experience before applying and has no intention of becoming a teacher. "We would go through past paper questions and anything they were confused about in class," they said. "I basically just used my IB notes."

Marius Sheldon, Growth Manager at MyTutor, told Varsity that as a "market-place business", MyTutor uses a consumer-led review service which has "very direct implications for the tutor to do work in the future." Of 92,520 tutor reviews on the MyTutor website, 89,408 (97%) were rated '5 stars'.

Varsity also got in touch with first-years who had used online tutoring before arriving at Cambridge. One maths

▲ **Much of the tutoring undertaken by Cambridge students takes place via online platforms** (OLIVER RHODES)

student, who wished to remain anonymous, used both a home tutor and a freelance online tutor to assist in preparations for the Sixth Term Examination Papers (STEP), which must be sat as part of a conditional offer to study Maths at Cambridge.

They paid their home tutor £30 per two-hour session, and their online tutor £70 per one-hour session. "When you're at school, since you're with a wide range of abilities, it's hard for teachers to tutor you individually, but what I was hoping with online tutoring was that I could have someone going at my pace", they said.

The online tutor, who had previously been a lecturer at LSE before establishing their own tutoring website, "taught everyone in the same way – we all did the same questions and she had the same notes for all of us." Sessions were conducted as group video calls with other students. "I never got to the point where

I felt like I could ask anything, because of the time pressure: one hour meant one hour", they said.

By contrast, their home tutor, a former university lecturer, "just did it in his house – it was like a supervision and got very conversational at times. I got the chance to ask a lot of questions."

Online tutoring is becoming a wider part of students' efforts to access higher education. "It's surprising how much it often comes from the kids [rather] than from the parents", argues Daniel, who described a "massive range" of backgrounds among his clientele. "I'd assume that parents from wealthy backgrounds would want someone face-to-face, because as far as tutoring goes, my tutoring is cheap as hell."

While MyTutor does not hold data on the demographics of its users, Grant told Varsity that the removal of geographical barriers to tuition has ultimately increased the supply of tutors and "democratised learning". Over 300 schools use MyTutor to complement classroom teaching, constituting around 45% of the company's business. "If you think about schools, especially outside major cities, they're not going to be able to provide one-to-one support for a physics class on a Wednesday afternoon", Grant said. "By moving tuition online, we're accessing the most deprived schools where they're less likely to find the expertise."

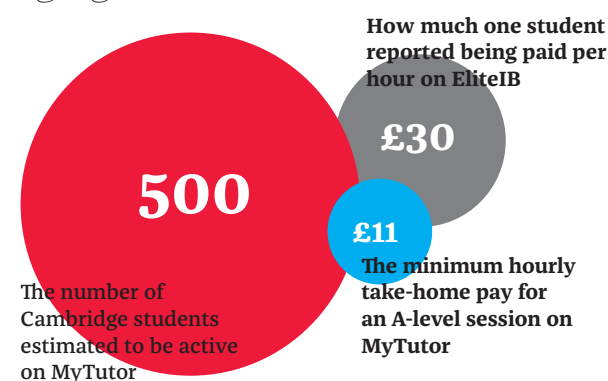
The social enterprise Project Access uses online tutoring to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds access top-tier institutions. Unlike commercial platforms, Project Access is free for prospective students to use.

Kyra Chong, a second-year lawyer at Corpus Christi and the organisation's co-ordinator at Cambridge, told Varsity that Project Access arranges "mentors" for prospective students, who offer monthly one-to-one sessions on the admissions process, interview preparation, and "helping them get to know the university and their subject."

Kyra had previously tutored students from international schools in Lebanon, India and Switzerland on Elite IB. "You have a much more personal attachment to your tutee because there's not that commercial element – you're just offering them your free time."

## By the numbers: Cambridge students and tutoring agencies

MyTutor is one of the largest platforms used by Cambridge students looking for extra term-time income





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## News

# Hacks assemble CUSU elections set to commence next week

**Katy Bennett**  
Senior News Correspondent

With less than a week until campaigning officially begins, the race is on for aspiring student politicians and future BNOCs to assemble their campaigns and psych out the competition.

Nominations for candidates opened on Wednesday morning, and will close at 12pm next Tuesday, with official campaigning beginning on Thursday 28th of February. From next Thursday, candidates have just over a week to persuade the student body to vote for them, with voting taking place between Tuesday 5th March and Friday 8th March. The provisional results will be announced within two hours of the vote closing, with the official results coming at 10am on Monday 11th March.

Student Union elections are notoriously fast-paced and tension-filled, and this year looks to be no different. However, among the broader student body, engagement with CUSU elections has historically been low. Last year's CUSU elections saw a 20.9% turnout, with 4,713 votes cast – a fall from the previous year's record turnout of 22.5%, in which 4,967 students voted.

Students should expect a tight race: last year, current CUSU President Evie Aspinall triumphed over Siyang Wei and Connor Macdonald to claim the presidency, winning in the second-round



▲ **Campaigning at Sidgwick site during the 2016 CUSU election cycle** (LOUIS ASHWORTH)

run-off despite Wei winning the most first preference votes and leading in polls prior to the election. In one of the other two contested elections, Shadab Ahmed won by just over 100 votes to become Access and Funding Officer.

As the principle representative of CUSU, the President leads the sabbatical team, and is expected to oversee the long-term, strategic development of CUSU, and represent Cambridge students both within and outside the University. The other sabbatical roles up for election

this term are the Education, Access and Funding, Welfare and Rights, Women's and Disabled Students' Officers. Each of these roles targets different aspects of the student experience at Cambridge, from pre-admissions access, to pastoral and academic support, along with issues specific to self-identifying women, non-binary and disabled students.

Three positions were uncontested last year: Women's officer, Disabled Students' Officer and Education Officer. These positions are currently held by Claire Sosien-ski Smith, Emrys Travis and Matt Kite respectively. Although these people were the sole candidates for their respective positions, voters had the opportunity to vote to re-open nominations (RON) if they did not support the only candidate in the running.

In addition to directing academic provision and strategy, the Education Officer also serves as Vice-President of CUSU. One of the Women's Officers main responsibilities is heading the CUSU Women's Campaign (WomCam) and providing training for college women's officers, while the Welfare role is shared between CUSU and the Graduate Union (GU) and forms part of the GU Executive.

The position of Disabled Students' Officer, which is currently held by Emrys Travis, involves leading the CUSU Disabled Students Campaign, and aims to advance the accessibility of Cambridge for disabled students. The position was introduced in 2016 following a referen-

dum.

It remains to be seen what policies and issues will be reflected in this year's competition. Last year, Aspinall was brought to victory on a platform of student engagement, promising to make CUSU more accessible for the majority of students. Election platforms this year may serve as a verdict on the current CUSU sabbatical team's success in keeping their campaign promises.

In addition to the sabbatical team, there are also four part-time roles up for election: the two Ethical Affairs Officers, the Graduate Union President, and the University Councillor, which do not require taking a year out of your studies. Last year saw no nominations for the roles of Ethical Affairs officers, so a by-election was held later in the term.

All of the sabbatical officers receive a full-time salary and are expected to devote the year exclusively to their role, beginning in July. The Welfare and Rights role is unusual in requiring students to be in at least the third year of an undergraduate degree before applying – most of the roles are open to second-year students who can take a year out before completing their final year.

Hustings will take place at 6pm on Friday 1st March and offer the candidates a chance to battle it out face-to-face, in front of the students they are hoping to represent. With voting opening (and closing) in less than two weeks, the race is on.

## ANALYSIS

# Is CUSU more democratic and engaging?

**Kiran Khanom**  
Senior News Editor

During her campaign for CUSU President last year, Evie Aspinall cited CUSU visibility and engagement as a key policy area. She criticised CUSU as a “bubble” and positioned herself as an outsider who understood students' disillusionment with CUSU.

With CUSU elections around the corner, it is worth examining changes in engagement and representation within CUSU.

### Devolution as representation

This week saw CUSU Council pass a motion to devolve its structure to two bodies, a ‘College Forum’ and an ‘Academic Forum’. These are designed to “directly address the issues that [students] care most about”.

CUSU's motion to devolve cited a survey of students which received 122 responses, with 83% of respondents saying that CUSU Council should focus on academic issues, whilst 80% said that it should focus on college life issues.

During her campaign, Aspinall said that a key policy was increasing “CUSU's engagement with JCRs and having regular meetings”, which ‘College Forum’,

building off Aspinall's work with ‘Pres-Con’ meetings with college JCR presidents, will seek to address. However, Aspinall's policy for this was criticised by another candidate who last year ran for CUSU President with experience as a JCR president, Connor Macdonald, who said that working groups would be more effective.

Last year, Aspinall criticised the length and bureaucratic nature of CUSU Council. However, at the Council where the motion was passed to devolve CUSU Council, concerns were raised that devolving the Council could increase the bureaucracy of the Council. Members were assured that motions could be brought to Council as they normally are, without needing to go through these devolved bodies.

Furthermore, at the second CUSU Council of term, Aspinall did describe the move as an attempt to “best represent students” rather than necessarily increase engagement with CUSU Council.

Aspinall has also set up a ‘democracy steering group’, comprising the CUSU President, the chair of the elections committee and the CUSU Council Chair. Its duties will include ensuring that sabbatical officers follow through on policy

passed at CUSU Council and encouraging representatives to properly consult their constituents for decisions made at Council.

### Engagement

Aspinall told *Varsity* that “engagement with CUSU Council has definitely improved. Attendance has increased and the feedback we've received from Council members has been positive.”

Beyond this what extent has CUSU's engagement with the wider student body improved?

Aspinall last year said that students often do not know what CUSU is doing for them, claiming that CUSU “need[s] to be in their face”, and promised to be a “really visible” President.

Aspinall has sought to remedy that through the introduction of ‘accountability videos’ on Facebook in January. This replaced previous practice when sabbatical officers would provide updates on their work at the bi-weekly CUSU Council, which tends not to be attended by ordinary members of the student body who do not have a vote at Council.

Aspinall's videos have seen around 500 to 800 views each. CUSU has a membership of 21,594, but considering



▲ **Is CUSU more engaged with the student population under Evie Aspinall?** (LOUIS ASHWORTH)

Council attendance is not in the hundreds, these are undoubtedly reaching much higher numbers of students than previously.

### How feasible is changing CUSU's engagement?

Engagement is something that CUSU Presidents have sought to remedy for years, with previous Presidents Amatey Doku and Daisy Eyre running on similar policies. To what extent should CUSU focus on ‘engagement’, when it seems almost inevitable that a large portion of the student body will feel disengaged with its activity, perhaps due to the more accessible and closer to home work of JCRs?

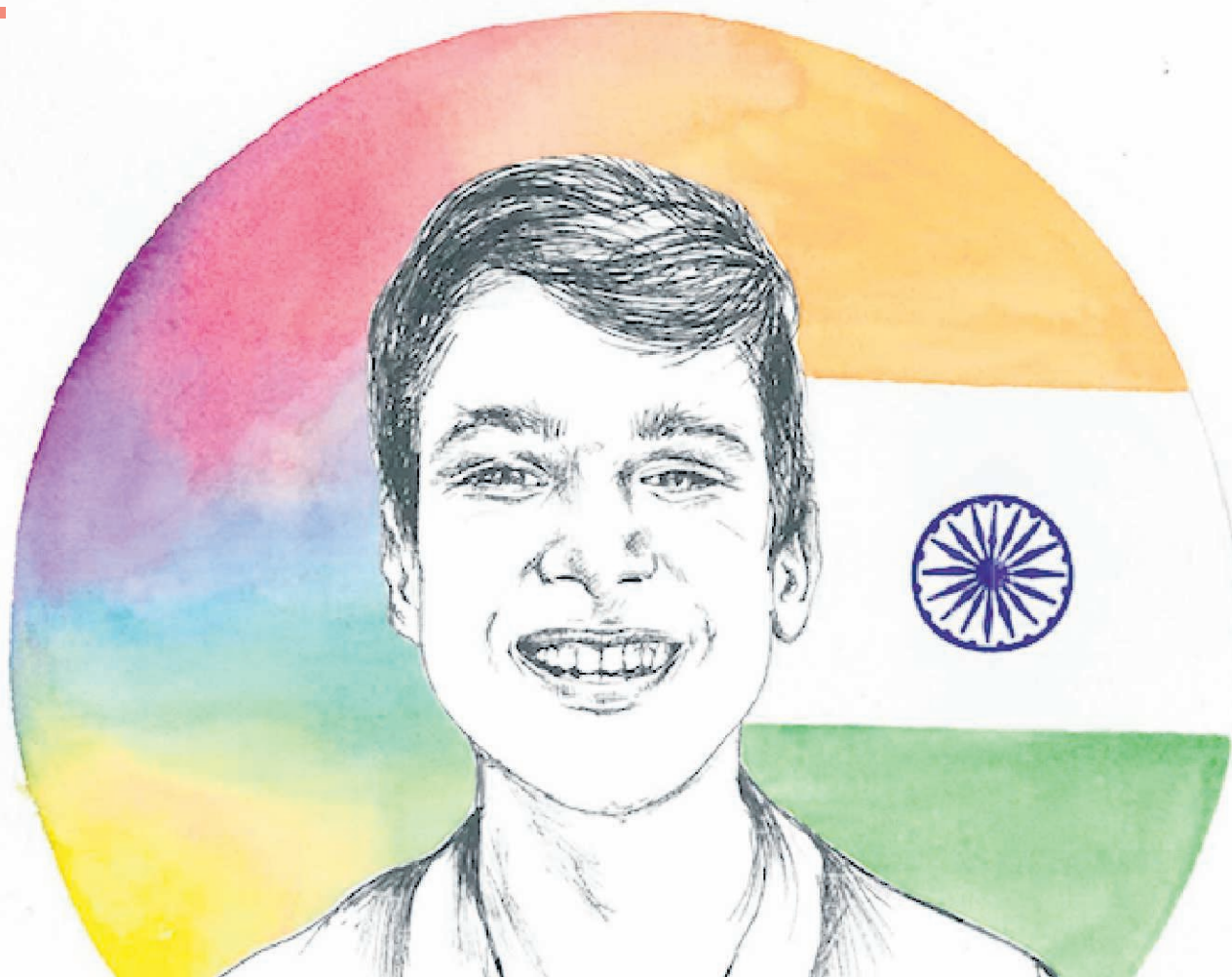
Aspinall said to *Varsity* that “CUSU Council isn't the whole picture”, commenting that “we've shifted our focus on to supporting JCRs and MCRs more” which may help to bridge this disconnect.

The devolution of council to ‘College Forum’ and ‘Academic Forum’ will be a part of this – but the extra stages may make CUSU feel even more bureaucratic.

It will be interesting to see whether any of this year's candidates choose to centre their campaigns on the issue of engagement or whether other issues will take centre stage.



# Features



## Gaypiphanyes & curry conversations

**Gian Hayer**  
reflects on coming  
out as a gay  
Indian man

A couple of weeks before I turned 18, I dragged my parents into the kitchen and finally told them the big news: I wanted to take all my friends out to this really nice Indian restaurant for my birthday. They loved the idea, proud of me for sticking to my roots. I decided to open with that *right* before telling them that I was gay for a very good reason: there's nothing better than a curry to butter up an awkward conversation. But I'll come back to that. My parents were born in two small villages a few miles apart from each other in the north of India. Like many other Sikh Punjabi families in the sixties, my grandparents decided to pack their suitcases and move to England for work and better opportunities for their children. Over 50 years later, my parents are married and have three children, the youngest being myself.

As I grew up, sexual orientation was never something that was really brought up in the household. That isn't to say that my parents were actively trying to shield me from these kinds of conversations, but anything that strayed from the Indian heteronormative ideals I was accustomed to didn't ever seem like a viable option. So, when I was 12 and I started to realise that I was thinking in ways that perhaps didn't conform to these ideals, I

was confused and, frankly, terrified.

