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VARSITY

Watergate!

Chemistry student kept hot-tub in room for a year without College knowing



Jacob Freedland
Senior News Editor

When students move into college they can expect a decent bed, working toilet and if they're lucky, an en-suite bathroom.

But amidst the privacy that last year's lockdown brought, one chemistry student, Richard (not his real name), was able to keep a luxurious hot-tub jacuzzi in his second year digs throughout Michaelmas and Lent. And the best part? The College never knew.

Richard bought the hot-tub for just £200 after he saw a listing on Reddit – a bargain compared to brand-new alternatives which sell for thousands more.

Throughout Michaelmas and Lent, he would host intimate gatherings at his spa-like residence, making the most of his international roommate's vacant bedroom to house the jacuzzi.

Guests could expect drinks late into the night without having to worry about the dreaded knock on the door from a porter enforcing social distancing.

According to one regular attendee the

hot-tub was "fairly nice". It could fit five people comfortably and was quite deep – the water reached up to your waist if you stood up.

Being a chemist, hygiene was also taken seriously. Richard made guests shower before and after they got in and he made sure to drain the pool every month. However, sometimes he wasn't thorough enough. According to one friend, a group of freshers left with rashes having sat in water "full of eve-

Story continued on page 4 ►

University bans use of coat of arms on thesis submissions

Eleanor Mann
News Correspondent

Cambridge University has banned the use of its coat of arms from thesis submissions for certain postgraduate qualifications.

The ban applies to PhD, EdD, MD, BusD, MLitt and MSc students.

The change was made despite a long tradition of the University arms featuring on thesis submissions, and has been met with anger from PhD students. Submitted academic work will now no longer have a visual association with the University, or be part of one of Cambridge's oldest scholarly customs.

The University stated that its logo "should not be used anywhere as your thesis is your work and not the work of the University." They went on to specify, "If you wish to use a logo on your title

page or the cover of your thesis, you are advised to ask your College about the use of their logo."

Cambridge's coat of arms was adopted in 1583 after being granted by Robert Cook, Clarenceux King of Arms and graduate of St. John's College, for use by the Chancellor, Masters, Fellows and Scholars. The shield features four lions between a cross ermine and a Bible laying at the centre, representing the University's royal patronage, dignity, knowledge, and faith.

The University has upheld a strict policy on its terms of usage for the coat of arms, distinguishing between its logo, motto and shield, adding that despite the coat of arms often mistakenly being called the "University crest", the University actually has no "crest."

2022 will mark the first year that students are banned from using the arms when submitting their work this Easter.

Plan to replace iconic King's bunker shelved

Jacob Freedland
Senior News Editor

King's College planned to turn their iconic bunker into a 200-seat conference hall, but have stalled plans due to a lack of funding.

Despite years of hosting techno nights and bohemian parties, the £20 million ambitious project looks to transform the bunker into a "performance auditorium" – built for "academic and creative exchange" and fit with the University's first "electroacoustic" recording studio. A move which the College says will bring "students and fellows closer together".

However, despite fundraising efforts which involve "naming opportunities" and "commemorations" for gifts over £10k, the College is more likely to opt for a reduced scheme.

The plans surrounding the bunker are set to be discussed later in the year, but the proposals have already frustrated students.

According to one undergraduate, Sam (not his real name), "the idea that this project will 'bring students and fellows closer together' is laughable".

Similar development projects elsewhere in the College are "hardly for student use. We cannot use the bar for certain student-run events, since the floor is porous and expensive, and the same will be true of whatever soulless, white-walled Keynes Hall that they create. If King's continue with this 'enriching' project, they will erode whatever student spaces existed to begin with".

According to the College, the renovation looks to improve the "mix of poorly

Story continued on page 4 ►

News

EDITORIAL

Halfway through

We finally have a valid reason for our stress and sleep deprivation, and no it's not this print edition - we have reached week 5 and the sky is not nearly as blue as we are feeling. Storm Eunice is on her way, UCU strikes have given us an excuse to never get out of bed and there is tragically still no sight of the caramel tea being restocked in Mainsbury's.

Yet, it's not all doom and gloom, as we bring you all the talent Cambridge has to offer in this week's Varsity edition. As you've read on our front page, some students had found a great way to beat the winter blues this time last year with an en-suite jacuzzi, whilst this year we turn to May Ball launch parties and the ensuing dent in our bank accounts (page 13).

To celebrate of LGBT history month, the creative team has been hard at work putting together a three-set fashion shoot celebrating Queer love, which you can find on page 24. Far from the comfort of the Varsity office, Sport brings us an exclusive interview with the Women's

President and rower of CUBC on the frontline of their Boat Race preparation. With the Lent term elections fast approaching, we sat down with the SU presidents, Zak and Anjum (page 17), to hear about their work and its role in Cambridge life.

Last week saw second, and some belated third-year, students celebrating their Halfway Halls. From glamorous dinners to personal reflections (page 10), this time of year gives us the opportunity to mark all that we've achieved and what we can look forward to.

This week saw the opening of applications for Varsity's Easter term Editor-in-chief, looking back on the past 5 weeks we can confidently say that amidst the work and range of stories broken, this has been an amazing role to hold, and we encourage any and all of you to apply.

So grab a cup of coffee to power you through the next four weeks of term, wrap up in a nice fuzzy blanket and flick through this week's edition: there's undoubtedly something for everyone!

Emaan and Beth

Corpus May Ball asks workers for £160 'personal insurance' deposit

Eleanor Mann
News Correspondent

Workers at Corpus Christi's 2022 May Ball will pay a £160 'personal insurance' deposit to ensure their behaviour is satisfactory on the night.

Corpus' May Ball committee stated that the cheques "will be destroyed at the end of your shift unless your supervisor or a member of the Committee considers that you have broken the terms of your contract", clarifying: "this includes drinking alcohol or any form of obnoxious behaviour."

The requirement has been met with outcry from many students seeking a job this summer. One potential applicant stated that "the policy of deposits put me off working for them", adding "I don't even have a cheque book."

Corpus' May Ball Committee defends the decision on their website, stating that the deposit policy is "standard for many May Balls" and that the cheques act as a "guarantee of good behaviour."

When asked for comment, the college stated that they had followed the

policy with the knowledge that it was a common policy across all May Balls. They also highlighted that the practise had been in place at previous May Balls held at Corpus.

They added that having "undertaken further investigation", the policy will undergo review and the website will be updated if any changes are made.

Student-run may ball committees decide the pay of its hired workers, not the colleges themselves or the University. It remains unclear what the money would be spent on should supervisors find their employees to be in breach of their contract, with cheques asked to be made payable to Corpus May Ball Committee.

Student frustration is partially down to the differences in college policy.

In 2020, for example, St John's committee did not pay its junior set-up and clean-up workers in direct money, offering them instead a £49.20 discount off their 2021 May Ball ticket price (£182.50) for a six-hour shift.

Some colleges like Gonville & Caius, are operating a half-on half-off system, where workers can attend one half of the ball for free or at a discount provided

they work the other half. Other committees are guaranteeing its workers the right to buy a ticket to their next May Ball the following year, including Trinity and St Johns.



Revellers enjoy breakfast the morning after St. John's May Ball (ED BRAMBLEY/FLICKR)

Protestors gatecrash Jimmy Carr gig over Holocaust jokes

Esmé Kenney
Deputy News Editor

Crowds gathered outside Corn Exchange on Wednesday evening (16/2) to protest against comedian Jimmy Carr's comments on Gypsy communities and the Holocaust.

The protest took place at 7pm, while Carr was performing his gig inside the venue.

This comes in the wake of outrage at Carr after he joked that the death of "thousands of Gypsies" had been one of the "positives" of the Holocaust.