For the next few years, I kept this to myself, strongly under the impression that this was just a phase I would grow out of. It wasn't until just before I turned 16 and I was two hours deep in coming out videos on YouTube that the dots started to properly connect, and I had my realisation. My 'gaypiphany', if you will. It stays with me as one of the most exhilarating and bewildering feelings I have ever experienced. I remember saying it aloud and then grabbing a notebook and writing down everything that was going through my head.

It was then that I decided to close the notebook and hide it away. I didn't feel ready for anyone to know and I assumed that I would be just fine if I didn't tell anyone for at least a few years. However, having admitted that I was gay to myself only made me feel far more aware that I was actively hiding something from the people around me. Around five months later, it had gotten to the point where I just needed to talk to *someone* about it and I ended up confiding in a close friend over text. It was relieving to see how positively she reacted, but it didn't suppress my worries for how my other friends and how my family would react.

As it turns out, I would be able to witness my family's reaction only days later, when my older brother, aged 23 at the time, came out as gay to my parents. I was pleasantly surprised to see that they were supportive, and saddened by the fact that he has been dealing with such a burden for so long. I specifically remember my mum speaking to me later in the day about what had happened, and how she felt more at ease with the situation

▲ Illustration  
by Emily  
Whittingham for  
Varsity

“*I didn't want my parents to have to deal with being viewed as the family that had raised two gay sons; ...that would never be able to fit the 'Indian stereotype'*”

having realised that homosexuality is neither condemned nor dismissed in the Sikh religion that my parents had been brought up with.

You would think that my brother coming out and my parents' reassuring response would have made me feel relieved, and so it should have. But in my naivety, I thought that my brother being gay only worsened my predicament. I didn't want my parents to have to deal with being viewed as the family that had raised two gay sons; two sons that would never be able to fit the 'Indian stereotype'. Looking back now, I realise how ridiculous this was, but my pessimism wasn't helped by the slightly stressful process that ensued of my brother and my parents having to inform other close family members of the news. At the time, I found the fact that they had to do this to be quite dramatic, but now I can see that I was completely missing the point. My brother was one of first people in my extended family to come out as gay, so there wasn't really a set way to go about the situation. In fact, his bravery to have these conversations so openly ended up meaning that there would less confusion and fewer raised eyebrows when it came to me discussing my own sexuality.

After starting sixth form, I began coming out to more of my friends, and it wasn't long before I told my brother and my sister. The more people I told, the more confident I grew in myself, and the less I worried about how my family would react. I avoided telling my parents for a while, thinking that I probably wouldn't have told them if I was seeing a girl, so there wasn't any need for me to tell them that I was attracted

“*I felt an immense amount of pride being able to come back to India after homosexuality was legalised*”

to guys just yet.

But I knew that it had to happen eventually, and there were so many possible scenarios that went through my head. My personal favourite involved me shouting out 'By the way, I'm gay!' from the window of my new room as they walked back to the car after leaving me at university. Alas, I decided on the curry conversation, a spontaneous decision I had made only hours before.

When I told my parents, yes, it was awkward, but they were accepting and only slightly disheartened that I had told so many people before them (in all honesty, I do regret this). Before long, everything was back to normal, but I felt so much happier knowing that I was no longer hiding an important part of my life from two of the people that I care most about.

Coming from an Indian family, I understand how incredibly fortunate I am for the lack of adversity I have faced in my coming out experience. This hit home when I returned to India with my family for the first time in six years this past Christmas for a wedding. Visiting my dad's village, I began to imagine how different both mine and my brother's lives would have been if our grandparents hadn't moved to England half a century ago. There is still so much progress to be made to overcome the taboo that is deeply instilled in the country's culture. That being said, I felt an immense amount of pride being able to come back to India after homosexuality was legalised in September of last year: a moment that made two integral parts of my identity feel closer than ever.



## Features

## Diasporic afterlives



## Jonathan Chan reflects on celebrating Lunar New Year in Cambridge

The first Lunar New Year I celebrated in Cambridge crept up imperceptibly. I remember when I realised I had no idea the new year was approaching. I was in the dining hall when a friend from home asked how I was spending it. I checked my phone and leapt at the date. It was new year's eve. There were no aural or physical markers around me to suggest that anything celebratory was afoot. The franticness of each day did not seem to abate. It was disconcerting to be reminded of my severance from the familiarity of home, an absence of the usual flashes of red and promises of rest.

Having grown up in Singapore, where the Chinese constitute an ethnic majority, the imminence of the new year's festivities was always made apparent by the gaudy red streamers that adorned shopping malls, the nasal trill of festive music in public spaces, the surreptitious appearance of oranges and snacks in my family's living room. The new year brought two consecutive public holidays in Singapore, in which there always remained the anticipation of having a long stretch of days without school. While neither of my parents are from Singapore, they parents each experienced a variation of the Lunar New Year in the contexts they grew up in- Chinese communities in Malaysia for my father, the

“In every Lunar New Year there is remembering and forgetting, imagining and reimagining what it is to be ‘Chinese’”

cacophony of festive Hong Kong streets for my Korean mother. The nexus of our upbringings brought its own set of expectations- new clothes, reunion dinners with friends and family, an impetus to reflect on the year that had just passed.

While the Gregorian calendar prevails as the global arbiter of measuring years, the communities of the East Asian cultural sphere, a broad designation referring to people of Chinese, Korean, or Vietnamese descent, continue to adhere symbolically to the lunisolar calendar. Based on the cycle of the moon, the calendar governs holidays and the selection of auspicious days for events such as weddings or funerals. The boundaries of the Lunar New Year shift every year and accompanying, the festivities held in accordance with it. The peculiarity of my experience was not only one of forgetting its approach, but also of forgetting the customs accompanied it at all. This experience is not particular to me or other international students of Chinese descent, but rather to entire generations of diaspora who have grown up beyond the bounds of the idealised cultural home of ‘China’.

A number of cataclysmic events resulted in the supergenerational displacements of the Chinese through the 19th and 20th centuries. Civil wars, starvation, foreign invasions, and political corruption galvanised emigration to work in places such as the Americas, Australia, South Africa, Southeast Asia, and Zealandia. In *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, Lynn Pan writes that Chinese coolie emigration began after slavery was abolished throughout the British possessions, with

▲ Family reunions are substituted by dinners at the Chinese restaurants that dot Regent Street (SHEILA RUSSELL)

“I see a new anxiety in Cambridge as my friends and I try to make sense of the season”

desperate European merchants replacing African slaves with indentured laborers from China and India. As cultural theorist Ien Ang writes, “Diasporas are transnational, spatially and temporally sprawling sociocultural formations of people, creating imagined communities whose blurred and fluctuating boundaries are sustained by real and/or symbolic ties to some original ‘homeland’”.

I find a familiar narrative in tracing my paternal family's history, the story of my ancestors fleeing from China and landing on the banks of the Klang River in Malaysia in 1880 where they built a hut and set up a home.

The passage of time has brought me and my cousins successively further from some kind of ‘cultural core’ as we've settled in Singapore or the United States, with each Lunar New Year revealing anxieties of what ought to be preserved. A Singaporean upbringing yields the practice of *yusheng*, the tossing of a salad in which each ingredient bears some kind of symbolic importance relating to prosperity. A Christian upbringing gives a religious inflection to the notion of ‘blessings’, one contingent less on materialistic aspiration but more on gratitude toward material providence. Lunar New Year in Singapore becomes a syncretic celebration, one conscious of a broader multiethnic context and a willingness to distinguish ourselves from China.

There are drastic differences in thinking through ‘Chineseness’ in terms of Singaporean centrality and British marginality. I see a new anxiety in Cambridge as my friends and I try to make sense of

the season. The first things to disappear are red packets- none of us are married so there's no reason for us to give out money. Spring cleaning (to sweep out the bad luck) disappears under the never-ending list of tasks that are set before us. It may slip our minds as to whether our debts have been paid off or if our decorations have been hung. Certain celebrations are a little more grandiose- gala dinners with drinks, gambling, and lion dances.

Others are more modest affairs. Big family reunions are substituted by group dinners at the Chinese restaurants that dot Regent Street or the simultaneous hot pot dinners in the comfort of college kitchens. Our tongues tumble as we try and remember the *chengyu* (a type of traditional Chinese idiom) that are apt for the season. Embedded in these practices are the stories we tell to reassure ourselves of a sense of cultural belonging, an appeal to an idealisation from which we have long found ourselves separated. In every Lunar New Year there is remembering and forgetting, imagining and reimagining what it is to be ‘Chinese’.

The 5th of February 2019, a Tuesday, was the first day of the Lunar New Year. I FaceTimed my family. My mother wore a red blouse and my brothers modelled new shirts. My dad wandered into my brother's room and was pleasantly surprised to see me on his screen. They were about to depart for an afternoon of visiting. I would soon leave for lectures. I shut my laptop screen and let the silence settle, but not for too long. Cambridge had its own festivities in store.



# Escaping competitive anorexia

**Cordelia Sigurdsson** on the dangerous competitive element of eating disorders

*Content note: This article contains detailed discussion of anorexia and physical illness, along with recovery*

I was trying to explain to a friend what it is like to be so tired, ill, weak and thin. He said – “But how do you even do that? How could you not be able to move and still not eat? Why didn’t you just stop?” This is a perfectly valid and very logical question. If you’ve been threatened with hospital admission, if you’re so weak you cannot move – why wouldn’t you stop?

The plain truth is that for some, you can’t. When you starve yourself for over a year, your brain becomes entirely consumed by thoughts of food: what you will eat, what you won’t, when you next will, who you’ll be eating with. You begin to develop all kinds of strange food rules. For example, not eating after 7pm, no carbs in at least one meal a day, or perhaps the strangest – I used to refuse to eat dinner unless it could fit inside four leaves of lettuce. I was entirely obsessed.

There was one point where I could list everything my best friends had eaten for lunch in a week. I knew the calories in everything. I couldn’t concentrate on anything because anorexia had become my mind – it had taken over.

My mind raced constantly with

thoughts of food and food alone. It was exhausting. Anorexia is a form of self-harm, a reflection of a dissatisfaction in yourself and in your external circumstances. Yet, perhaps one of the worst aspects of it is its competitive nature which fuels this *can’t stop, won’t stop* mind-set. Not eating, for that point in your life, feels like winning. Why? Looking at it from an outsider’s perspective, surely hurting your body so much can only feel like losing. But it doesn’t. With anorexia, at first it’s a competition with yourself – how much weight can you lose, can you eat less food than the day before, run further, burn more calories?

Then, it becomes a competition with all the people who are concerned about you. Looking them in the eyes and still refusing to eat, no matter what they say, somehow feels good – like a little win.

Finally, it becomes a competition with other people who suffer with anorexia. A lot of anorexic people want to be the best – that’s why you keep going, keep continuing not to eat and to over exercise when really you desperately need to stop. The trouble is that there will always be someone who has been in hospital for longer, had more out patient admissions. This mind-set is disgustingly encouraged by ‘Pro -Ana’ websites – which I urge everyone never to visit.

There becomes a moment at some point in an eating disorder that you envy these very ill people, the people confined to a hospital bed being fed through a tube in their arm.

Sounds crazy right? Well, it is. You’re not yourself. By this point your mind is almost entirely anorexia. Anorexia is



▲ Illustration by Kate Towsey for Varsity

winning because you are dying. This is why it’s so hard to stop, because it feels like anorexia has won. To surrender to it seems the easiest option. Don’t get me wrong; there’s a small part of you left in your brain that is desperately screaming for help. I used to run a lot when I was most ill – miles and miles, without eating anything – and sometimes I found myself wishing someone would jump out of one of the passing cars, shake me and tell me to please, please stop. It’s such a hard mind-set to understand – you have to have lived it to really get it. Your body gives up on you – my hair fell out, my white blood cell count was so low I probably wouldn’t have been able to fight off an infection, I didn’t have periods and my heart rate was very low.

I was scarily skinny, but it still felt like winning. Part of recovery then is turning this idea around in your mind: to win is to beat anorexia, and live your life. To lose is to allow it to win, and to kill you.

You have to realise that no one can be the best at anorexia – in truth, the person who is best at being anorexic is dead and buried in the ground. They lost to anorexia a long time ago; they never beat their demon. It takes an incredibly long amount of time to turn this around in your head – but once you do, recovery is a sure, rocky, but straight path.

If you’ve been affected by any of the content of this article, B-eat Eating disorders provides useful information and resources, as well as a helpline at 0808 801 0677.

The Students’ Union Advice Service provides a more comprehensive list of support resources.

# Setting aside Nietzsche for novels

**Lucy Fairweather** discusses how reading for pleasure helps her escape the Cambridge bubble

On my shelves normally is a row of folders, a row of library books and a row of books I’ve brought up from home but that are relevant for my degree. At the moment, they feature excitingly-named volumes such as *English Social History* and *The Keynesian Revolution in the Making*. But this term, I’ve added a few more. Books that are in no way related to history, or politics. I read a lot at Cambridge. As an arts student, it’s obviously required and expected, and every week sees me trudge to the library to get out more books that I will, at most, read only two or three chapters of.

Reading the first book completely unrelated to my degree in over a year during the Christmas holidays made realise that I’d almost forgotten how to read for pleasure. Forgotten how to read without constantly skimming ahead, looking for relevant words or information. Forgotten how to read without making notes or checking references. Forgotten how to

“Whenever I want to get away from it all for a day I open my latest book”

read without constantly checking the clock to check that I still had enough time before I needed to start writing an essay.

Reading for pleasure felt almost alien, taking my time, simply following from page one until the end. I rediscovered the joy of following a narrative, of seeing something develop over time that wasn’t a macroeconomic trend, or a historiography. I had to almost relearn myself to read every word, to not worry about what was coming next.

Before, I thought I didn’t have enough time to read in Cambridge. When not doing academic work or the million and one other things there are to occupy you during term, it felt like I should be socialising or simply catching up on sleep. I probably could have read one more thing to increase my bibliography, or started on some revision notes, but that time probably would have just been spent flicking through Instagram or chatting about nothing anyway. This term, I’ve made a conscious effort to make the time to read and read things for pure pleasure. My Cambridge bubble barely extends beyond a twenty-minute walking radius, so escaping through the pages of a book is much needed. So, it’s not surprising that my choice of reading has been travel and nature writing. When I miss waking up to the sound of birds

looking onto fields, reading comforts me. I’ve been transported to the South West Coast path, the moors of England and the sunken holloways of Dorset. I’ve laughed, cried, and been made to look at things from a different angles. Whenever I want to get away from it all for a day, instead of wistfully looking at trains home, I open my latest book. Instead wasting hours on my phone before finally going to sleep, I find myself actually winding down.

Travel writing has given me a sense of perspective. A sense of how small it is, and how insignificant in the long run. The story written by a lady, who was made homeless and informed of her husband’s terminal illness in the space of a week, who then decided to walk over 500 miles, makes my weekly essay crisis pale in

significance. The tales of footpaths over 2000 years old makes even Cambridge seem young in comparison. A tour of Britain makes me realise how small a part of even a small island I exist in. Whilst it’s normally good to feel like you matter, sometimes it’s equally as useful to remember that, in the grand scheme of things, you don’t.

The full-on nature of Cambridge can make it feel like you don’t have the time for anything as luxurious or wasteful as reading for pure pleasure. But as the weeks roll by, it’s made me question how I was ever able to function without it.