The demonstration was organised by Stand Up to Racism (SUTR) Cambridge, and was attended by those within and

outside of the traveller community.

Speakers at the protest called Carr's jokes "cowardly" and demanded that he "move his humour away from hate."

Protestors chanted "Jimmy Carr shame on you!" and "Out, out Jimmy Carr!", while holding posters that said "Genocide is not a subject for mockery" and "Your jokes are not welcome".

They faced hostility from some passers-by, with one man shouting that Carr was exercising "free speech" and that it was "just a joke". The protestors responded that the genocide of Gypsies during the Holocaust was "no laughing matter."

Jimmy Carr graduated with a first in Social and Political Science - a precursor to HSPS - from Caius in 1994.



Protestors chanted "Jimmy Carr, shame on you!" (ESMÉ KENNEY)

SU President Zak Coleman and BME Officer Tara Choudhury both attended the protest.

Speaking to Varsity, Zak said that whilst it was sad to see how many people had attended Carr's show despite the protests, it was also amazing to see so many people showing solidarity with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities.

Both Zak and Tara emphasised that they were not only there as SU officers, but also to show their support personally.

In a Facebook post, Tara urged people to attend the protests "so Carr hears loud and clear that there is no place for racism in Cambridge."

"If, as Jimmy Carr has done, you choose to platform hateful, fascist views making light of genocide, you are not immune from criticism because you deliver these views as 'jokes'. There is nothing funny about the systematic ethnic cleansing of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities."

She went on to add: "At a time when government legislation threatens to criminalise the very existence of the UK's already marginalised GRT [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller] communities, it is more important than ever to condemn views that normalise bigotry towards them."

Many of the speakers at the protest brought up the recent Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

One said that Carr's comments "come out of the same nasty strand in our society that has given us the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which seeks to further criminalise the Traveller way of life."

Cambridge City Council lit up the Corn Exchange in green to show solidarity with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

EDITORS Bethan Moss & Emaan Ullah *editor@varsity.co.uk*
DEPUTY EDITORS Inès Magré & Juliette Guéron-Gabrielle *deputyeditor@varsity.co.uk*
VULTURE EDITORS Lily Maguire & Lotte Brundle *magazine@varsity.co.uk*
DIGITAL EDITOR Ellie Austin *digital@varsity.co.uk*
BUSINESS MANAGER Mark Curtis *business@varsity.co.uk*
SENIOR NEWS EDITORS Jacob Freedland & Serge Isman *news@varsity.co.uk*
DEPUTY NEWS EDITORS Aoife Petrie, Esmé Kenney, Fergal Jeffreys & Lorna Kimmins
NEWS CORRESPONDENTS Ella Mann, Tommy Castellani, Krystian Schneyder, Tiffany Tsoi
SENIOR INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR Christopher Dorrell *investigations@varsity.co.uk*
DEPUTY INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR Rosie Smart-Knight
SENIOR FEATURES EDITORS Nabihah Ahmed & Aoife O'Driscoll *features@varsity.co.uk*
DEPUTY FEATURES EDITORS Alex Levy & Taneesha Datta
SENIOR OPINION EDITORS Samuel Hudson & Megan Byrom *opinion@varsity.co.uk*
DEPUTY OPINION EDITORS Mikaela Krim & Hugh Jones
INTERVIEWS EDITORS Tiffany Tsoi, Marion Willingham & Akshata Kapoor *interviews@varsity.co.uk*
SCIENCE EDITORS Sambavi Sneha Kumar & Julia Dabrowska *science@varsity.co.uk*
SPORT EDITORS Liam Kline & Tom Bullivant *sport@varsity.co.uk*
ARTS EDITORS Emma Hulse, Famke Veenstra-Ashmore & Priyanka Voruganti *arts@varsity.co.uk*
FASHION EDITORS Anna Chan, Dioni Ellinikaki & Eva Morris *fashion@varsity.co.uk*
FILM & TV EDITORS Catrin Osborne & Sophia Till *filmandtv@varsity.co.uk*
LIFESTYLE EDITORS Rosina Griffiths, Charmaine Au-Yeung & Nadya Miryanova *lifestyle@varsity.co.uk*
MUSIC EDITORS Josh Osman & Felix Asare *music@varsity.co.uk*
THEATRE EDITORS Bethan Holloway-Strong, Georgina Hayward & Lewis Andrews *theatre@varsity.co.uk*
ILLUSTRATIONS EDITOR Florence Brockman *digital@varsity.co.uk*
HEAD OF PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO Katie Kasperson *digital@varsity.co.uk*
HEAD OF PUBLICITY Alex Radford *digital@varsity.co.uk*
PUBLICITY OFFICERS Jennifer Cartwright & Holly Lambe
CHIEF SUB-EDITOR Chloe Bond *subeditor@varsity.co.uk*
ASSOCIATE EDITORS Isabel Sebode, Nick Bartlett, Gaby Vides, Georgina Buckle, Gabriel Humphreys, Meike Leonard, Stephi Stacey, Cameron White & Christopher Dorrell *associate@varsity.co.uk*
VARSOC PRESIDENT Emaan Ullah *president@varsity.co.uk*

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Fresher becomes bouncer at local club

When he's not doing his degree, he's keeping the peace outside Revs. According to the fresher bouncer, 'taking care' is the whole job

Krystian Schneyder
News Correspondent

When our anonymous hero got his first job as a newly-qualified bouncer, he was thrown in at the deep end. His older brother, also a doorman, got him into the job at a pub in his hometown. He had a knife pulled on him on his first night.

So why did he decide to start – and continue – working as a bouncer?

"I was 18 and if I wanted a job, where else is going to pay me £10 an hour? No other job will pay you more than £6 an hour at 18. The shifts elsewhere are long and it's hard work. I didn't want that. I thought: I'm not going to get paid better anywhere else so I might as well do this. Secondly, my brother had done it and loads of people in my family had done security."

The student works weekends at several Cambridge clubs. When asked about how he balances work with his degree, he said that his favourite way to work is to go to a bar, get a bottle of wine and sit there until his essay is done.

According to University policy, students are "expected not to work during term-time." When asked what he thinks about Cambridge's 'no jobs policy' he called it "ridiculous", "classist" and "awful".

He shared that to become a bouncer he had to take a five-day course which included fire safety training, health and safety regulations, learning how to restrain people and how to take care of people who are drunk. On the sixth day he had to take a series of multiple choice exams. He also said you have to be qualified in first aid. Once you finish the course and pass your exam (and pay a total of £500: £300 for the course and



▲ "In comparison to any major city, the nightlife here is quite dreadful" (JOSIE MORGAN)

Quickfire Q's...

What do bouncers hate most about students?

About Cambridge students: the entitlement. We kicked someone out on Sunday and he was like, "I'm going to be offering you a job in five years." The entitlement of some Cambridge students is awful.

But students in general: pre-drinks. The amount of people who turn up drunk and then get annoyed that they can't come in because they're already drunk – that is very, very annoying. But bouncers generally like students. They're a bit annoying and they get drunk but there are never any fights or anything. There's never any trouble like there will be on other nights.

Which song(s) are you sick of hearing?

'Old Town Road' still gets played every night in the club for some reason and I don't understand it. 'Sweet Caroline' is still always on. Just everyone screaming the three words they know. You get tired of it very quickly.

Can Cambridge students dance?

No and I'll tell you why. Not a funny story at all. Some girl had to come downstairs because she had a cut on her eye because some guy upstairs was dancing – purely elbows and he hit some girl in the face dancing manically. So no, they can't dance. But it's very funny watching them try.

Van Of Life or Gardies?

Gardies. A hundred percent.

£200 for the licence itself) you get your licence which you have to renew after 3-4 years. However, he said that "like in any other job, you only really learn once you start."

I asked him about the responsibilities that a bouncer has. "The main thing is everyone's welfare. If someone is thrown out for being too drunk, it's not because we're being horrible, it's because if they hurt themselves inside the venue because they are drunk, it affects insurance and things like that. If someone's drunk and they want to get into a fight, they're gonna hurt other people. We take them out for not only their safety but everyone else's safety in there as well."

A big aspect of the job, he said, is "taking care." "If someone is throwing up on the floor. If a girl comes in saying she doesn't know where she is, she's lost or something, you bring her in, just mak[ing] sure she's safe is the main thing."

He said that recently a lot more female bouncers have come into the business and he thinks it's "brilliant."

On the responsibilities of a bouncer he also mentioned that: "The one thing that people don't understand is that your first role is about customer service. It's talking to people. [...] It's not about being big and knowing how to fight. You need to talk to people, make sure that if somebody is going to go off, you can talk someone down, you can be nice, you can explain things to people. Explaining things to drunk people is very, very difficult, so you've got to be good at that."

On a less serious note, I asked what he thought about the Cambridge nightlife scene. "In comparison to any major city, the nightlife here is quite dreadful". However, he did admit: "I'm not really a club man; I'm a pub man."

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If equally good, pick minority actors over white counterparts, say drama society

Fergal Jeffreys
Deputy News Editor

Producers should prioritise "margin-alised" auditionees in "tie-breaker situations" involving equally castable actors, new guidance from Cambridge drama club (CUADC) has set out.

The guidelines, published last Tuesday (08/22) by diversity officer Mithiran Ravindran, say that members of the society have a "responsibility to acknowledge" their prejudice towards minority groups and "actively contribute" towards making CUADC "inclusive and identity-conscious."

Written in consultation with Bread Theatre and Film Company (a society promoting ethnic minority drama in Cambridge), and the CUADC committee, the new guidelines are aimed at students pitching or staging shows at the ADC or Corpus Playroom.

Other recommendations include changing the name of the character to reflect the actor's appearance, and listing the character's gender in audi-

tions rather than the person going for the role to "accommodate various non-traditional gender identities."

Where gender isn't a central part in the narrative, CUADC will encourage production teams to leave the gender identity of the character open.

The guidelines advise against casting actors solely based on their identity since it's "unfair" to expect minorities to incorporate their identity into the role.

The new recommendations go on to criticise "pseudo-inclusive" casting processes such as a BME drop in hour, urging the production team to reflect on their impact on marginalised groups "instead of engaging in self-interested, performative allyship."

Promoting the guidelines, Mithi said that the aim was to make Cambridge Theatre "more inclusive of marginalised identities, increase their meaningful representation onstage, as well as hopefully widening the already-open dialogue about these issues and fostering a culture of greater empathy."

College supervisors support strike despite being unable to take part

Jack Evans
News Correspondent

A campaign to improve college supervisors' pay is supporting the strikes despite being unable to take part.

Because they lack the "employment contracts which are a prerequisite for striking", the Justice for College Supervisors Campaign (#J4CS) are supporting the strikes through a "postcard campaign".

The action involves collecting postcards signed by supervisors who are paid by the hour and support the campaign's demands. They are asking for training payments to be guaranteed, open negotiations on "secure employment contracts" and a pay rise.

A representative for the campaign told *Varsity* that the "college supervision system is so exploitative that most of us don't even have the right to negotiate with our employers and withdraw our labour from the colleges in protest".

The campaign is one part of the broader UCU anti-casualisation movement, one of the UCU's 'Four Fights'. Strike activity for the 'Four Fights' will take place across two weeks, first from Monday 21 to Tuesday 22 of February and then from Monday 28 of February to Wednesday 2 March.

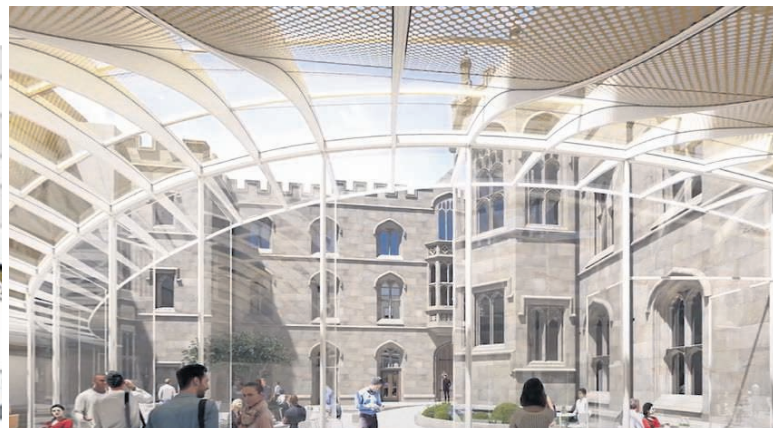
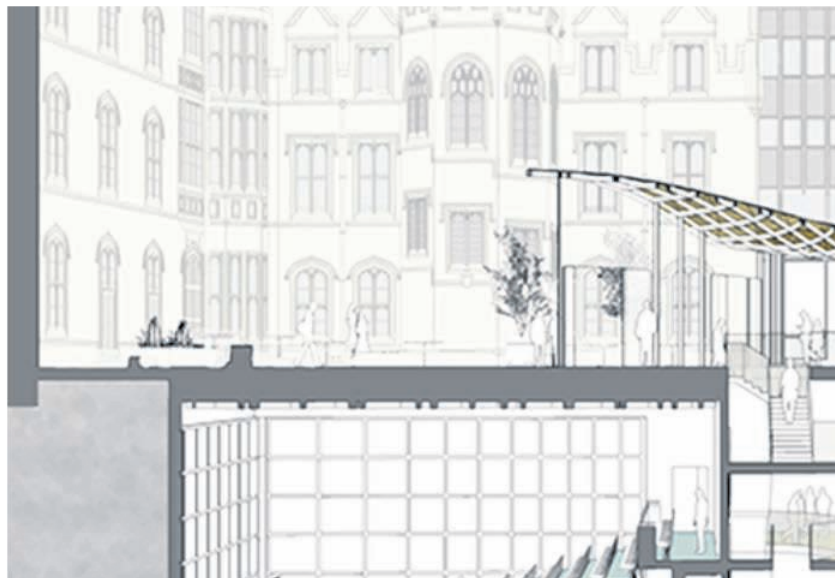
Despite being unable to strike themselves, the campaign said they "stand in full solidarity with our striking colleagues" this week.

The campaign also condemned the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association's recommendation that staff taking "action short of strike" should have their pay cut. In a comment, they said that this was "indicative of the disastrous state of UK higher education" and that "UK higher education has institutionalised overwork and underpayment" as staff were "being penalised for working to contract".

Strikes began against pension cuts this Monday (13/02), involving picket lines across the city.

News

The £20m revamp looked to turn the iconic Kings bunker into a conference hall, but is now on hold...



▲ Proposed plans for the new bunker in 2020 (KING'S COLLEGE/YOUTUBE)

Continued from front page ▼

poorly designed function rooms" surrounding Chetwynd court with a state-of-the-art revamp in the hope of meeting new building standards.

As well as the proposed auditorium, the partially completed blueprints feature a new lecture hall, supervision rooms, college bar, and glazed roof over the courtyard – "making it an all-weather meeting

place for student and conference use".