► Reading for pleasure is easy to forget in the rush of a Cambridge term (LAURA)





## Features

# You graduated. Now what?

**Mark Robinson** takes on the dilemma that faces most graduating students: Well, what now?

It's here. You're clad in a fur-lined cloak, probably choking on a bow tie and wishing it was 5 degrees cooler outside. You don't care. Because in some strange sense many of us believe that this day will never come. That graduating from Cambridge, that *finishing with Cambridge*, is something which other people go through, but not us. Not you. But it is today and everything's happening at once. You haven't finished packing. You need to say bye to your friends. You may need to keep an eye on your guests. And you'll see yourself six feet under the ground of King's chapel before you miss out on the last free champagne Cambridge will ever give you.

You process as a troupe from your college to the Senate House where you line up in your ranks. You're surrounded by people you lived with, laughed with, pretended you didn't see in the corridor and sought out at every opportunity. People you made and cancelled and saw through plans with. People you love, loved, and people whose backs you stroked as their head lolled from side-to-side in a Lola's toilet bowl. You take the praelector's finger and parade across

“All we can really do when we start to hike along our respective paths is pack well and keep an eye on our feet for blisters”

the Senate House floor. You collect your certificate. \*Poof\* and it's over. From graduand to graduate. Congrats!

Well, what now? A three-shot cocktail immediately muddies your mental waters. You feel a hearty mix of relief, terror and joy. These will be in varying proportions depending on the individual. Practically speaking, most of you will now go home. Not Cambridge home, home-home.

Others, by force or choice, will do other things. I spent my graduation evening getting messed up with my best mate and then couchsurfing until the start of my residential job. Simply asking “what now?” is like going to King's Bunker sober. Sure, you might find a spiritual awakening in that soundscape, but most likely it just shows that you have not thought this through enough. The key difference is that at least on a Bunker night you have a chance of being able to bum someone's roll-up.

Historic You, a creature with worse hair and less fortitude, was launched to this strange land of golden arches and emerald quads by A-levels or IB or some other qualifications. By an eye to the future and enough uni-themed research to trigger a psychological hernia. But recall the other forces at play. The things you did and didn't do. Things you had and have and never had. Probably the expectations of others. What brought me to King's over other colleges wasn't the promise of a socialist revolution or even the largest fan-vaulted ceiling in Europe. I chose King's because it had a

gym, working ovens in its off-site hostels, and music practice rooms where I could plug in a guitar amp. Intellectual, amiright. Understand the difference between what you want, what it's merely smart for you to want, and what you're being pushed towards by the wider currents of your life. Then consider all of it. Look inwards, look backwards. Now you're better qualified to think about what's next.

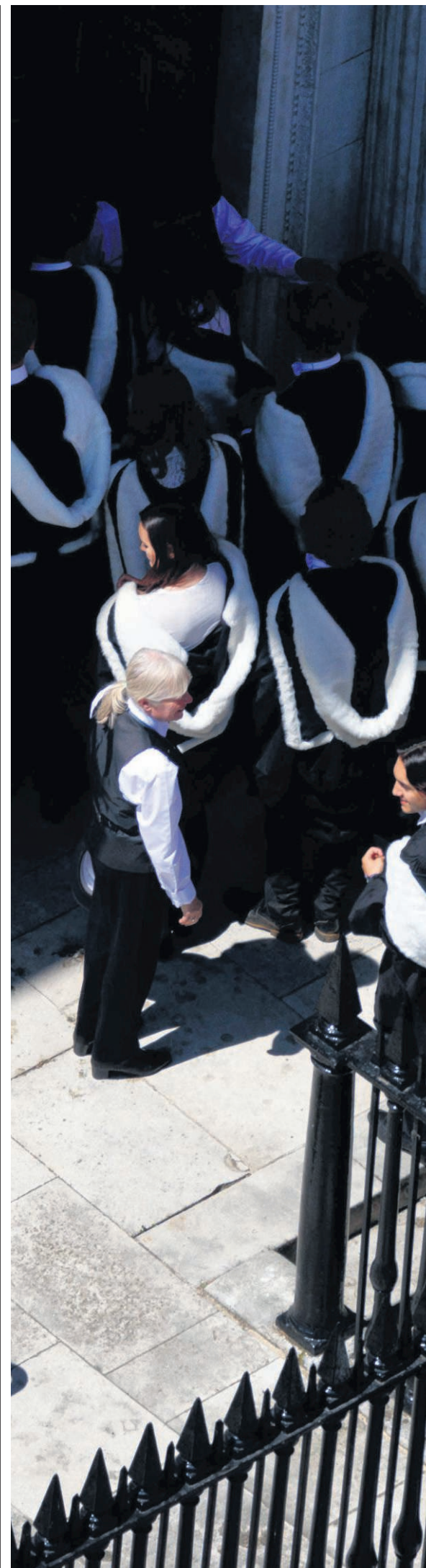
You'll make poor choices at some junctions. I certainly did. It's telling that there used to be a pile of things I thought I wanted the size of Mont Blanc. Now, over half a year later, all that remains of that mountain is a respectable heap of granite. It takes reading your reading list to figure out which arguments you like. Most of us don't have that experiential base to fall back on. You might remember that a few short weeks ago – when your penultimate term was nascent rather than geriatric – I told you that you're about as qualified to decide what to do with the rest of your life right now as a fresher is to write a Part II dissertation. All we can really do when we start to hike along our respective paths is pack well and keep an eye on our feet for blisters.

You might have a vocation. Most of us don't, and that means a lot of flailing around trying to find a cause which will bring in a respectable income package and enough purpose to stave off the existential malaise. Dwell on what has and hasn't tickled your fancy so far. After all, if you're not destined to do just one thing, you get the pleasure of being able to change your mind and try something else. Get into Finance, buy yourself a better life, use your skills in a charitable organisation later on, etcetera. It's a big ole world out there. Just keep an ear to the ground of your own wellbeing and pay attention to what is and isn't working. It's not rash or childish to listen to your brain when it's shouting at you to turn a strange corner. Keep some faith in your own ability to orienteer.

I'd forgive you for thinking that this whole column has been an exercise in saying “everything will be okay” in as verbose a way as is humanly possible. It's true that a lot of words were spent telling you that it isn't always an apocalyptic phenomenon when things go to s\*\*t. But really, all I'm saying is that while you might not know what to do with the rest of your life, might not even be in a position to know, you're still wiser than you think.

Practically speaking (again): you've been walking a long time now. Reflect on the lessons that you learned on the road.

Now, just before you start the next leg of your journey, is a good time for you to pause and catch your breath. So it's here. You walk out of the gates of your college for the last time as a resident, and look back for the first time as a visitor. You return your gown, pause with your suitcase, and think that you should be thinking something poignant while you're actually thinking of very little at all. The sun is out, or behind a cloud, or it's belting down with rain. It's 2019 or 2018 or 2028. The dreamlike property encroaches on the edges of your memories of that wild ride. Now you get on with things. Good luck.



▲ Graduation, summer 2018 (LOUIS ASHWORTH)



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# Coming to terms with sexual assault



*Anna Vassiliades discusses her experiences of processing sexual assault and explains why the college environment can make it difficult to report such situations*

*Content notice: this article contains detailed discussion of sexual assault, doubt surrounding the nature of this assault, and the aftermath of sexual assault.*

**W**as I sexually assaulted? This is the question I have spent the first half of term grappling with. I know I feel violated. I don't know what sexual activity happened. I know I was too drunk to understand what was going on. I don't know if he realised that. Even if it wasn't sexual assault, occupying that grey space is still difficult. Waking up the morning after a night out in someone else's bed is normalised at university. Promiscuity and having fun is seen as part of the university experience, and that freedom can be empowering, choosing to have those experiences with other people.

Not knowing whose bed you're in when you wake up is not. Not knowing how you got there, why you're naked,

“The anxiety of seeing him in college hasn't disappeared yet”

why there's a condom packet on the floor. At first, waking up believing you're safe, assuming the person lying next to you is one of your friends who took care of you when you were black-out drunk. Then realising it's not. In that moment all I wanted to do was leave. Him asking if I was alright. Me telling him I didn't know what had happened. When you finally get out it hits you. All I wanted to do was sleep.

Going to my lecture that day was a blur. My friend asking me if I had a good night. Me telling them what happened. Me spending the rest of the day curled up in their bed because I couldn't bear to be on my own. Them sitting at their desk, not knowing what to say, trying their hardest to cheer me up. It wasn't even until I asked a male friend how he would feel if a girl told him they didn't remember what had happened the previous night, and his response was that he would be worried that he raped her, that I began to process what had happened: I hadn't been able to consent.

Knowing that someone has been inside you without truly knowing that it happened is awful. From what I woke up to, my vagina bleeding in the shower, the condom packet, I think that sex happened. Only he knows for sure if it did. Having that agency taken away from you, feeling like your body isn't yours, like someone else controls you, makes me feel physically sick. The thought of him being inside me makes me feel sick. The anxiety of seeing him in college hasn't disappeared yet. I don't know if it

ever will. I'm at formal and my friend has to hold my hand the whole time because I can see him on the other side of the room. I go to check my pidge and he's inside plodge; I can't go in. He comes up to me in the club, saying 'Hi', running his hand over my torso; I leave the club, I feel unsafe. My friends, not knowing who it was, questioning my sometimes irrational behaviour. Seeing him on nights out dancing with his friends and just being angry at the unfairness of it all. He will never feel the same consequences as I did. He gets to carry on his life whilst I'm dealing with the emotional fallout. He doesn't feel dirty and disgusting knowing that it happened. It's not fair.

When my friends asked me how that first night out was the next day, expecting the standard gossip and instead being greeted with me bursting into tears, the first reaction I got was “have you reported him yet?”. In those first few hours when the evidence would still have been on my body, I couldn't face it. Even now I don't think I could go through any kind of disciplinary process about it. I'm shaking writing this, never mind being questioned about an act that women are not believed about anyways. I don't know if he realised how drunk I was. None of my friends did – I asked someone the next day how drunk I seemed and he said “you were just normal drunk, fairly standard”.

The lines are so blurry. Is it my place to ruin someone's life because of a mistake? What if he does it to someone else? The main reason I still haven't reported it is because I don't want people to know

▲ Illustration by Kate Towsey for Varsity

“Even now I don't think I could go through any kind of disciplinary process”

that it was him and that it was me. If there were any kind of repercussions for him, the college environment means that people would know that I reported him. Would people think I was making it up? I can imagine people saying I was only doing it because I regretted sleeping with him the morning after; that I made a drunk mistake and was taking it out on him. Thinking about what people would say fills me with anxiety and for my own sanity I don't think it's worth taking that out on myself. Being here is hard enough without putting myself through that. I don't know if it's ever going to go away. I don't feel safe anymore in college, especially on my own. I do my best to avoid it, avoid him, but I can't escape it. It happened. Did I become one of the 20% women who get raped in their lifetime? I don't know. Will I ever want to recognise that? I don't know. What I do know is that it has left a mark on me, a memory I can't erase.

*If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this article, the following organisations provide support and resources:*

**Breaking the Silence:** the University's campaign against harassment and sexual misconduct (includes reporting mechanisms).

**Cambridge for Consent:** a student-run campaign to promote consent.

**Cambridge Rape Crisis Centre:** a charity for female victims of sexual violence.

**Cambridge Nightline:** a confidential night-time listening service.

**Students' Unions' Advice Service:** the University's confidential, independent and impartial advice service.



# Opinion



## The closure of Whitworth House is an unacceptable result of austerity

National austerity is responsible for the closure of Whitworth House, an essential place for women affected by homelessness

Stella Swain

*Content note: This article contains brief mention of sexual assault*

**W**hitworth House is a hostel specifically for vulnerable women in Cambridge, and it's about to be shut down. As part of their strategic review of housing provision, Cambridgeshire County Council has withdrawn the £65,000 annual funding which keeps the house running, and, as things stand, its residents will have to leave by June.

The house provides a vital place of refuge for women who are homeless, or at risk of becoming so. For many residents, it's the last line of defence between them and the streets. Unlike homeless shelters, which also provide a valuable service, hostels like Whitworth House provide residential accommodation away from men for those women seeking it. They are also able to provide shelter for more than one night, unlike emergency care providers such as rape crisis centres.

The withdrawal of funds from services like this is not new and it's not uncommon. It is a direct result of Conservative austerity policies on local governments

which have been implemented systematically across the country for years. Central government funding to the average local government has been cut by 40% since 2010, forcing unprecedented savings targets and extortionate cuts to public services.

It has reached the point where local governments have been so eroded that they are having to choose which necessary services to cut, pushing more and more already vulnerable people into dire situations, and onto the streets. At the start of 2018, a government study found that there were nearly 5,000 people sleeping on the streets of the UK, a number that had doubled since 2010. As Conservative government austerity measures consistently defund local councils, the most vulnerable people in our communities pay the price. We've got to start paying serious attention.

Most Cambridge University students won't have heard of Whitworth House. The culture of the Cambridge "bubble" encourages us to live a life that is incredibly sheltered from the issues affecting the town, but we need to stop perpetu-

ating these harmful myths. Cambridge is a community that we are a part of, as students, and as residents of the town. The closure of Whitworth House should be an issue that concerns us all, and we need to remember that students at Cambridge University are not immune to government cuts or austerity measures: there are people studying here who rely upon this kind of local government support too.

These local government funded services, the refuges, the hostels, and the respite care providers, will continue to have their funding cut unless we take action. We need to use the privileges we have as Cambridge students to oppose austerity measures, to use whatever power we can muster to lend solidarity to the communities affected, and to collaborate in campaigning and support.

The wealth inequality in Cambridge is stark, and under austerity those at the bottom lose even more, while the Vice Chancellor of our University earns £431,000 a year, and Trinity settles comfortably on its £1.34 billion in assets. We need to seriously question the division of space in Cambridge when places like

▲ Exterior view of Whitworth House (Varsity Video)

Whitworth House are being forced to shut down but the colleges where we work and live have a huge number of spare rooms that are reserved for conference guests and only slept in for a few nights a year. Think of the amount of space in Cambridge that you cannot access without a Camcard.

The false division of space and communities between Cambridge University and the town is fabricated, and so can, and must, be undone.

Although it might be tempting to see Whitworth House purely as a service, or as a dire example of the effects of government policy, it's also home to a group of women, many of whom have nowhere else to turn. Austerity policies have been hitting hard for years, and it's real lives that they are leaving by the wayside. Whitworth House provides an essential good to the community, and this kind of public service is starting to become a thing of the past. We can't let that happen.

The petition to stop the closure of Whitworth House can be found online at <https://www.thepetitionsite.com/588/006/711/save-whitworth-house>

“The most vulnerable people in our communities pay the price”



# Social class colours our relationships with non-academic college staff

By treating college workers as 'comic appendages' we are colouring our perception of staff relations

Olivia Sutherland

There is an awkwardness about class in Cambridge which cannot be denied. This is only the most recent in a string of earnest pieces of student journalism confronting elitism, and it certainly will not be the last. Yet for all our noise, there is a marked silence in the places where our immediate relationships are structured by social class. It seems that students are unwilling to bring up the issues surrounding social class, which arise in day to day interactions, in the same way that they might raise issues concerning gender or race.

If this is the case with the relationships between students, how much more strained does this silence become when the less privileged person is not a student, but a member of non-academic staff?

We are in regular contact with these members of college, and the fact that they are explicitly providing us with a service, from cleaning to catering, leads to an uncomfortable ambiguity about their status, to which some students respond patronisingly. I myself exhibit

a self-aware awkwardness because of this dynamic: I hop up at the sound of the bedder's knock to start frantically tidying, and I cast nervous smiles at the porters, hoping they know that I don't bang drunkenly on the main gate late at night, but take the side-gate and leave them in peace.

However, as awkwardness often does, the strained silence of Cambridge produces nervous titters. How many times have you heard jokes about grumpy porters, standoffish bedders, or, crime of hilarious crimes, a bedder accidentally interrupting a student during sex? The fact is that student discourse about college workers often positions them as if they were a colourful backdrop of Dickensian side-characters, existing on the periphery to throw into relief the supposedly deeply amusing exploits of students.

We are so mired in euphemism that even the term 'bedder' is oddly equivocal: using the old-fashioned Cambridge jargon, we are allowed to imagine that bedders are just another quaint tradition, rather than our often vastly underpaid

personal cleaners. As the recent creation of the Taylor's Table has shown, over half of Cambridge colleges fail to pay all their staff the Real Living Wage of £8.75 per hour, and therefore set a poor example for students by failing to treat their employees with dignity.

This student behaviour is not necessarily epidemic (as is demonstrated by the student engagement which led to the creation of the Taylor's Table itself) but it is symptomatic. It is testament to a culture in which not gaining access to this prestigious institution through academia can render a person inferior in the social eye; one where the most culturally challenging thing that a student from a privileged background is likely to encounter is a student from a less privileged one.

However, it may be the case that these relationships will be the most substantial connection in their lives so far to someone from a significantly different class background. There is a tendency to take less privileged students as straightforward representatives of 'the working classes', without fully realising how dif-

ferent the makeup of society outside the University is. Therefore, I believe many students leave Cambridge with a skewed picture of the social spectrum, thinking that they have encountered the full scope of its diversity here. It is a worrying prognosis when some of the greatest minds of our generation are set loose on the world so completely untheorized about – and unpractised in – social class relations.

Currently, awkwardness or obliviousness towards social class, and a resultant dehumanising comic strain, characterise much of the discourse about college workers, colouring students' perceptions of class relations for years to come. Students can change this discourse by becoming more self-aware and refusing to participate in a culture which treats college staff as comic appendages to our narratives. A more open discussion of class in Cambridge, with less ostracising nervous laughter, can only take place when students are brave enough to resist these tendencies, helping to inculcate a more thoughtful attitude to class in those who might lack it.

“We are allowed to imagine that bedders are just another quaint tradition”

# Turning Point is too dangerous to joke about – it must be properly confronted

The mockery of Turning Point in America and the UK does not do justice to their pernicious influence

Alex Walsh

The arrival of the controversial right-wing student group Turning Point in the UK was met with widespread mockery. A batch of fake Turning Point accounts emerged on Twitter, some even causing confusion by accusing the genuine account of being the imposter. However, humour can only go so far in confronting a group which has a sinister and extensive influence in America.

Without an official chapter Turning Point has, mercifully, struggled to get off the ground in Cambridge. Instead, Turning Point Cambridge has its own parody account which has lambasted the group as a 'racist, capitalist, white supremacists organisation'. The Cambridge Union decided not to hold a debate involving two Turning Point leaders, who were set to frame the right (presumably themselves) as the defenders of free speech after Turning Point broke their agreement about inviting specific opposition speakers. Turning Point has, however, officially launched in eight other UK universities, including in Oxford under the guidance of a Bullingdon Club member. So far, it still looks laughable.

Of course, humour can be an effective weapon against the far right, particularly when the subject of derision is as absurd as Turning Point. There is much to mock. For example, they frame their movement as a response to 'cultural Marxism' on university campuses, which are described by leader Charlie Kirk as

"islands of totalitarianism", whatever that may mean. This hyperbolic critique of apparently dystopian campus culture reads almost as a parody of itself.

Despite this, jokes cannot be the only effective response to the group's trans-Atlantic migration. Failure to confront the group for its attempts to recruit UK students would be gross complacency. A complacency that cannot be afforded in light of the recent rise of the right across the world, personified in figures such as Victor Orban, Jair Bolsonaro and, of course, Donald Trump. Behind the farcical appearance of Turning Point, something more sinister is at play.

The comparison of this right wing movement to McCarthyism is an obvious one. Turning Point USA even has a 'Professor Watchlist' of academics who they accuse of spreading left-wing and 'anti-American' views, although their offences are often as simple as criticising Trump or arguing in favour of gun control. Even at the earliest stages of its development, a response to this method of intimidation was to poke fun: the watch list was soon infiltrated by fictional characters such as 'Professor Albus Dumbledore'.

As much a good dose of sarcasm may have ameliorated some of the effects of these shock tactics, Turning Point's campaign did lead to abuse being directed towards academics on the watch list. Some of those listed reported receiving a barrage of abuse from Turning Point

supporters, such as Professor Danielle Allen who wrote an article for the *Harvard Crimson*. Clearly, the claims that the organisation defends free speech on campuses are an example of bare-faced duplicity. Turning Point's attacks on supposedly 'radical' college professors seem to reveal more about the paranoia of these activists than any trace of a Marxist conspiracy.

Turning Point does little to resolve the tension between this attack on academic freedom and their own criticisms of no platforming but this is the least of the problems with the group. Even within the organisation there have been multiple complaints about the racism of Turning Point USA members and staff.

However, it would be wrong to simply dismiss Turning Point as a fringe group of Alt-right fanatics. This is not to say that their views are of any merit; they are not. The fact still remains that the US branch of the group has a considerable following and links to the White House. In particular, Donald Trump has said that one of the group's rising stars, Candace Owens, has met some of his immediate family. She has also been applauded by Kanye West on Twitter.

Charlie Kirk, the founder of Turning Point, also has connections with Trump and makes frequent appearances on FOX News, as well as possessing a Twitter following of nearly 1 million. Aside from powerful friends, Turning Point has deep pockets. The organisation is reported to

have a budget of around \$8 million per year and has events sponsored by the NRA. Turning Point USA may propagate ideas that are typical of the Alt-right but it is able to occupy a comparatively prominent place on the mainstream political stage. To hear the leaders of the organisation speak you might well view them as unpleasant outliers on the political spectrum but their influence and visibility reflects a place closer to the centre of US politics. They are not merely a punchline any more.

In the UK the group has already gained the support of Jacob Rees-Mogg, one of the stranger idols of the young right wing, as well as other conservative figures like Priti Patel, Nigel Farage and Steve Baker. Even the widespread revulsion expressed towards Turning Point UK has been used by some as proof that the organisation is needed to champion right wing students. Even as Turning Point UK is greeted as a far right laughing stock, it creeps closer to the mainstream.

Ultimately, the ridicule of Turning Point may not be enough to prevent it gaining momentum. Many of the leaders of Turning Point may be crackpots and sensationalists and perhaps its presence will simply fade away in the UK after its initial humiliation. However, in the current political climate of stark polarisation in the UK, there is a danger that Turning Point may grow into more than just a joke.

“Ridicule of Turning Point may not be enough to prevent it gaining momentum”



## Opinion

# Access statistics that don't treat grammars and comprehensives separately are meaningless

Going to a grammar school sets students up with a certain amount of privilege simply not afforded by comprehensives

Olivia Emily

When I was applying to Cambridge, I came across their admissions statistics online. There is a page on their website dedicated exactly to this. These comprehensive statistics paint an image of self-awareness and a desire for parity that was a shock to me even then.

But if we dig a little deeper, that parity starts to get a little blurred. In 2016, the most recent year for which we have this data, just over 5% of state-educated students attended a grammar school. And yet, in the admissions cycle for the same year, 36% of the state-school students admitted to Cambridge were schooled in grammars. This is a huge disproportion of success rates for those educated in the maintained sector. So, how can we seriously group comprehensives and grammars under the same umbrella?

The success rate for "maintained-schools" access doesn't show the reality: that students from grammar schools are admitted at a much higher rate than those from comprehensives. Full parity in access will never be achieved until we recognise the differences between these schools.

There are big differences between comprehensives and grammars, not just in how one is selective and the other isn't, but in how they prepare their students for different futures. Articles by

newspapers like *The Guardian* tell us that Grammar school pupils "gain no social or emotional advantages by age 14" and that "Selective schools make no difference to GCSE results".

We are continuously reassured that grammar schools are innocuous, but where are the articles and reports addressing the eventual inequalities that grammar schools promote, such as grammar school students making up a disproportionate percentage of the Cambridge student body?

These articles overshadow the discussions we should actually be having about the disparity in comprehensive and grammar schools. It isn't about wellness or GCSE results, but aspiration and preparation for the future. Grammar schools are just as accustomed to sending students to Oxbridge as many independent schools, in fact, in 2017, more offers were made to students from grammar schools than those from independents. Not only this, but they motivate these students to aspire towards those futures: if you've been told since age 11 that you're Oxbridge material, my guess is that you're less likely to worry that you might not be good enough to apply.

The 11+ is not solely a measure of kids' intelligence. Unfortunately, financial privilege also comes into play. Recent studies from the University of Bristol have shown that "the highest scoring

pupils in the 11-plus selection test are most likely to be affluent children from stable homes with parents educated to degree level and able to afford private tuition for their children as well" So how far can we even trust the 11-plus as a reliable indicator of intelligence? It is more effective as an indicator of privilege.

The whole concept of grammar schools engenders elitism and deprives teenagers across the country of the confidence and preparation provided by going to a grammar school, just because they didn't pass the 11-plus – whether because they didn't have the intelligence, access to a grammar school, or the resources to prepare.

But when will we realise that success isn't inherently based on academia and education? A fundamental flaw of the British education system is that it values academia so highly and discredits transferable skills.

My experience of things like apprenticeships or vocational courses is that, regardless of their value, they are frequently perceived as an inferior route. When I was at school, I was encouraged to take more traditionally 'academic' subjects, and to completely stray away from anything vocational – like performing arts, business studies, or media studies – lest it take up too much of my time to little avail. My teachers told me these subjects wouldn't "look good" on my university

admissions.

There is an alternative to this flawed system. Take, for example, the German education system splits teenagers up at a similar age, and allows them to choose various academic or vocational channels, depending on the child's (and their family's) desires. All of these channels are valued equally, with some lending themselves better to a future at university in academia, and others to skilled labour and apprenticeships. This system recognises that everyone has different talents and there are different ways to be successful. Shouldn't we encourage a similar attitude in the UK?

Personally, I believe grammar schools should be scrapped entirely. But this is a contentious debate. There are pros and cons on both sides of the argument, and right now, this simply isn't achievable. However, a short-term goal is understanding and accepting the privilege instilled by going to a grammar school. If we aren't going to scrap grammar schools, we should at least look at them for what they are and stop conflating them with all other state schools: grammars and comps differ in some fundamental ways.

Access has not succeeded simply because more students from maintained schools go to university. We must recognise that there is a huge disparity within the state school bracket.

“Access has not succeeded simply because more students from maintained schools go to university”

## More must be done to ensure adequate and affordable postgraduate housing

When it comes to student housing, the needs of postgraduate students are often overlooked

Mrittunjy Guha Majumdar

Housing is one of the most important aspects of a student's university experience. Affordable and decent housing must be a basic right for every student: without proper accommodation, everything else falls apart. In Cambridge, while undergraduate housing has been a point of debate and discussion, postgraduate housing does not often receive as much attention.

According to the NUS-Unipol Accommodation Survey 2018, the overall average weekly rent for students across the UK stands at £147 per week. Most PhD students rent for a whole calendar year, but this average is seen to be over half of most postgraduate grants. Colleges provide the majority of housing in Cambridge, with 55% of postgraduate students living in University or college-owned accommodation and the rest staying in private accommodation.

Private or college-owned, the key question remains: are we getting a fair deal when it comes to postgraduate housing in Cambridge?

There is a lack of transparency and student consultation when it comes to student housing, with a lack of student involvement in the setting of rents. Why isn't more being done for postgraduates

“The University needs to look at the demands of students more closely”

in terms of affordable housing by the collegiate University? Why don't the colleges more clearly advertise a clear housing rent structure and the possibility of getting those rooms upon admission before offering places to students, so that they can take that into consideration when choosing their college? Many students opt for a college as their choice or are allocated colleges from the applicant pool without knowing about the number and kinds of rooms available, the rent-range and the system of allocation in those colleges. Given how important housing is for students, it is important that these aspects of the student experience be made clear by the various colleges.

The kinds and numbers of rooms in Cambridge have changed significantly over the years. Overall there has been a decline in non-en-suite accommodation across the UK by 7%, which now make up only 17% of rooms. This spells a general decline in the availability of standard rooms which are priced within an affordable range – the NUS believes that 50% of one's grant should be the maximum rent expenditure. The decline in the number of such rooms is arguably the largest cause of concern for the student housing sector in the UK today.

On the other hand, primarily due to

strong developer interests and investor appetite, studio rooms have increased by 123% and more than doubled their profile as a proportion of the stock of rooms in the UK since 2012-13. For instance, the Swirle's Court residential complex of Girton College only has en-suite rooms with shared kitchens, with the monthly rent in 2017 coming to around £670 for a single room.

The University needs to look at demands of students with regards to accommodation more closely. Three of the larger postgraduate colleges, who do not house a significant amount of students, have no plans to expand accommodation even though they are likely to take on more students. The additional purpose-built accommodation services which are so needed must be in defined areas that are within walking or cycling distance of teaching facilities, thereby enabling efficiencies in transport and service provision.

There is also a lack of housing for postgraduate students with children and families in the University. Although St. John's College has one of the largest partner and family accommodation profiles, with 52 units of furnished accommodation for students with long-term partners and/or children, and Jesus College has 22

such units, most other colleges have family housing units in the single digits.

Further to this, the special needs of certain students, for example the need of disabled students for special facilities, are often overlooked. Welfare support and specialized training, such as mental health first-aid training, is also lacking in most housing facilities in Cambridge, often purportedly due to the presence of college tutors who may not be available around the clock.

Looking at the funding that postgraduate students receive, with a single room rent range of £400-£740 per month, most postgraduate funding schemes offer a stipend, and often students find themselves having to spend more than 50% of the stipend on rent. After paying their rent, students are left with little to put toward living costs.

Many postgraduate students in Cambridge are partially funded or entirely self funded for their courses. Many are international students who have to meet tuition fees of about £20-30k per year with limited funding options. On top of that, if maintenance is expensive, what can a student do? Should the University not stand up for its students, ensuring that they are not negatively affected by such financial constraints?



# vulture

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Photographed by Lois Wright





▲ The band opened with 'Time to Give' a track from their latest album (JOE COOK)

# Black and *White Lies* at the Cambridge Junction

Alex Jones

Over the course of a pulsating 90 minutes, White Lies' show at the Cambridge Junction did not let up for energy. From the moment the band walked on the stage it was obvious that they were there to have fun.

The band opened with 'Time to Give' from their latest album *Five*, and there was enough new material to keep things exciting throughout the evening. But being ten years since their debut album, *To Lose My Life...*, it was comforting to hear a range of songs from their discography. Classics such as 'Hold Back Your Love' slotted alongside the new songs remarkably well.

This being the fifth time I have ventured to the Junction this year, the venue constantly amazes me in its strength and variety. From the pulsing house of Turf to the far-out sounds of psych-pop octet Superorganism, Cambridge has a genuinely brilliant little venue in the Junction that we should continue to support. White Lies certainly made the best use of the room.

In such an intimate venue as the Junction it was nice to see that the band had not stinted on the light show. The setup was absolutely stunning, helping to add even more energy to an already electric performance.