While the College say the changes will provide an "inspirational space for hosting seminars, lectures and national and international conferences", students are unconvinced:

Sam told *Varsity*: "What frustrates me most about the plans to 'transform' the court is the idea that doing so will preserve the 'special nature of King's'. Any 'special nature' that King's has is not from 'hosting international con-

ferences' or an ability to 'provide high-quality...conference facilities'. King's special nature is built on community values, care for students, and equality amongst staff and students; the redevelopment plans completely disregard these things".

Nor are the projects that have already been finished popular with the students.

According to a third-year student, Åke Gafvelin, the bar's renovations make it a less suitable student space and have led to it being nicknamed the "premier-inn"

bar because of its modern design.

He told *Varsity*: "Before it was possible to take food into the bar, and there were often concerts and other events. Now both food and live music is banned in order to, as I have understood it, spare the perforated floor. It is truly a shame".

For Åke, the project is part of a "general theme in the college of neglecting students in favour of donors, conference guests and tourists. As a student, I do not feel welcome at King's and will actively dissuade people from applying".

But according to a student who sits on the building committee, the students needn't worry about the bunker: "Initially there were plans to redevelop and effectively remove the Bunker, but those plans are being changed as the college couldn't find a Donor."

"At the moment, King's is getting an

architect to do a reduced scheme, so any changes to the bunker are unclear but likely to be mostly superficial, with the possible exception of including a lift down to it.

"Basically, the College are going to present revised plans cheaper than what was initially planned to the committee, and until we know what they are we don't have any clue if they're going to try any redevelopment of the bunker or what it'd look like if they did, although the last meeting implied the continued existence of the bunker at the very least".

King's did not confirm if the project had been put on hold due to funding issues, but told *Varsity* that "new plans are being sought for an alternative, scaled back version of the scheme without the underground excavation / auditorium. Again, there's no suggestion that the Bunker would be lost or replaced".

Continued from front page ▼

everyone's bodily fluids" for hours.

Richard was able to get away with his covert spa operation because of the pandemic. Thanks to a lockdown in Michaelmas and Lent, bedders seldom entered students' rooms, least of all those situated outside college grounds. And so despite the jacuzzi violating college rules against private furniture, Richard got away with it.



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Strapped for cash? Students can earn hundreds from humorous verses, living in Devon, or reading in chapel



▲ The Devon Cambridge Society offers a grant of £300 for undergraduates to travel around Devon (EVO FLASH/FICKR)

Christopher Dorrell, Rosie Smart-Knight, Lily Isaacs, Katie Wright & Oscar de Wit
Investigations Team

The number of different funds available to students at Cambridge can be bewildering. This was *Varsity's* experience as we tried to establish which colleges provided bursaries for disadvantaged students. Investigating the esoteric funds available proved a far easier task. The most valuable prize on offer is the King's College Entrepreneurship Prize, established in 2014, which offers a top prize of £20,000 and a second prize of £10,000. Entrance is open to all King's members, past and present. The finalists have to present in "Lyons Den," named after the benefactor Stuart Lyons.

For the musically inclined, one of the most lucrative prizes up for grabs is open to Trinity students, who have the chance to win up to £1,680 for performing a libretto at Trinity's May Week Concert.

Organists across the university are also in luck: the organ scholar at Homerton receives £450 a year alongside free Formal Hall and free international tours. Organ Scholars at Jesus

also receive £450 per annum with free College Feasts, reduced room rent and an extra £1,250 per annum for organ and singing lessons.

Up to £960 is also on offer at Trinity for the Charles Grant Tennant Prize for light or humorous verse. Tennant, who was killed in the First World War, left Trinity 'the sum of £350 to be invested, and the interest thereon to be devoted to an annual prize to be awarded to the writer of the best copy of light verse.'

At Queens' students can receive £100 thanks to the Ryle Reading Prize, for the far less arduous task of reading in the college chapel.

Some of the most widely available funds are travel grants, with almost all colleges having funds available for students who are hoping to travel. We have collected a selection of the best for your perusal below:

Jesus College offers £300 for students hoping to travel to Greece after former Master of the College and classicist Sir Denys Page bequeathed funds in his will.

The Roger Chishold Fund at St John's offers up to £750 to St John's students 'wishing to explore wild places by sea, climbing and/or hiking.' Successful applicants are required to write a report for either the College Magazine, the Journal of the University Yacht Club or the Journal

of the Cambridge Mountaineering Club.

At Darwin, three DarBar Grants of £200 are available. 'Individuals awarded a DarBar Travel Grant are invited to have a drink in the bar before departure and to send the bar a postcard from their destination.'

Perhaps the most niche fund is the possible £300 on offer from the Devon Cambridge Society for undergraduates living in Devon to use for travel.

As in so many cases, what is most striking is the discrepancies between different colleges. Some offer multiple prizes many worth hundreds of pounds while others give out a relatively small amount to a handful of students.

Little information is available on the availability of top-up funds for those struggling financially.

St John's students with lower-income are eligible for a top-up bursary of up to £7,630 on top of the Cambridge £3,500 bursary. A *Varsity* investigation in 2020 revealed that less than 40% of students accepted by St John's came from a non-private or grammar school background.

Of the thirty-two colleges at Cambridge, only St Catharines, Churchill, Fitzwilliam, Magdalene, Pembroke, and St John's have published easily available information about top-up bursaries.



Could you be the next Editor of *Varsity*?

Applications to be *Varsity's* Editor for Easter Term are now open. Please check out our website for further information on how to apply.

You will lead a team producing online content throughout the term after our 22nd April 2022 print edition up until the late summer handover to the Michaelmas 2022 team and be responsible for producing our *Varsity Review & Yearbook* - a circa 60 page A4 glossy magazine, which will be published on 10th June 2022.

No previous experience at *Varsity* is required for the role. All students who are passionate about journalism, have clear creative direction for the magazine, coupled with a high level of expertise with Adobe InDesign and an eye for layout and design are encouraged to apply.

Direct questions to the Varsoc President at president@varsity.co.uk, or the Editors at editor@varsity.co.uk.

The deadline for applications is midday, Friday 4th March 2022. Interviews will take place on the morning of Wednesday 9th March 2022.



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News

What do students really think about the strikes?

The view from Sidgwick

Fergal Jeffreys
Deputy News Editor

Sidgwick Site on Wednesday (16/02) was unusually quiet - an echo of last year's cancelled Lent - except for a few students furtively avoiding the picket lines.

It's hard to tell what students really think about the strikes. At one of the picket lines strikers tell me "there's overwhelming support" among the students for the strike, "demonstrated again and again over the past five years by public opinion polling, SU and JCR motions."

"The small size of people who aren't supportive vocalise their opposition on anonymous Facebook pages like Camfess, not through democratic channels."

Another student tells me that "15 - 20 % of students are [crossing the picket line] with their headphones on or pretending to talk to people on the phone. The rest of the people want to talk to us. They might end up crossing the picket line but they want to understand why we're out here."

Yet across the picket line, the story is more complicated. The few students at the site on Wednesday morning ranged from supportive to guilty to apathetic.

A law student waiting outside a lecture told me "I get that [staff] should be paid more but on the other hand we've got lectures to attend, I've got to go to the library."

"I'm sad about the impact it's having

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Personally I
don't see why
I have to com-
promise my
education for
their issues
”



▲ Picket line demonstrators spoke of "overwhelming support" from students - but some students aren't so sure about the strikes (ROSIE POSER)

on the students. I'm not the one responsible for the fact that [staff] aren't paid enough."

Many students were sympathetic with the concerns of striking staff. An English student told me "I understand they're a last resort and I sympathise with the strikers. But [the strikes] have happened before and they'll happen again. I have to go to class."