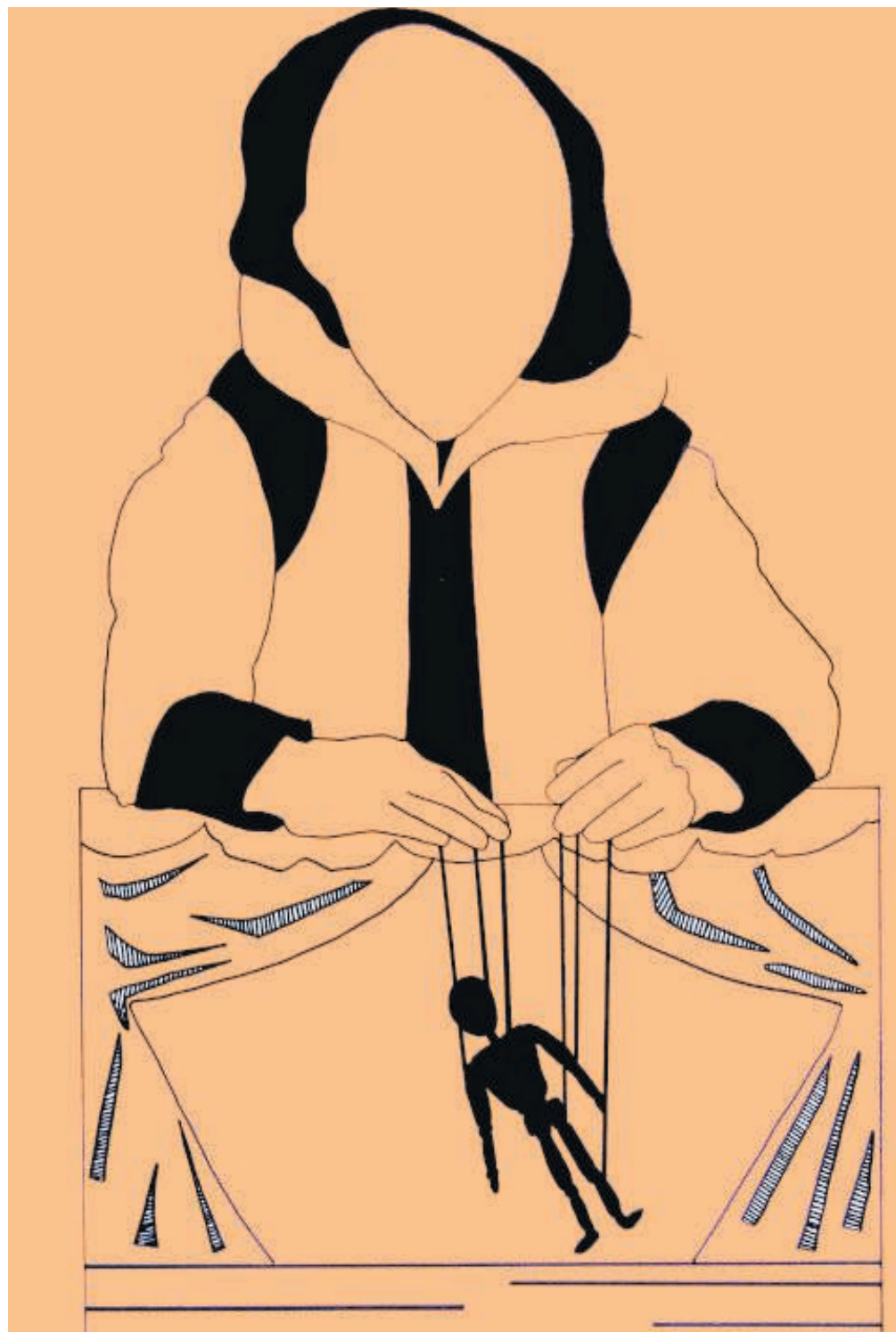
It was indeed a feel-good night, where any fan, whether they have kept up with them since the beginning or not, would have left feeling incredibly satisfied. White Lies are halfway through an extensive world tour - if you want certainty of a good night out, go see a great band at the top of their game.

► Photos  
for  
*Varsity* by  
Joe Cook





# Shakespeare's monopoly on the modern stage



▲Shakespeare's popularity continues to endure 400 years after his death. Dare we ever criticise him? (KATE TOWSEY)

## Alex Jacob asks whether we are able to criticise the Bard

**B**ardolatry, n. - Worship of the 'Bard of Avon', i.e. Shakespeare. (Occasionally used of other writers.) (OED)

When I was younger, and I wanted to be an author, I always thought that the definition of success was to have your own Wikipedia page. A bit of a limited definition of success, right? Success, as I came to realise, is a much more nebulous, and deeply personal quality, hardly

quantifiable by an online dictionary.

But that definition of success, as stupid as it sounds, has always stuck with me just a little bit. And one day, whilst writing an essay about duplicity and duality in *Hamlet* (as you do), I found myself googling, and subsequently looking up on Wikipedia, that phrase which has become utterly associated, and completely inseparable from Shakespearean theatre. It was of course, 'To be, or not to be.' It's a phrase which has had an inconceivably large cultural impact - it's everywhere, being paraphrased in other plays, in popular literature, in our everyday speech.

But you don't need me to tell you that our very language is built upon the Bard's literary

scaffolding - you've probably already heard it a million times from your GCSE English teacher. That's not the point I want to make. That wasn't the part which impressed me. Instead, when I stopped to think about it for a second, I was astonished: here was a figure of such towering literary genius that he not only had his own (vastly detailed) Wikipedia page, but so too, did the very phrases which he had invented! My younger self would have been in utter awe.

Again, I acknowledge: that's an utterly stupid way of looking at Shakespeare's genius; there are so many other ways to credit his literary merit. I'm almost embarrassed that that was my immediate reaction, so I won't dwell on it for any longer. Instead, I'd like to think about it in terms of something much more significant: bardolatry. Shakespeare worship. The allocation of absolute praise to a figure who is so ingrained in our cultural consciousness that it would be hard to go a single day without uttering a phrase which he invented. Why? Why is he so popular? Why has he become this staple of English Literature?

Every single term that I've been in Cambridge has seen multiple productions of Shakespeare featuring on Camdram. There's a Shakespeare play for every season of the year - a frosty 'Macbeth' for Michaelmas, a light-hearted 'Love Labour's Lost' for Lent, and a 'Comedy of Errors' for Easter. We somehow never, ever get bored of reading them, watching them, or acting in them. The peak of any Thespian career is arguably considered to lie in portraying *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet* functions as a byword for romance enacted by illicit young lovers.

It's like Shakespeare is a consumable product - the more we have of him, the more we want, and we somehow never, ever get bored of his plots, many of which we vaguely know before we even see them. I could go on for ages like this. A quick google search asking 'is Shakespeare still relevant?' tells me what I already knew - it's because he was a master wordsmith, because of his eternal relevance etc. etc. But I still don't think that quite captures the exact reasoning behind his popularity.

If you thought this was going to be an article debunking why Shakespeare worship is still a thing, or why exactly his cultural presence is as potent today as it ever was, then I'm going to have to disappoint you, mainly because I'm probably just as confused as you are.

As an English student, I've lived and breathed Shakespeare (whether I wanted to or not); I've read him and about him, I've watched him, I've (over-)analysed him, and I still find myself baffled by him.

In fact, whilst

watching *Much Ado about Nothing* (at the Cambridge Arts Theatre) earlier this term, I was struck by how difficult it is to critique Shakespeare in performance.

By all means, we can critique the staging, the set and the acting, but no one dares touch the writing itself. It's treated with this bizarre kind of reverence - if anything goes wrong with the play, then the fault lies with the production itself and nowhere else. And it's not that I do want to critique the Bard's work - after all, who am I to do so - but I'd like to make the point that just because something is popular and well established within our cultural consciousness, doesn't mean it isn't criticisable. I've seen plot flaws pointed out before (none of them utterly convincing) - such as the sudden disappearance of Benvolio in *Romeo and Juliet*, or the fact that the gulling scene in *Othello* only works for Iago because Cassio is remarkably unclear about who exactly he is describing, or the fact that it's never explicitly stated that the spell is removed from Demetrius in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'.

*Hamlet* (along with the vast majority of his plays) isn't even an original plot - an Anglo-Saxon version of the story existed for centuries beforehand. (Although back in those days, it wasn't strictly plagiarism). To quote Director Joshua Engel: 'I can't think of any other author who gets this kind of treatment. In the hands of a lesser playwright, these mistakes would simply be mistakes.'

So where does that leave us in the modern age? Whilst new writing is still undeniably valuable, Shakespeare remains as popular as ever; he's still utterly revered, and he still holds a genuine monopoly over the stage (both inside and outside of Cambridge) - one which I'm not necessarily unhappy for him to have. And that's a monopoly which we can expect him not to relinquish any time soon.

Like I said, Shakespeare is an enigma, and I don't think anyone, least of all, me, can put their finger on why exactly he's as popular as he is. Instead, I'll have to make do with the conclusion that although he may not be perfect, he's still very much infallible, and that's simultaneously remarkable and infuriating.

▼ The Globe Theatre, London.

(PIXABAY)





# Finding style inspiration in niche childhood cartoon characters

Marie-Louise James looks at some less-than-likely fashion icons from our childhood movies

Whether a marketing ploy or simply a wave of childhood nostalgia, the past few seasons in fashion have seen a lot of cartoon collaborations. Designers can't seem to get enough, from streetwear Betty Boop motifs to Mickey Mouse tennis polos. Disney in particular has reigned over recent fashion brand collaborations, including H&M x Moschino, Lacoste, Coach, Levi's, and Uniqlo.

But rather than go for the classic Disney characters everyone knows, and because we're in Cambridge, why not look to some more niche (though equally fashion-savvy) cartoon characters for inspiration? Give it a go.

**Captain Haddock:** Cantankerous yet lovable, the pipe-smoking and whiskey-loving Captain Haddock is one of the most popular characters in the Belgian comic book series *The Adventures of Tintin*. Not only does his character have an incredible amount of depth and growth in the stories, but he also has an impressive wardrobe to boot.

Haddock's style is a combination of seafaring and luxury. As Tintin's mariner friend, he mostly wears nautical pieces: fisherman caps, Fair Isle jumpers, jackets studied with gold buttons, and weathered orange combat boots. Yet as resident of the ancestral family estate Marlinspike Hall—or in French, *Le château de Moulinsart*—he has an array of fur-lined coats, calf-leather brogues, and pinstripe bathrobes.

As a possible contender for my style icon of 2019, Haddock has many wardrobe pieces that can be seen in trends today. Greek fisherman hats and newsboy caps are ubiquitous. The

taboo

of wearing blue with black is a thing of the past. And just take a look at Tommy Hilfiger x Gigi Hadid Spring 2018, a nautical collection that seems to only use sailor caps, embroidered anchor motifs, and chunky knits. Meanwhile, Ralph Lauren embellishes countless blazers and turtlenecks with gold anchor buttons. Even Kim Kardashian was spotted wearing an orange faux fur stole in Heathrow Airport. Haddock did it first!

**Anastasia:** The 1997 animated musical film tells the story of Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna of Russia, known by legend as one of the only survivors of the Romanov family. Whether the story has any historical truth or not is another matter.

In fact, I prefer Anastasia's bundled up look as she escapes from Rasputin to Paris to her glamorous Parisian royal ensembles, mostly because the outfit's components are all androgynous—very *Comme des Garçons*. Having just left the orphanage in which she grew up, Anastasia throws on whatever will keep her warm in a Russian winter.

What looks like a long, burlap tunic is actually a *kosovorotka*, or Russian men's peasant shirt. The band collar of the *kosovorotka* is sometimes embroidered, and the buttons are often set asymmetrically. Here the yellow ochre complements the overall earth-tone colour palette of the outfit—a nice contrast for bleak snowy days—with military greens, warm browns, and occasional touches of grey to break things up a bit.

And finally, the coat. It's the centrepiece of the outfit: warm and well cut, loden-meets-robe, boxy with strong lapels. Celine and Max Mara would be envious. Topped off with a baker-boy hat and lace-up boots, the look becomes even more chic. Slightly bohemian, slightly minimalist and very effortless: look out Paris, Anastasia is coming to your next fashion week!

**Grumpy:** Resum-

ing with less likely sources for fashion inspiration, we have Grumpy from Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the original old school Disney princess film from 1937. Why choose Grumpy as our fairy-tale fashion icon over the other six dwarves? Although all seven can be commended for their colourful outfits, Grumpy has the *je ne sais quoi* that makes for a true style rebel.

Grumpy's signature red-and-brown ensemble has a lot of details which can be picked up in fashion today. A belted jacket, for example, is a great styling trick that has gained traction in the past few seasons. While belts were formerly assumed to cinch the waist with a pair of jeans or a skirt, they can now simply be worn over a blazer or coat. Featuring a statement gold buckle and black leather number, Grumpy's outfit puts waistbands on centre stage before Gucci belts were even a thing.

Grumpy's red tunic has something very street-style about it. With patchwork elbows and an oversized sartorial fit, the baggy silhouette emulates the exaggerated proportions featured by brands like Vetements or Maison Margiela. Grumpy also rocks a monochromatic colour match with his tan slacks and slip-on shoes, all accessorized with a coordinating beanie. Now that's attention to detail. Snow White's puffy sleeved and popped collar potpourri of an outfit doesn't stand a chance.

**Lucky Luke:** Adding another Franco-Belgian cartoon character to our list of comic strip style inspo, Lucky Luke has mastered the cowboy look. His unchanging style recipe is a white broad-brimmed hat, black vest, bandana, yellow shirt, skinny jeans, and a pair of brown leather boots (let's not forget the belt, too). Lucky Luke's primary colour palette is particularly bold and eye-catching: mixing bright shades of blue, yellow and red can seem like a challenge, but Lucky Luke shows us how it's done.

The key to a colour-blocked outfit lies in the way it's accessorised: for Lucky Luke, the staples are white leather details and concho hardware. His red bandana adds the finishing touch, be it a more traditional paisley pattern or a silk neck-scarf. The ex-

aggerated stitching on the denim seams adds an extra element of texture and fits well with the cartoon chic of Moschino's latest Spring 2019 collection, where all the pieces were covered in stylised inky squiggles. To make Lucky Luke's uniform more winter-friendly, switch out the black mini vest with either a long black trench or—taking a page out of his book—a shearling brown leather jacket.

And finally, get yourself a sassy stallion that matches your sartorial ensemble. Not everyone is as lucky as Luke when it comes to his quadruped companion: with his voluminous blonde mane and white fell, Jolly Jumper is a horse capable of just about anything—chess-playing, tight-rope walking, and, most importantly, coordinating outfits.

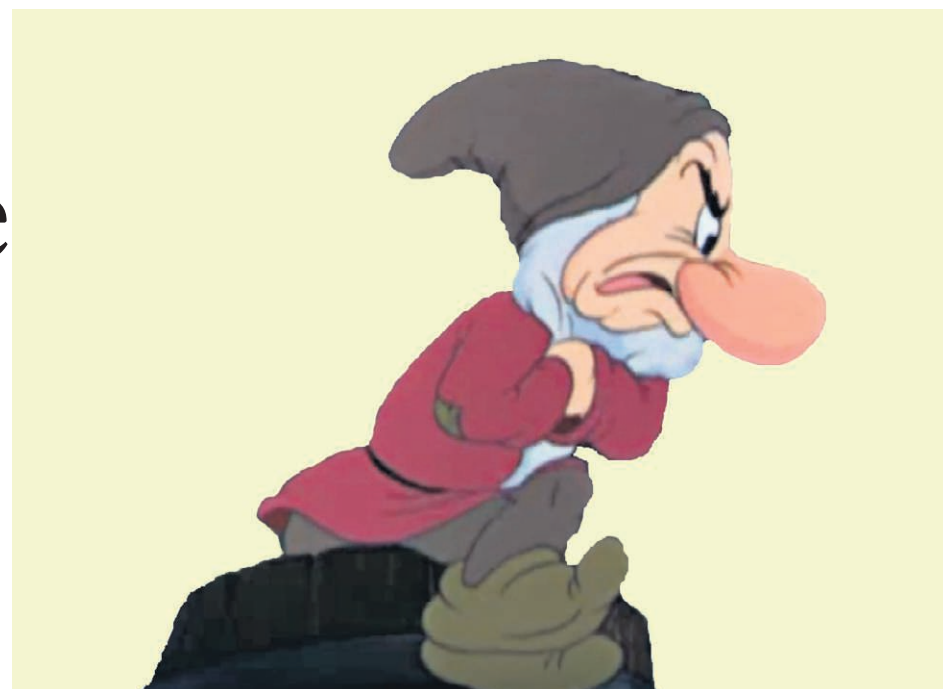
**Tintin:** To come full circle, we couldn't talk about Captain Haddock without mentioning his sleuthing counterpart, Tintin.

Tintin sports a variety of looks throughout the comic book series, but his style is always polished. Just treading the line between smart and casual, Tintin's outfits provide plenty of style lessons: for one, that it's okay to mix black and brown. There's something about breaking that fashion rule—one especially applied to menswear—that

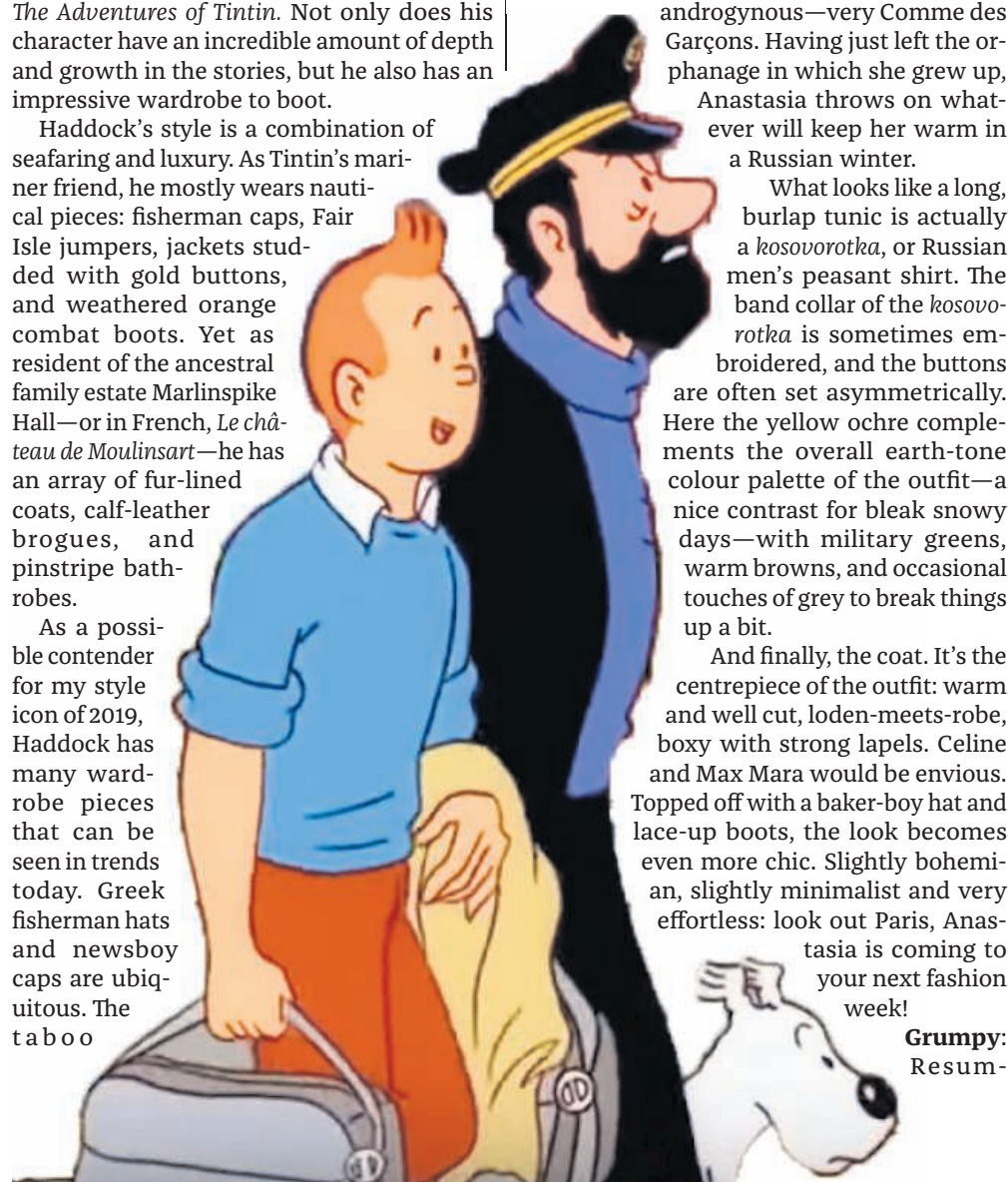
feels thrown together and effortlessly cool. Just watch Tintin slip on his cream coloured Burberry trench coat as he dashes out the door to solve the next mystery!

Usually sticking to the vintage journalist look (the series did, after all, first appear in 1929), Tintin's suits have a relaxed fit, with the trousers gathering around the mid-calf. He wears a colourful sweater over a shirt and tie, something that, when imitated, has the fabulous potential of channelling Diane Keaton in *Annie Hall* (1977). A button-up white shirt and thin cashmere sweater go a long way, and lighter pastel shades of blue and yellow accentuate an otherwise nude-tone palette. Accessorise with monk shoes and a beige cap, and you're ready to fight a gorilla named Ranko on a mysterious Scottish island!

Speaking of accessories: is Tintin's white Terrier, Snowy, really there to be a loyal helper, or is his canine companion just an excuse for a four-legged style accessory à la Paris Hilton? Why not both?



▲ Grumpy, Anastasia (YOUTUBE/AMY COETZE) ▼ Anastasia (YOUTUBE/DARKULIME DARK)



▲ Tintin, Captain Haddock, Snowy (YOUTUBE/SUMAN DUTTA)



# Miracle at Capernaum

Moved by the story of child suing his parents, **Theo Howe** reflects on a powerful drama.

*Directed by Nadine Labaki*  
*Starring Zain Al Rafeea, Yordanos Shiferaw,*  
*Boluwatife Treasure Bankole*  
*Released 22 February*

Capernaum, the Village of Nahum, was a locale in the New Testament where Jesus performed a number of minor miracles. We see the title, also subtitled as 'Chaos', splayed over a view of Beirut's skyline. Both titles make for an interesting lens through which to view the film. *Capernaum* is indeed a story of chaos, but also one of someone seeking to be saved, but miracles don't really happen anymore.

The biggest surprise that *Capernaum* pulled came about half an hour in, when it became obvious that Zain, a boy of about 12 years old who is suing his parents for bringing him into this world, is going to carry the entire film. Not just that, but child actor Zain al Rafeea is the perfect mix of vulnerable, resourceful, and impetuous that the audience doesn't just sympathise with him, we are compelled by everything he does to get by.

It would have been easy for *Capernaum* to become unendingly grim, seeing Zain move in with Rahil, an illegal immigrant and her baby Yonas before she is brutally taken away and Zain and Yonas have to fend for themselves. Director Nadine Labaki still gives necessary weight to how terrifying it could be to have everyone you care about removed, maimed, killed; but at the heart of it, she does not beat you over the head with tales of horrible strife, and crafts a remarkable story.

It's a story that perhaps one wasn't expecting to be terribly interesting from the first 20 minutes. The film truly comes into its own when Zain runs away from his house, going to rough it in Beirut. As upsetting as parts of the film can be, the city is shot with a real sense of love and passion. Labaki doesn't miss an opportunity to show some rough areas where people will gladly enter into fights over shots of Tramadol laced water, but she also celebrates the local neighbourhoods, the souk, the elderly man who dresses up as the fictitious superhero Cockroach Man. *Capernaum* would simply not work without the city of Beirut behind it, and it's been a very long time since I can remember feeling like I was so deeply within a setting.

Outside of the city streets, and into the interiors is where we can find one of very few weaknesses with *Capernaum*. The film opens with Zain in court, suing his parents. We flash forward to this setting a few times in the film as a type of framing device. It works somewhat at the start, but we return to it so infrequently that these scenes in the courtroom feel more like an afterthought, and they create a confused type of chronology.

So does *Capernaum* represent chaos, or a place where miracles can genuinely happen? At points it hints towards total pandemonium, but that isn't all there is. The central conceit would seem to indicate a message of antinatalism: where there is life there is no hope. This doesn't even begin to cover *Capernaum*; perhaps that is part of it, but there has to be hope, there must be hope.

It would be wrong to say that *Capernaum* hits you like a ton of bricks; it is slower, and far more subtle than that. Labaki juggles a lot of different themes, but it never feels unfocused or rushed. She jumps from humour to poignancy with such aplomb that by the end, all of your emotions are spent, and you watch the credits roll, knowing that you have seen something truly special. Al Rafeea and Boluwatife Treasure Bankole, who plays the baby Jonas give spectacular performances, and it is they who deserve the greatest credit for how good the film is. *Capernaum* depicts a world where children and adults seem to have swapped roles, and perhaps only through the children can we escape chaos. That would indeed be a miracle.

► **Zain Al Rafeea gives a startling performance as a child suing his parents for bringing him into the world (top left corner)**

(YOUTUBE/  
 SONY PICTURES CLASSICS)

“Does Capernaum represent chaos, or a place where miracles can genuinely happen?”





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# Dragged into recovery

Drag artist and student Helena Fox explores the important role that drag has played in her recovery

*Content note: this article contains detailed discussion of eating disorders, self harm, BPD and recovering from mental illness.*

**S**exy. That's how I felt walking up the ADC stairs, every centimetre of my body hugged by corset and fishnets and hot pants and thigh-high boots that stretched all the way up to the 11pm sky.

I never felt sexy before I started drag. I started when I was unwell, entrenched in illnesses that were so much bigger than me, a high functioning mess. I felt monstrous. I felt depressed. I felt angry. I felt too big. I felt too small. I did not feel sexy.

One day, in August 2016, my friend suggested we spent an afternoon trying drag king contour; we improvised with warm-toned eyeshadows and half-dried mascara and photographed ourselves, manspreading to the extent of our trouser seams. I was filled with a sudden electricity. I was hooked.

At its very base, drag has provided me with comfort and a focus during difficult times. If I am feeling low, or anxious, or triggered, to put on an audiobook and paint my face for a few hours proves the ultimate distraction. It is art therapy, art therapy that I can wear on my cheekbones and across my lips.

But beyond that, drag is, for me, empowerment. When I am in drag, I have a new courage, a new voice with which to subvert gender or to make people laugh. I can put on a new face and say the things I didn't quite dare to say earlier that day, when it was me, bare, in my dungarees and frayed, second-hand sweater. Drag is an armour for me. With my eyebrows glued down and lips outlined I am not scared to discuss homophobia, or satirise lad culture, or even just to dance without worrying what I look like. And each time I speak out in drag, I get a little bit braver out of it. I have a little more emotional energy to call someone out for prejudiced language, because I have a refuge, too.

And it has changed how I see myself. When I first became unwell at the age of 13, I hated myself, and I hated myself for six years after that. I had always defined myself for my brains: I was top of the class or I was worthless. Aged 13, I thought I was getting stupid, slower, thicker, and so then it followed that I was annoying, overly loud, and hideously large. Self harm became something which showed on the outside what I felt was on the inside. I found both solace and punishment in food, and another physical expression of the churning sickness inside of me.

I remember putting on some nice underwear and heels late at night and standing in front of my mirror. I told myself I liked what I saw. I think I was lying to myself. Maybe I thought I looked better because now I was in control of my food and so in charge of what the mirror said. I wasn't. I was delusional, a hollow ghost behind my eyes, no matter what underwear I wore or how I changed what I ate or how harshly I judged my body.

I was also torn from seam to seam about who I thought I was. Identity disturbance



▲ "At its very base, drag has provided me with comfort and a focus during difficult times." ▼ (LOIS WRIGHT)

“  
Drag has taught me how to collect all of my identities into one, composite whole  
”



is no small matter in BPD. It is not a teenage phase, or a desire to follow fads. I felt a deep and, quite honestly, disturbing sense that I was not who I seemed to be, and not who others thought me to be, and that no matter what I did I could never reconcile the disparate parts of my identity. Was I Helena the outspoken lesbian, or sarcastic Helena, or Helena the performer? I was told I could be all at once, but I didn't feel like any of them. I distinctly remember telling a counsellor that I was a fish out of water in the world, suffocating in the air, but that I didn't know who or what or where else I was meant to be, only that it had to be something other than this.

Drag has changed that. When I am painting myself or performing, I feel able to integrate all of the parts of my identity. I am queer, I am loud, I am creative, I am recovering, I am clever, I am sensitive, I am brash. Even more than that, when I take off my makeup or step off that stage, I don't stop being all of those things. I am a fish who has found water, thriving in the oxygen of being myself. Drag has taught me how to collect all of my identities into one, composite whole, whether I am in drag or not, and I cannot verbalise how significant that is after years of feeling so desperately out

“  
Each time I perform, I remind myself that this would not have been possible if I was still ill  
”



of touch with the world around me, the only black and white character in a technicolour film. Drag has rebuilt me, in colour.

And it has played a part in resetting my thoughts about myself. Every time I experiment with my makeup, I am recalibrating myself. I am no longer self-defining based on my intellect, but self-appreciating based on my imagination and skill. When I am on stage, my scars are but an insignificant part of me.

Drag has also given me the most incredible experiences: performing on the Corn Exchange stage for the Rainbow Ball and putting on a sell-out show at the Edinburgh Fringe, for instance. Each time I perform, I remind myself that this *would not have been possible* if I was still ill. If I wasn't nourishing my mind and body, there is no way I would be able to do any of these incredible things, many of which, all clichés aside, rank among the best moments of my life. I can look in the mirror and genuinely think, *wow, I look empowered*, and I continue to think that even once the wig is off and the false eyelashes boxed.

It may sound paradoxical but drag, while ostensibly the act of reinventing oneself, has made me recognise myself as a whole, and wholly valuable, person, as messy and complex as that person may be. After such a long time feeling truly, sickeningly uneasy with my existence, drag has anchored me, and I will not downplay the part it has played in my recovery.

On the ADC stage, in Pembroke New Cellars, at the Edinburgh Fringe, sitting in my bedroom painting my face, even taking the makeup off with mascara smudged down my face, I am never too big or too small or too clever or too cracked. I am myself.



▲ "Every time I experiment with my makeup, I am recalibrating myself. I am no longer self-defining based on my intellect, but self-appreciating based on my imagination and skill." (LOIS WRIGHT)

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# VARSLITY



# Finding my place in the Fitzwilliam

Connie de Pelet reflects on her special relationship with Cambridge's beloved museum: finding "a reassurance of my place here"

For a few years, the Fitzwilliam Museum has been my place. It has been the backdrop to some of my most important moments here; a marbled place of milestones. Cambridge didn't feel real for a long time when I was at school. I had never visited, knew nothing of King's Chapel or supervisions.

The first time I saw the Fitzwilliam was the day of my interview. I walked along Trumpington Road towards town; past the museum. Its pillars, carved ceilings, gold tipped railings. A manifestation of anything I thought I knew of Cambridge.

On my offer holder day, for a college I had never seen, my dad drove me up from Somerset. My apprehension stretched three and a half hours. When we arrived on the opposite side of town we had time to kill; we stopped me at the Fitzwilliam. I had just read an Ali Smith novel, *How To Be Both*, and was struck by the passage when the heroine bunks off school to sit in front of a painting that her mother had loved. It is a painting by Francesco del Cossa, of Saint Vincent Ferrer, dated between 1473-75.

It is typical of its time, a religious piece in blues, reds and gold. She visits it seven times; looks at it; looks at the people looking at it. I slowed my breathing and thought about this. She grounded her feelings of grief in the painting; I read my own meanings into the oils around me. Smith had solidified something of the significance of the gallery space that I had always felt.