A history student told me he's "Broadly supportive of the strikes. I crossed the picket line because I've got a mandatory seminar. I'm a first year so I don't want to be missing out on learning. I feel a bit guilty honestly, I'd prefer to have not crossed"

Not all students I spoke to however were sympathetic. One economics student said "I think the faculty and lecturers have never had our best interests at heart, they haven't been fighting for us but instead fighting for themselves."



▲ A student on the picket line (ROSIE POSER)

"It's another term of disruptive teaching when we've never had a term without disruptive teaching."

Another economics student agreed, "When my lectures are on I don't see why I can't go to them - personally I don't see why I have to compromise my education for their issues."

Frustrations with the strikes are not confined to the Sidgwick site.

Speaking to *Varsity*, Christ's JCR President Sam Carling said that "It's completely inappropriate for Cambridge SU to support these strikes. While they argue they have a mandate from students, as a motion allowing them to was passed at student council, this is nonsense."

"A small, vocal minority does not imply universal student support. The SU should instead be focussing on mitigating the impact on students' learning and wellbeing, rather than chasing some abstract notion of solidarity."

Labour club out on the picket lines despite division

Varsity News

In spite of internal disagreements, the Cambridge University Labour Club (CULC) has had an official presence at the strikes this week.

Without releasing a statement explicitly endorsing them, the club's committee gave permission for an "official CULC presence at events" and for the club to use their official social media accounts to publicise their presence on the picket lines at a meeting last Wednesday (09/02).

According to co-chair Eve Blain, the decision is a "massive step forward."

However, the club is divided on the decision at the very top: one Chair voted against and another for.

There is also disagreement over what the motion means in practice. One committee member said that it was "factually incorrect" that the motion supports the strikes, instead, merely gives freedom to turn up to events. Another disagreed, asking "If you establish an official presence in support of the strikes, how does this not logically say we're not backing strikes? The motion speaks for itself."

To those who back the move, support is "definite achievement."

According to Blain, since "CULC is a labour club, we support people who work. We're a student society."

However some are unconvinced. One CULC member said that it was "not the place" for CULC to support the strikes and that "the club shouldn't be telling students that they're bad."

"The UCU had no clear roadmap for actually achieving anything and students shouldn't be forced to sacrifice time and learning for this."

Division on the strikes is not new for the society.

Last term's committee struggled to agree on whether to back the December action, opting for a compromise motion which supported "the right of all workers to go on strike, and their goal to rid higher education of the creeping menace of insecure working conditions and less financial support."

Students struggle to get emergency contraception

Aoife Petrie
Deputy News Editor

Female students and residents are struggling to get key contraception from local pharmacies, *Varsity* has heard.

Emergency contraception, known as 'Plan B', works under a time constraint to prevent pregnancy: Levonelle must be taken within three days, while ellaOne or the "morning after pill" has to be taken within five.

A current student, Anna (not her real name), said she struggled to buy the emergency drug this week in Cambridge.

In one pharmacy, she was told that the pharmacist was "too busy" to help and that she should come back "later" or

"tomorrow". She was directed, instead, to an online form which could take up to twenty-four hours to receive the contraception.

When told that it was "urgent" and that she needed the contraception sooner than twenty-four hours, the staff still offered no help.

Anna said she felt "anxious" due to the lack of "sympathy or acknowledgement of the seriousness of the issue". Adding that there was "no consideration of the time pressure and urgency".

Though managing to purchase emergency contraception in a different pharmacy, the student said it "caused [her] a lot of anxiety" as she "did not want to have to confront someone to get basic health care".

A local alumna told *Varsity* she was "surprised" that while trying to get Plan B in Cambridge, she was told "all the central pharmacies" had none in stock. She rang other pharmacies but was told that they couldn't sell since they were closing.

She phoned a hospital as instructed but was told: "I don't know if we do that" and to "call 111". Due to the obvious urgency, she had to go to London to buy the tablet in time. She said it "seems a major problem if a major university town has no emergency contraception".

Anna said that the lack of contraception was reflective of an institutional "disregard for the health of people with uteruses".

Emma students pledge to cut ties with polluter bank

Jack Evans
News Correspondent

Emmanuel College's student union has pledged to stop banking with NatWest, citing their investment in fossil fuels and the arms industry. The vote passed unanimously.

The proposal came from the union's green officer (29/01), joining other Cambridge and Oxford JCRs and MCRs which have made similar pledges.

The pledge includes support for the Boycott Banks' Destruction campaign which started at the end of last year and is pushing for MCRs and JCRs to

leave banks who invest in fossil fuels and the arms industry. Among them Lloyds, Barclays, HSBC, and NatWest.

Emmanuel College continues to bank with Barclays, despite criticisms of the bank's investments in fossil fuel companies.

When asked for comment, the green officer said that as "an independent body, we felt very strongly about banking more ethically ourselves before opening up conversation with college about their banking practices".

They also said that the transition is still in "the beginning stages", but discussion over alternative banks is underway.

Students and ‘study drugs’: a complicated relationship

Deputy Editor Juliette Guéron-Gabrielle investigates the use of ‘study drugs’ among students both with and without ADHD

Juliette Guéron-Gabrielle
Deputy Editor

To anyone with ADHD, Ritalin, Modafinil, and Adderall are familiar terms. These cognitive enhancing drugs boost concentration, problem-solving capacities, and task-related enjoyment.

“I tell people that my brain does not work like their brain, I can’t start a task and finish it”, finalist Linda tells me. She was diagnosed with ADHD in her second year. “These drugs don’t make me superhuman, they just mean I can do my degree”.

However, these drugs are increasingly being used by others too, Cambridge professor Barbara Sahakian tells me.

Sahakian links this increase to the nature of work today. “Work used to be done in sequences. You finished one job before you started another. Now, people’s attention is flickering from one task to another, they’re on their computers and their phones, they work in streams”.

“Students use it to cram before exams, which might be detrimental to their results. It disrupts sleep patterns, which can start a vicious circle, where the drug is then needed to counter the effect of the lack of sleep.”

A Trinity student tells me he needs

Ritalin “to actually work on my boring degree”. He says he was using it for about a month or two without a prescription, and realised “wow, this is good”. Now, he is diagnosed with ADHD, and prescribed the drug.

He tells me he now finds his degree easier to do, but the drug “sort of numbs out everything else”. He recently went to a wedding without feeling anything.

A 2009 *Varsity* survey found that 10% of Cambridge students had used “study drugs”. A 2018 Tab survey found that 17% of students had used the drugs,

These drugs don’t make me superhuman, they just mean

I can do my degree

suggesting their use had increased 70% throughout the decade.

Sahakian thinks the priority should be to enable individuals to use “smart drugs” safely. She advocates for drugs like Modafinil to be assessed for their long-term health consequences, before being made available as over-the-counter medication.

“People are using Ritalin away from the supervision of a doctor. They’re getting it off the internet, from China, India, or Russia. They’re getting it off their friend’s prescriptions. They don’t know

Personally, it was quite a journey, but Ritalin works for me now

which doses to take or whether they have any contraindications. They might be mixing it with other drugs.”

Cambridge graduate Caroline Callo-way became famous by sharing snippets of her fairy-tale-like Cambridge experience on social media, from pictures of balls to dates in castle-like surroundings. Her talent for hosting parties earned her the nickname of the “Cambridge Gatsby”.

While she was sharing these snippets of perfection, she was addicted to Adderall, and taking this “smart drug” at near fatal doses. “Adderall murdered my life, and I’ll never touch it again - but drugs are fun”, she believes.

According to Sahakian, the NHS avoids prescribing Adderall as much as possible. “It can cause psychosis. It is prescribed to people with ADHD only if all the other drugs, like Modafinil or Ritalin, have failed”.