In November, I cycled to the Fitzwilliam with two new friends. We wandered round the first floor, sat on the cracked leather couches, stood in front of painted gentry. Some of the rooms are cased in pinkish marble, flanked by



greens. We were studying Medieval literature, and reading of maidens cloaked in waved hair and wreathed with flowers.

I recognised the strange romance of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* in the Pre-Raphaelite collections.

Here hangs a painting by Sir John Everett

Millais, one of the leading members of the movement, titled, *The Bridesmaid* (1851). It's tiny, and coloured like a jewel: sapphires and ambers. In the centre, her hair streaked across most of the page, is a girl, her chin upturned. Her hair is flaming, her skin porcelain, her hands impossibly delicate. She holds a piece of wedding cake, enacting the old superstition that states an image of one's future groom can be conjured in passing a morsel through a wedding ring nine times.

There is something quite eerie about this painting, for all the richness of its colours. I told my friend it was my favourite painting in the Museum. She seemed surprised but I thought it was beautiful. I bought a postcard of it in the gift shop, and, when I first went home for the Christmas holiday, I taped it to my wall. Something of Cambridge in my bedroom.

In February, I went to the Fitzwilliam's annual Love Art After Dark Event with friends. There were specially

opened exhibits, live jazz and a launch for a student-run magazine.

I gave the caterer my laminated token and stood in an art gallery holding a glass of wine, thinking, *this is it*.

This is what I wanted Cambridge to be: oil paintings and conversation. And for an evening at the Museum, it was.

Then, there was the exhibition inspired by the writings of Virginia Woolf in the first term of my second year. It showcased a spectrum of works by female artists, housed in rooms hand painted with line drawings of dancing women. I went alone, delighted.

Most recently, a few days post Half Way Hall, a friend of mine from home came to visit. I took him to the Fitzwilliam. My favourite room of oil paintings was closed, so we went downstairs and traced case after case of ceramics and glass work. We ended up in the Ancient Egypt room and talked about a school trip to a tiny Tutankhamun exhibit back in Somerset.

The single room we had visited then could not compare to the selection of heavily decorated wooden coffins in front of us now. Problematic as a collection of another country's culture may be, I felt a rush of awe. A sense of privilege at having access to such extraordinary relics of history.

More than that, as I walked with my friend back down the steps at the front of the museum, I experienced one of those hot moments of realisation. I saw through his eyes something of what it was to be at Cambridge.

In the Fitzwilliam, I found something of a reassurance of my place here.



▲▲ Connie looking at some of the Fitzwilliam's exhibits at Love After Dark (Rebecca Wright)





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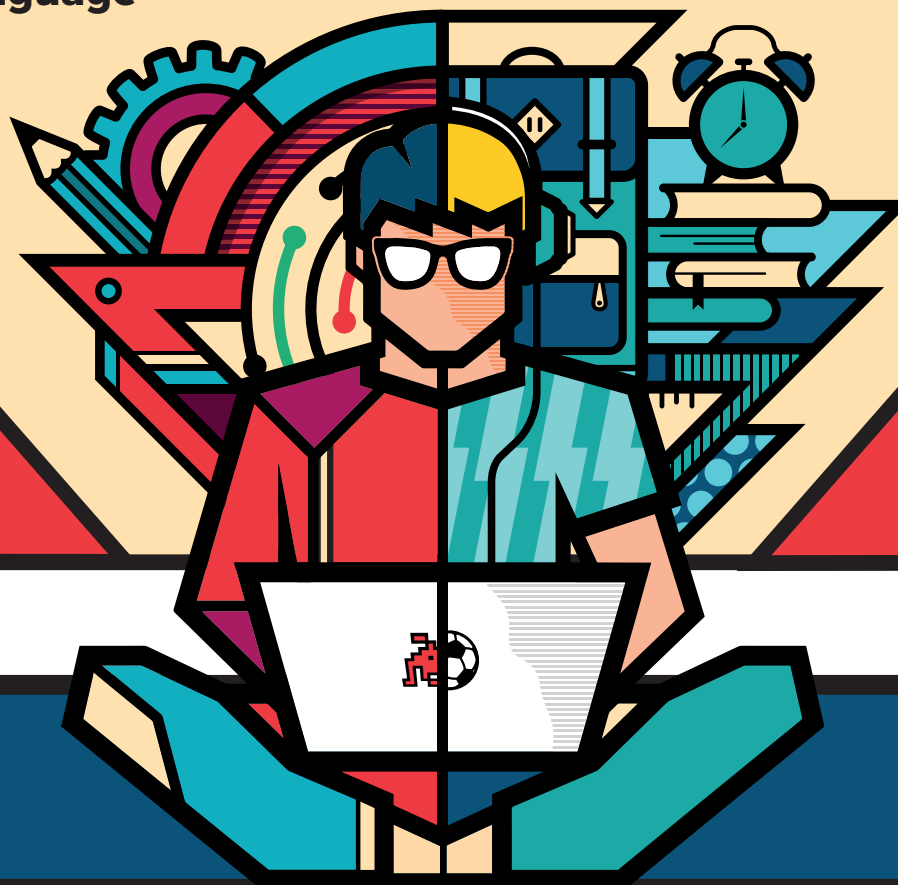


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# Science

## Analogue gravity: empirical evidence or an amusing feat of engineering?



*Grace Fields asks what we can learn about black holes without being able to directly perform experiments on them*

Black holes are far beyond scientists' experimental reach. They cannot be experimentally manipulated. Instead, they are *observed* and their behaviour *analysed*. Black-hole scientists collect cosmic data, and then spend most of their time analysing the data to pick apart different signals. Data analysis replaces the work that would otherwise be done by experimental manipulation.

But for Hawking radiation, an extremely weak thermal flux that – according to a theoretical prediction – should emanate from black holes, observation and analysis are not enough. Because gravitational redshift stretches a signal's wavelength as it moves towards less extreme space-time curvature, Hawking radiation – if it exists – becomes less and less energetic as it moves away from its source and towards observers on Earth. It becomes much too weak to pick apart from stronger signals that dominate cosmic observations.

Black-hole scientists, then, face a problem, because they want to know whether Hawking radiation really exists.

They want to know if their theoretical prediction is correct. But it seems impossible for them to find out whether Hawking radiation exists, since they cannot run experiments on black holes, and they cannot pick Hawking radiation out from their cosmic observations.

In 1981, scientists' inability to detect Hawking radiation sparked the creation of an entirely new field of physics called 'analogue experimentation'. An analogue experiment is an experimentally accessible 'source' physical system that mirrors the mathematical structure of a less experimentally accessible 'target' system. Scientists who construct analogue experiments aim to learn about their target system based on empirical data collected from the source system, using the following reasoning: since the source and target systems are described by the same mathematical structure, if the source system exhibits some phenomenon under some circumstances, then the target system would exhibit an analogous phenomenon under analogous circumstances.

Physicist Bill Unruh, in 1981, suggested using analogue experimentation to solve the Hawking radiation detection problem. He realised that, just like light waves cannot escape from regions where spacetime curvature is too extreme,

“Analogue gravity has been embroiled in both success and controversy”

sound waves cannot flow upstream in regions of a river where the downstream rate of flow is faster the speed of sound. Motivated by this simple analogy, and the fact that it is complemented by a strict mathematical analogy between the acoustic and gravitational systems, Unruh suggested using acoustic horizons in fluids as analogues for event horizons in astrophysical black holes. He urged experimentalists to construct model black holes out of fluids, and test whether those model black holes emit Hawking radiation – from these results, we would learn about whether real astrophysical black holes emit Hawking radiation.

Analogue gravity has recently been embroiled in both success and controversy. It took over thirty years for an experimentalist to actually construct a fluid analogue gravity system and test its behaviour. Finally, in 2016, Jeff Steinhauer published results that claim to show Hawking radiation in an analogue fluid black hole. He took his results as “experimental confirmation of Hawking's prediction”. Soon after, Radin Dardashti, Stephan Hartmann, Karim Thébault and Eric Winsberg, all philosophers of science, defended analogue experimentation as a robust inference structure that *does* have the power to teach us about

▲ An artist's concept of a black hole (NASA)

its target system.

Not everyone agrees. Daniel Harlow, a physicist whose work sits at the theoretical interface of quantum mechanics and gravity, dismissed Steinhauer's experiment as “an amusing feat of engineering” that “won't teach us anything about black holes”. And just three months ago, Karen Crowther, Niels Linnemann and Christian Wüthrich published a scathing rebuttal to Dardashti, Hartmann, Thébault and Winsberg's work. Crowther, Linnemann and Wüthrich argue that analogue simulation is viciously circular as a mode of scientific inference because it relies on the fact that we *think* the source and target systems can be described by the same mathematical structure – but whether the target system actually *can* be described by that mathematical structure is exactly what we are trying to test.

So is analogue experimentation a new way to test the structure of space-time, or merely “an amusing feat of engineering”? The discussion remains open. If it is a new way to test the structure of space-time, then scientists have learned how to look into the structure of the astrophysical world by running experiments on fluid systems no larger than their lab table-tops. Too much to expect, perhaps, but exciting nonetheless.



# Goodnight Opportunity, hello Franklin

As we bid farewell to NASA's Opportunity Mars Rover, **Jess Sharpe** looks back on its groundbreaking achievements which have laid the foundations for future exploration and discovery

"My battery is low and it's getting dark" was supposedly the final message sent back to mission controllers on Earth by Opportunity. On 13th February, NASA declared the Mars rover mission over, after failing to make further contact with the rover following a vast dust storm that cut off communications last June. Over 830 attempts to establish contact were made. The affectionately nicknamed 'Oppy' outlived its intended mission lifetime by over 14 years, changing our understanding of the Martian landscape as the third robotic explorer on Mars – and taking its first selfie.

Oppy landed on Mars in 2004 in a crater full of spheres of the mineral hematite. On earth, these typically form in water. Other evidence for the presence and qualities of water on Mars were swiftly identified, from the discovery of the mineral jarosite that forms in acidic water to crossbeds which indicated that water had once flowed across the planet's surface. The evidence of water's presence has helped to identify promising sites for future missions, and enabled us to begin determining whether Mars could ever have supported life.

There was great adversity during Oppy's 15-year mission, alongside these huge triumphs for science. Oppy travelled more than 28 miles across rugged terrain through dust storms and sand ripples, with routes plotted by teams of mission engineers. The last contact with Spirit – the other Rover on NASA's Mars Exploration Rover mission – was in 2011, yet still Oppy wandered on. Both of these

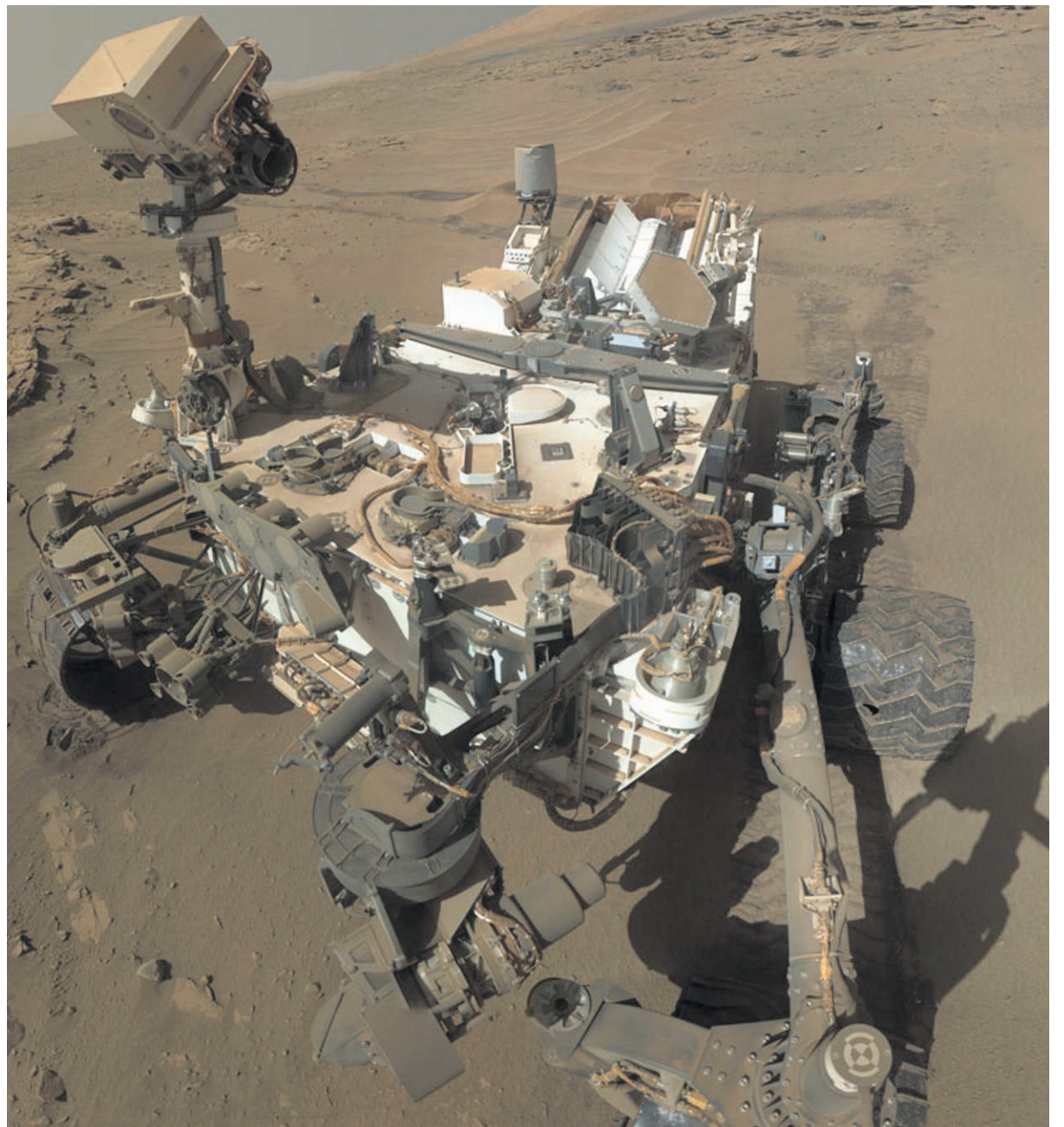
rovers far outlived their 90-day mission lifetime, and contributed vastly to our understanding of the Martian environment. It is clear now that the cold and dry Mars of today is very different from its ancient past, with water above and below its surface that could have once sustained life forms.

Oppy exceeded expectations with its lifetime and discoveries, and set new precedents for Martian exploration. Currently Curiosity is the only rover on Mars, continuing the search for evidence of ancient life. Soon two new rovers will join this astrobiological quest. These missions will investigate areas identified as having potentially been habitable, as well as begin investigations in preparation for future human expeditions to Mars. Rovers therefore have a key role to play in improving landing techniques and investigating environmental conditions that will affect future astronauts.

In July 2020, two new rover missions will launch for Mars. Each will set out to discover signs of past microbial life, with on-board spectrometers which are capable of detecting 'biosignatures'. NASA is currently producing the Mars 2020 Rover, while a collaborative European and Russian programme, ExoMars, constructs another robotic rover.

On 7th February, the ExoMars rover was named *Rosalind Franklin*, which is fitting for a rover off to hunt down traces of ancient life – its namesake Newnham College alumna made key contributions not just to the discovery of DNA but also to scientific work on RNA, viruses and even graphite.

It is also fitting that in the last year of Franklin's life, she had marvelled at the very beginning of space exploration marked by the Soviet *Sputnik* satellite. Perhaps *Rosalind Franklin* will be the first to discover life on Mars: a worthy tribute to the endeavours of space science as well as a talented and underappreciated scientist.



▲ A self-portrait captured by one of NASA's Mars Rovers (NASA)



## On this day in science: Dolly the sheep

**Jess Sharpe**

On February 22nd in 1997, the announcement of the first mammal born through the cloning of an adult cell set off frenzied debates across the world. Dolly the sheep was actually born in July 1996, but the news was held back until the publication of the scientific report on the cloning work, as well as the submission of a patent for the cloning technique.

The announcement had many roots in Cambridge science. Dolly was not the first sheep ever cloned – in 1984, a sheep was cloned from an embryo cell at the Institute for Animal Physiology, now the Babraham Institute, in Cambridge. The possibility of using mature cells rather than pluripotent embryo cells to clone an organism emerged through the work

of John Gurdon, during his PhD at Oxford in the 1950s. Gurdon transferred the nucleus of a mature, differentiated cell from an African clawed frog into an egg cell with the nucleus removed. This nuclear-transfer experiment produced cloned tadpoles, proving it was possible to produce cloned embryos from adult cells. These results were initially greeted with scepticism, but by 1971 Gurdon was working on this nuclear reprogramming effect in Cambridge, and directing an institute named after him by 2001.

Gurdon's work in Cambridge therefore formed the background for the cloning of Dolly. Ian Wilmut, the leader of the research group which cloned Dolly, also received his PhD at Cambridge. Working alongside Keith Campbell in Edinburgh, the group set their sights on cloning mammals from adult cells, in-

spired by the work of Gurdon. The major hurdle in this challenge was convincing the differentiated adult cell nucleus to return to its undifferentiated state. Coordinating the stages of the cell cycle of both the adult and egg cells by starving them meant that successful nuclear transfer of this type could occur for the first time.

The birth of Dolly marked a triumph in cellular reprogramming, as the first cloned mammal to survive until adulthood. Dolly was more than just a scientific triumph, though – she was a living, breathing sheep, who went on to have six lambs. She was named after Dolly Parton, in reference to the adult cell Dolly was cloned from – the mammary gland cell. We can see the wider questions about science in society that even Dolly's name raises. More dramatic social and ethical questions made the headlines in the aftermath of the 1997 announcement, with fears about the possibilities of human cloning. However, the most exciting and promising areas Dolly's birth led to were in the reprogramming of cells rather than the cloning of whole

“Stem cell transplants could replace neurons damaged by Alzheimer's”

organisms.

By 2006, methods of converting adult cells back into pluripotent stem cells by transcription factors which reprogram the cell had been discovered by Shinya Yamanka. There is now vast potential for these cells to be used in regenerative medicine to replace cells lost to disease or damage, as each stem cell can go on to make any cell type in the body. Stem cell transplants could therefore replace neurons damaged by Alzheimer's, produce insulin in diabetics, and repair injured organs and tissues. In 2012, a group of Cambridge scientists published work on the possibility of producing banks of stem cells that could potentially be used to treat most members of the population, without the need for production of individual personalised cell lines. Work like this will ensure stem cell therapies are one day accessible to all potential patients and save countless lives – so we should give thanks to Dolly the sheep for being the unwitting pioneer.



# Are your recycling habits really helping the planet?

*Sophie Cook discusses some common recycling mistakes, and how to avoid them*

Plastic is quickly becoming the new public enemy number one. We are becoming increasingly aware of its impact on the environment, particularly on marine ecosystems. We have all grimaced at images of turtles eating supermarket bags or seabirds with stomachs full of micro-plastics. With so many people wanting to do their part and reduce their plastic consumption, I thought I would bust some myths and common misconceptions around plastic and its recycling process.

The rapid growth in plastic production began in the 1950s, and since then, we have seen a 200-fold increase in annual production rates. By 2015, we had produced a staggering 7.8 billion tonnes of plastic – more than one tonne for each person alive on the planet today. While sometimes this has been for the better (for example, it has massively extended the shelf-life of food), it has facilitated the growth of a disposable society where too little thought is given to what we consume.

In 2015, 55% of global plastic waste went straight to landfill, 25% of it was incinerated and 20% recycled. Of all the plastic waste produced since 1950, only

9% has been recycled. Unfortunately, it is a common misconception that most plastics can be recycled many times over. More often than not, due to the intensive thermal processing procedures used, most plastics can actually only survive being recycled once or twice.

When you recycle plastic, it is first sorted by machines based on plastic type and colour. It is then washed to remove impurities before being shredded into small particles. These are then separated by density, melting point and colour before being compounded and melted together into plastic pellets for reuse. One of the major problems with the UK recycling system is its vulnerability to contaminants. Putting non-recyclable items in your recycling bin can cause cross-contamination, which can lead to recyclable items being rejected and sent to landfill. Government figures show that between 2012 and 2016, there was an 84% increase in the amount of rejected UK household recycling.

A survey by Anglican Home Improvements found that 99% of British people claim they 'actively recycle'. However, a staggering 70% are unaware of what they can and cannot recycle. 27% of us think that you can recycle greasy pizza boxes and crisp packets. Considering we each produce around 412 kg of waste per year, getting our recycling habits sorted

“Too often, people justify buying disposable items because they are recyclable”



would make a massive difference.

The black plastic trays commonly used by supermarkets also cause a problem in our recycling system. These trays are often used as food packaging as their dark colour makes food stand out and look more appealing. This tactic obviously works as it is estimated that UK households produce 30,000 to 60,000 tonnes of black plastic packaging waste each year. However, most UK recycling centres use infrared sorting machines which cannot detect the dye used in these black plastics. Only 22% of UK households can actually recycle them.

While recycling effectively is important, as consumers we should still be looking to consume less overall. Since the 5p plastic bag charge was introduced across the UK, our consumption of single-use plastic bags has decreased by 80%. This is clear evidence that consumers do want to do their part and will

▲ Recycling does not make up for mass waste

(HANS)

“70% of people are unaware of what they can and cannot recycle”

do so if appropriately incentivised. The packaging industry is responsible for the use of 42% of all primary plastics. In the UK, we get through 35 million plastic drinks bottles *per day*. This could easily change. There has been an explosion of initiatives in the last few years to encourage people to carry around their own water bottles and coffee cups. It is these small changes which can actually have radical impacts.

We are lucky in Cambridge to have such a well-integrated recycling system. However, too often people justify buying disposable items because they are recyclable. In fact, recycling only delays the eventual disposal of the item. It does not mitigate their inevitable fate in our landfill or incinerators. So on your next visit to Mainsbury's, be mindful of the black tray lurking beneath your tomatoes, and don't try to recycle your greasy chip or pizza box after a night out!



## At a glance Recycling tips

Common offenders, which people absolutely shouldn't be recycling, include:

- Greasy pizza boxes
- Polystyrene contaminated with late-night takeaways
- Coffee cups (most high street chains line their cups with plastic)
- Crisp packets
- Straws
- Post-it notes

On the other hand, items which more people should be recycling are:

- Metal lids on glass jars – as long as they are separated from the glass
- Plastic bottle tops – as long as they remain on the empty bottle
- Clean kitchen foil
- Empty deodorant cans
- Envelopes – if you remove the plastic window
- Clothes – over one quarter of all clothes in the UK end up in the bin; if your unwanted clothes are unfit for donation to a charity shop, they can be recycled

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# CUWBC's Abigail Parker: "It's about trusting the people around you and moving with them"



**William Ross**  
Sport Editor

Sitting in the clubhouse of the Goldie Boathouse after training, surrounded by plaques detailing the Boat Race results of every CUBC and CUWBC crew over the last century, 24-year old zoology PHD student Abigail Parker seems relaxed ahead of what will be one of the biggest and most high-profile races of her rowing career.

"I think that it's looking good ahead of the Boat Race and I think that the amount of effort that everyone's putting into it will pay off. We've got really great people on the team, and there's a really good squad atmosphere. There's a tight bond between everyone and we're all focussed on what we can do to improve."

As one would expect of the CUWBC President, Parker has plenty of rowing experience to draw on ahead of the big day, having to learn to row at Winsor school in Massachusetts before becoming captain of the Harvard University's Radcliffe varsity heavyweight crew in 2016. Pressed on the key ingredients to a winning crew, Parker is particularly insightful:

"It doesn't come down to the individuals. It's about how you can work together and that's something that we've been really focussed on - getting eight people plus the cox completely on the same page."

"Making the same technical changes, taking a push at the same time, setting the same rhythm because even if you have eight people who are incredibly strong, if they're not doing it together you're not going to go fast and you're not going to win. So, it's all about trusting the people around you and moving with them."

It is hard to ignore the fact that Park-

▲ Parker says that success comes down to working as a team (CUWBC)

“When you get to race day, you’re more prepared than you’ve ever been in your entire life”

er is President of CUWBC (Cambridge University Women's Boat Club), a separate entity from the men's boat club, whose name does not even allude to gender: Cambridge University Boat Club. Intrigued, I ask about gender equality in the world of Cambridge rowing, and it soon becomes apparent that this is an issue close to Parker's heart.

"It's really apparent in where we are now that we live in a society that has been biased towards men for centuries. And that's where we are with the Boat Clubs - the men's club have been going for longer, they've been doing the Boat Race since 1829, whilst we've only been on the tideway for 5 years."

"Right now, we get equal support from funding and sponsors but there is a very different background. For example, we have great alumni from the women's club who do so much for us but we don't have the same alumni network or financial security that the men's club has in many respects."

"I think that going forward there are active plans to improve that, and equality between the clubs is improving every year."

An encouraging step in the right direction did indeed take place this year, with the joining of performance programmes across openweight women, lightweight men and lightweight women. In effect, CUWBC merged with the Cambridge University Lightweight Rowing Club.

CUWBC does, however, remain a separate entity from the CUBC, and the performance programmes of the openweight men and openweights women's crew are not formally joined. Asked whether she'd be in favour of merging with CUBC, Parker remains coy.

"The lightweight men and women now train with us. Our women's Blue Boat now has a boat that is faster than them in the lightweight men's boat to

train with and you can get more varied racing experiences within the squad and just having a wider support network where it's not just you training with the same twenty people that you're competing with but you also have another twenty people that are on the same journey as you."

"It's been an interesting experience and really helpful for us. But we've been getting along really well with CUBC"

The discussion of the structure of the different rowing clubs at the University leads me to question the structure of the season itself, a season which is entirely defined by a single, unpredictable race against a single University. Parker is similarly progressive on this issue, and is open to potential changes:

"I do think that it is great how focussed we are on the Boat Race because when you get to race day, you're more prepared for anything than you've ever been in your entire life."

"You've had so many months of working with the same people improving in the rowing but also in other facets like

sports psychology - everything is designed so that we hit our peak for the Boat Race. And that's a real strength of the Boat Race."

"But at the same time we do also want to continue our season past the Boat Race - how we make sure that we're also performing at BUCS regatta, and in a position to send boats to Henley and the European University Games. Making sure not only are we faster than Oxford every year but also faster than as many people as we can be. And that's something that we've been thinking about going into the future"

Full focus remains on the Boat Race on the 7th April. Asked to send out a message to the Oxford crew, Parker displays her characteristic sportsmanship: "We really respect everything that they're doing - they're training for the same thing as us and, although we hope that we come out on top, there's a lot of mutual respect."

Whatever happens on the Tideway on the 7th April, rest assured that Parker will lead her crew with strength.



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**Who will take the Tideway?** William Ross sits down with CUWBC President Abigail Parker **31**

# Pythons beat rivals to qualify for playoffs



Cambridge 25

Anglia Ruskin 0

**Michael N'Guyen Kim**  
Sport Reporter

The Cambridge University Pythons' American Football Club have qualified for the BUCS Division 2 playoffs after a 25-0 win against the Anglia Ruskin University Rhinos in their final game of the regular season. The victory was largely constructed off the back of a stifling defensive performance by the Pythons (3-3), who conceded just 161 yards of total offense.

Over the course of the four quarters, the Rhinos' offensive set-up was comprehensively dismantled by the home team. First came the run defence, who consistently plugged gaps and prevented the visitors' running backs Anousheh Fulford and Rory Magee from making any headway. Second came the pass rush, which pressured Rhinos' quarterback Kayode Dennis with such regularity that he spent more time outside the pocket than in it. Finally came the defensive backs, led by Pythons captain Sam Comb, who were unlucky to get an interception in what was a thorough blanketing of the ARU receivers.

The game ultimately came down to a question of Dennis' mobility. Constantly flushed out of the pocket, his speed represented his team's only credible offensive threat. His 75 rushing yards from nine attempts, however, were not enough to drag his team over the line.

Incredibly, Dennis was individually responsible for more yards than his team's entire offense, with 178 in total (103 passing yards plus 75 rushing).

Comb was ebullient about his team's performance: "We didn't allow them to score the entire game, [that] was outstanding. Their quarterback was particularly mobile and we put the game on his shoulders to win it...but you can only rely [on a quarterback's running game] for so long...we tired him out in the end."

The game was never going to be a particularly stern test for Pythons, as the Rhinos (0-4) were winless leading into the fixture and needed to win their three remaining matches to have any hope of making the playoffs. However, the Pythons had come off a close loss the previous weekend against East London and required a win at Coldham's Common to guarantee their spot in the playoffs.

They began proceedings emphatically, going 67 yards in 9 plays on their first possession. Quarterback Ethan Brown (11/17, 162 yards, 4 TDs) completed the drive with a slant to Michael Ballentine (2 catches, 16 yards, 1 TD), who strutted into the endzone for the first score of the day.

This was followed by two consecutive three-and-outs (plus a turnover on downs) by the Rhinos' offense as they struggled to establish either the run or the pass against the formidable Pythons'

▲ **The Pythons in action against the ARU Rhinos in a fiercely contested affair**

(MARTIN STEERS)

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Sunday's win was the home team's sixth straight victory over their local rivals  
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defence. Despite the Rhinos' defensive linemen and linebackers having a general size advantage over their Pythons' counterparts, the hosts' mobility allowed them to regularly evade blocks and breach the pocket.

It was the same story in the second quarter. After a failed fourth-down conversion which left the ball on the Rhinos' 16, Brown lobbed a beautiful arcing ball into the arms of Jonny Holland (2 catches, 28 yards, 2 TDs), resulting in the Pythons' second touchdown.

The Rhinos' breakthrough nearly came on the next drive. Their offense by this point had become heavily reliant on Dennis' running game, and a 26-yard run took them into Pythons' territory. Confronted with a 4th and 7 at the Pythons' 40, Dennis rolled out to the right before taking off once more, gaining another 20 yards and the first down. A couple of quick completions then gave the Rhinos a first and goal, which Dennis duly converted by rushing into the endzone with seconds remaining in the first half. There was a penalty flag on the play, however, and the Rhinos lined up for a 30-yard field goal attempt. Just as they were on the verge of getting on the scoreboard, the visitors were again penalised, this time for an illegal substitution. The resulting 40-yard attempt was just beyond Fulford's reach, missing wide left.

That was the closest the Rhinos came to breaking their scoring duck. Two magnificent passes by Brown, one

to Holland in the third quarter and the other to Simeon Kakpovi (2 catches, 36 yards, 1 TD) in the fourth, resulted in Cambridge touchdowns. The Pythons' defence continued to nullify the Rhinos' run and passing game, while a fatigued Dennis was eventually substituted late in the fourth quarter with the outcome beyond doubt.

Sunday's win was the home team's sixth straight victory over their local rivals, who they have never lost to. They are now guaranteed second spot in the 2A South East Conference behind Essex (6-0), and await further results to determine who they will encounter in the playoffs. After the conclusion of the playoffs, their focus will shift to the Varsity match in May, in which they are looking to regain the trophy at home.

▼ **The Pythons prepare for a scrum** (MARTIN STEERS)