A Selwyn undergraduate tells me many of the students at her private school in London used unprescribed ‘smart drugs’ to get into the best universities during sixth form. It helped them deal with academic pressure.

Sahakian tells me the use of “study drugs” on developing brains is worrying. Its exact consequences are unclear, given the lack of studies on the topic. “People should have better work-life balances, rather than having to take the drugs to be able to work more and more.”

Linda tells me that people often ask her how she was able to get through high-school and get into Cambridge, if she had unmedicated ADHD. “I tell them that I could do it because there was less work. It’s impossible in Cambridge.”

Linda’s first experience with Ritalin was bad. “When I started taking Ritalin, I was mixing it with coffee. I wouldn’t eat all day. When it wore off, I would feel terrible, very depressed. Your mind goes from focused to even worse than it was before.

“Now I don’t mix it with coffee, and I take antidepressants, so everything is flattened out. It’s much better. I can sleep properly.

“Different people react differently to the medication. Personally, it was quite a journey, but Ritalin works for me now.”



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The Mays Anthology is delighted to announce that submissions for our 30th edition are open.

The Mays is the premier student anthology, publishing the best new poetry, short stories, art and creative photography from Oxbridge students each year.

Widely credited with launching Zadie Smith’s literary career, The Mays continues to attract the brightest creative talent from both universities. Previous guest editors have included Kate Bush, Stephen Fry, Rupi Kaur, Nick Cave, Patti Smith, Jarvis Cocker, Oscar Murillo, Arlo Parks & many more!

Closing date - 25th February 2022.

For more details see www.themaysanthology.co.uk/submissions/ or email: mays-editor@varsity.co.uk

News

Cressida Dick steps down as Met Police chief

Cressida Dick announced that she was stepping down from the role as Commissioner of London's Metropolitan Police last week (10/2) amid reports of a culture of misogyny and racism within the force. After graduating with a BA from Oxford University, she studied Criminology at Fitzwilliam College. She graduated with a Master of Studies in 2000, receiving the highest ranking in her class, and went on to become the first female and openly gay officer to lead the Met.



▲ Cressida Dick led the Met for just under five years (WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

Cam paved with gold?

The bank of the Cam at Mill Pond could be covered with a gold metal sculpture, as part of a local art project. The artwork, named 'To The River', was designed by local artist Caroline Wright, and aims to celebrate how the river Cam has shaped the city of Cambridge. The sculpture will be etched with a lace design, as a homage to the lace design used on Cambridge University gowns. Cambridge City Council will ask the public for their views on the project, and if approved, it could be unveiled as early as September 2022.

Sicilian café reopens

One of Cambridge's most popular cafes reopened for indoor dining last week, (9/2) after being renovated. Since last September, Sicilian café Aromi had been open for takeaways only, while it was expanded into the shop next door and given a facelift. For the first time, the café will also turn into a pizzeria from 5pm-10pm. The relaunch was held on National Pizza Day, with the director of Aromi describing it as "fantastic" that they could reopen "for such a day in the pizza world."

Uni's festival of ideas returns for 2022

The Cambridge Festival, which is run by the University, will be returning to Cambridge this March. The Festival features 350 events, including talks, debates, workshops and exhibitions, and will be held both online and in-person. Speakers at the event will include Medwards President Dorothy Byrne, author Jeannette Winterson and Astronomer Royal and former Master of Trinity Professor Lord Martin Rees. The Festival will take place from 31st March until the 10th April.



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▲ Stephen Hawking did his PhD at Trinity Hall (WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

Lassa fever outbreak

A major incident has been declared in the East of England after a disease similar to Ebola was detected in the region. Originally found in rodents, Lassa fever typically causes flu-like symptoms in humans, but can cause bleeding through the nose, mouth and other parts of the body, and is spread through contact with the body fluids of infected people. Three cases of the illness have been diagnosed in the East of England, with one of the patients dying in hospital in Bedfordshire. Hundreds of staff at Addenbrooke's have reportedly been told to self-isolate after being identified as potential contacts of those infected.

Lorry sheds cargo of beer out onto Cambs road

Hundreds of cans of Belgian beer were left strewn across the A1198 at Bassingbourn in Cambridgeshire on Monday evening (14/2). Police believe that the incident was caused by a lorry crashing into an overhead pylon, which forced it to unload the crates and cans of beer into the road. The road was reopened at 2:30am the following morning, after the spillage was cleared.

Features

The unexpected joy of flat dinner

Columnist **Hannah Gillott** elucidates the power she found in eating dinner with her flat, both for forging strong, new friendships and addressing her relationship with food

There's a moment, making new friends, where the first group chat gets made.

Eventually it's rendered useless - its members are representative of a freshers preserved only in matriculation photos and memories of a Lola's night you'd rather forget. But for its time, that first group chat is an anchor, which says that you're in this Cambridge thing for the long haul, and maybe - if you can imagine it - you might actually settle into a life here. It's a palette which will one day be marked by inside jokes you haven't laughed at even once yet, let alone rinsed dry. From halting club night plans to pub trip bookings, then reunions you will desperately need in the unimaginable 5 weeks apart at Christmas, you inexplicably find yourself at holidays, with people whose initials marked doors you were too nervous to even knock on, but who have somehow become your midnight calls. For me, this first piece of the puzzle - the corner you tentatively place down first, wondering if it could be right - was the flat dinner group chat, whose messages, taken from friends who happily volunteered to be exploited for this article, went something like:

"flat dinner come to JCR"

"i think we were thinking easy and minimal washing"

"flat dinner then awful christmas film sounds good :)"

"see you for flat dinner and harry potter when you're back!!"

"flat dinner tonight before carols?"

"I'll probably go to sainsburys anyway so can pick something up for flat dinner"

"can we do flat dinner today I'm not convinced by the hall menu :("

"flat dinner around 630 halloumi, veg and rice"

Each night I leant into the ease of a community meal

Flat dinner served as a real and metonymic anchor in being both a daily gathering and our group chat name. More than just reassuring me that I had a place in this new life I was forging, though, it transformed my relationship with food. It eased the transition from days punctuated by family meals to one entirely unstructured - when waking up at midday and staying out till 3am didn't only have awful repercussions for my lecture attendance, but provoked an ever present, low level anxiety over what I was eating. Was hungover avocado on toast (always stale - my flatmate and I hadn't yet discovered communal bread, despite buying exactly the same loaf) now my lunch? Were chicken nuggets from the Van of Life a breakfast substitute or a second

dinner? And what the fuck did drinking this much mean in my unconscious, unwanted, but seemingly unavoidable, recalculations?

Yet eating a flat dinner meant that at around 7 each night I leant into the ease of a community meal. I stood in the gyp, propped open by whoever acted as doorstop that evening, on the rolling chair magicked out of nowhere, while conversations ricocheted off the fresh painted walls to those of us who spilled out into the corridor, the physical manifestation of a kitchen (a term generously employed) overflowing with love and bubbling over with laughter. I watched as friends were more creative with our George Foremans than I could ever be with words, and shared in amazement as we moved from halloumi to salmon to stuffed

Food was not calculated, nor glorified or demonised

peppers, fuelled by the stale tortilla chips left on the countertop, spite at being denied a hob, and Aldi wine we had stored, propped in the baskets of our bikes the week before. I danced as we washed up, unable to see for my overpowering joy and the alcoholic haze



that evening was melting into night. And somewhere amongst this increasingly complex, lengthy and numerous ritual, I sat and ate. And I didn't notice how much, or when, or who was eating more or less, or whether it was too much or too little or too similar to the night before, or what came next or before it. I ate. And that was all. And it was nothing and because of that it was everything.

A term later, reflecting on the unwitting progress I made and discussing the shocking significance of a group meal with my college wife, I realised how much community had altered my conception of food.

Once scared to even sample a dessert, I could now savour a four course meal at formal, surrounded by people I loved and supported by an uncomfortable wooden chair and a Cambridge tradition, both seeming to date back centuries. A starter, once unthinkable, was welcome when it was half a roll of challah, split with a friend over

Flat dinner served as a real and metonymic anchor

friday night dinner and dipped into chicken soup, the warmth it lacked that week replaced by the heat of tens of people sharing a sense of community and a smile across the rickety table.

Throughout my eating disorder recovery, such community practises have been a goal. I longed to joyously devour a Christmas dinner, unaffected by the scattered Quality Street wrappers, who

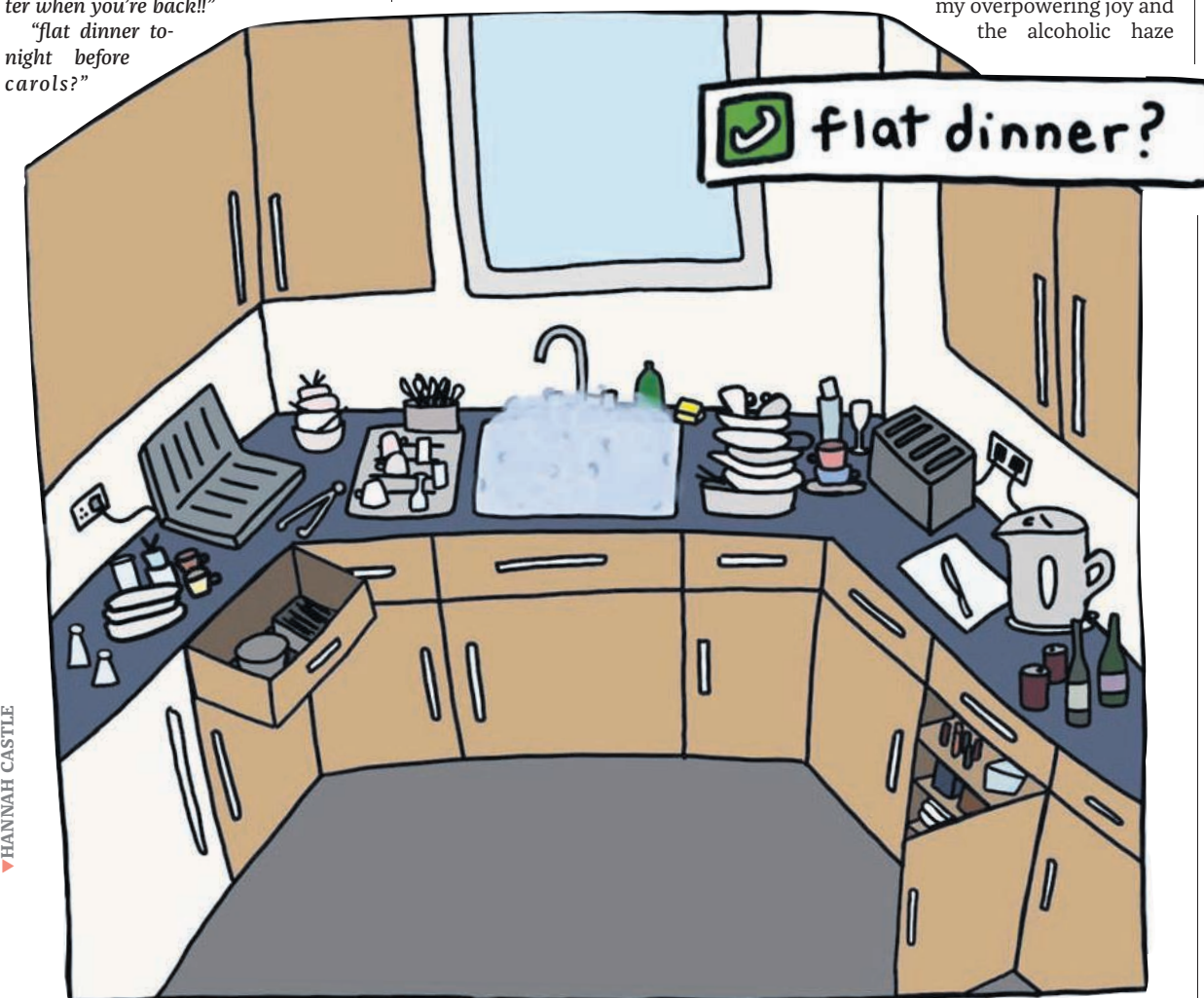
had taunted me with their nauseating glow. Yet I had never imagined that what I had aimed for would in fact be my path to recovery. For those of us who have at some point found food itself reduced to numbers, partaking in

Food always will be a point of connection

a shared meal steeped in tradition - be that on Christmas, Hannukah, or Ramadan - although terrifying, is a powerful reminder of what food has been and always will be: a point of connection. At flat dinner, food was not calculated, nor was it glorified or demonised. It was half a pack of suspiciously slimy mushrooms from one fridge and the leftover chicken from another. It was the Lurpak from the big spender of the group and the buttersoft from the rest of us. It was mismatched crockery, mine blue, someone else's chipped and none ever returned, the identical cutlery from our parallel IKEA shops and the rare bendable ones which we had warped into loops over the course of term, and mugs instead of wine glasses.

It was free, and after a while, so too was I.

And as I run to Flat B's kitchen at 7:30 tomorrow night, having raided my fridge for wine and a red pepper, I'm reminded of just how lucky I am to have been given the chance to rediscover this.



Ghost towns, or why you can never go home

Columnist **Jesi Bailey** delves into memories of her first home and contemplates the transience of childhood identity

Two days into visiting my hometown, I texted my boyfriend: “Every time I come back to San Diego I remember why I don’t come back to San Diego.” He replied: “Lana Del Ray lyric sounding ass.” Both statements were true.

When I think of growing up in California, my mind seems to show me only the best memories. I create a montage of the perfect life: playing video games with my brothers, dancing in my yellow bedroom, carving the initials of my first crush into the tree in my front yard. My best friend Lauren lived in the house across the street from mine, and I never had to knock on her door before I entered. This city was the entire world and, within it, there was nothing I couldn’t know. I was defined, subject; if someone were to describe me, I knew exactly which words they would use first. Things were simply organised into boxes, the way they

can only be for children who haven’t yet learned that loving something does not guarantee its permanence. In this world, everything was sacred, and I couldn’t have imagined it would not remain so forever.

By the time I decided to move away, I was under no such illusions. I was sixteen and terrified, feeling the foundations which I had spent my life standing upon crumbling. The fact that some changes had been inevitable did not make them easier to shoulder. My brothers had gotten older and moved out of the house, as did my father once my parents divorced. My childhood home was now impossibly empty, impractical and expensive for just me and my mother to be living in. Weeks after the “For Sale” sign was posted in our front yard, Lauren’s house

got one to match. It was the final crack to shatter my

rose-tinted glasses, and I fled at the first opportunity offered to me.

The fact is, I couldn’t stand to watch things end, and I ran somewhere new to make myself feel as if I had some modicum of choice in the matter. I spent years covering a city in my fingerprints, break-

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My childhood home
was now impossibly
empty

ing bones and going on dates, all the while imagining that this act of worship would be enough to make these places holy and therefore protected. During my last night before leaving, Lauren and I convened among the packed boxes in my bedroom, attempting one last sleepover like we had grown up having. The walls had been repainted white for the sale of the house, and it upset me to look at. We laid on the floor and stared at the ceiling instead, spending hours silently watching the headlights of passing cars move across the room. They looked like ghosts.

In December, I flew to California for my first visit in over three years. I don’t go often, and I don’t stay long – when I miss my siblings or Lauren too desperately, I cajole

them into visiting me instead, arguing the superiority of adventuring to someplace entirely new. The people I love are kind, and they allow me the false pretence of my argument. But the terrible truth of it is that going back to San Diego only reminds me that I can’t go back home, that I can’t ever reinhabit the identity of the version of myself who lived there.

The girl who grew up in California is different from the girl who left it. The woman who comes back to visit is more of a stranger than ever. I know this isn’t inherently tragic; in many ways, I feel I’ve honoured promises I made to my past selves about who I would become. I moved to England. I got into university. I finally started seeing a thera-

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The people I love are
kind, and they allow
me the false pretence
of my argument

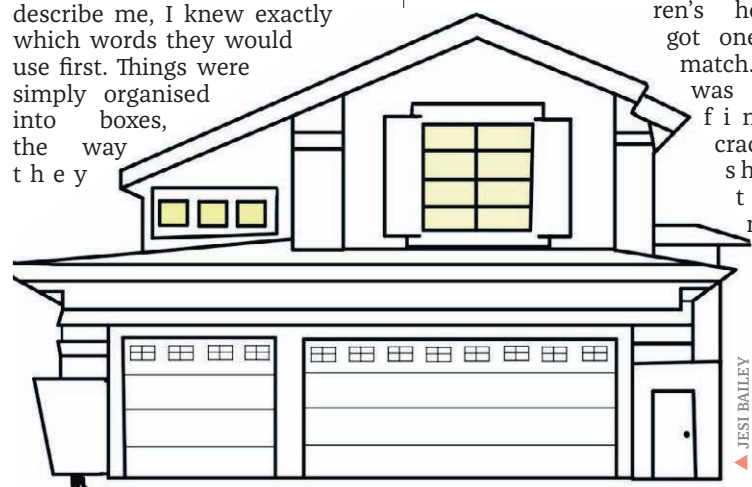
pist, and I don’t even lie to her in order to make her like me more. But I know there are also a great many dreams that I’ve let go of in the transition from my life as Her to my life as Me. In order to ex-

ist as I do now, I have had to grieve the possibilities of all of the other people I could have been and all of the people I no longer am. To revisit

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We can never stop
becoming new people

once-familiar spaces and find them alien and changed makes this starker than ever. It forces me to accept that the golden world I grew up in doesn’t exist anymore, that maybe there’s no way to go home again once you leave. Maybe we can never stop becoming new people.

On this last visit, Lauren and I went to look at our old houses and found that they weren’t our houses anymore. They belong to new families now, strangers who have their own arguments and traditions and lives playing out within those walls. My old tree, which previously stood large and imposing in the front yard, had been cut down. I wonder if they had problems with its roots like we did, or if they just didn’t like the look of it. I wonder where these new children will document their first crushes’ initials, and what colour they painted the bedroom I spent so many years in. For their sake, I hope it’s yellow. I hope their entire, wonderful world shines golden.



A halftime huddle

Halfway through his time at Cambridge, **Sobaan Mohammed** shares experiences of being a disadvantaged student, making the case that the challenges of access don’t stop when you matriculate

My first term was a bit of a rollercoaster. From completely losing my appetite the week I moved in, to falling during the matriculation photograph, my first Michaelmas was *interesting*, to say the least. In that first week, I was hopelessly certain that I wouldn’t be able to survive the term, and the idea of intermitting played on my mind. Fortunately, with the help of my tutor, DOS, and college nurse, as well as the wonderfully supportive people I’ve gotten to know here, I was able to make it through the term.

When I reflect on my time here so far, a lot of thoughts come to my mind. For example, how Cambridge is significantly different to my area of Birmingham; how the idea of the ‘university experience’ does not apply to those who bring a lot of emotional, invisible baggage with them; or how I’ve met very few people here who come from a similar background to me.

That last point was, and still is, especially profound for me. After moving in, I felt really out of place, precisely because I could barely find people like me. I come from a single-parent family in a deprived, inner-city area of Birmingham and have received free school meals my entire schooling life. Last term, I was extremely cognisant of how my life

experiences differed significantly from others. For me, this awareness was almost palpable, as though written on the faces of everyone around me. The way people walked, dressed, talked, the nonchalance, confidence and entitlement with which they went about their lives, truly made me feel like an outsider in comparison.

“
The way people
walked, dressed,
talked...truly made me
feel like an outsider

This takes me back to a time in Year 10 or 11, when I was speaking to my counsellor and told her how certain I was that out of all the 700 or so students in my school, I was probably the only person with my background, comparing my life to an Indian drama with its countless series of plot twists. She smiled and said she could think of one other person like me. Now, if that was the case in my school in Birmingham – granted, it was a grammar school – then in a place like Cambridge, it would be even more so the case. My point is, the feeling of unique-

ness and alienation that I felt then in secondary school is still present with me – in fact, it’s even stronger.

I also remember being asked what my parents worked as when I was younger and how I’d be embarrassed to tell the truth: at home was just my mum, who worked, and still works, as a dinner lady. I’m no longer ashamed of this fact, but still, I can’t help but feel a touch of insecurity when people talk about the jobs their parents have or the holidays they went on during the summer or Christmas break, which I instead spent co-managing the household.

The truth is, this is the reality of a place like Cambridge. In one of his videos, Ibz Mo – whose videos I used to watch religiously – said that as a disadvantaged student at Cambridge, you are not on an equal playing field. I’ve now realised, recognised and experienced that fact. Now, in a bid to maintain my authenticity, I feel a pressing urge to assert and root myself to my “access” background. I tell myself that I haven’t come here to pretend to be someone else or live a different life, but this endeavour is difficult when I feel like my experiences are isolated. Some may say that these are self-imposed barriers between myself and others and that I fail to acknowledge that people from all backgrounds exist here. But is it un-

reasonable to want to find similar people here? Surely, if Cambridge has made great strides in widening participation and access, this shouldn’t be a problem?

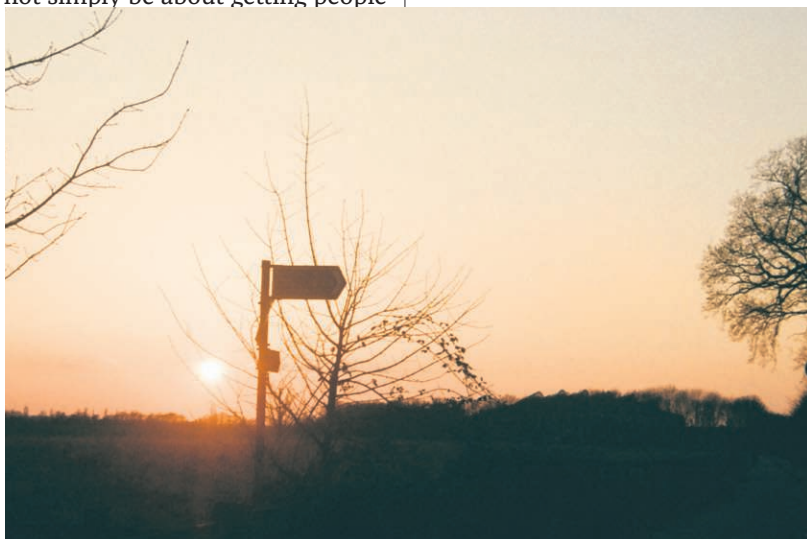
This is where, I now realise, the fundamental problem lies: the way

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Where a space doesn’t
exist, create it

we approach access as a concept first and foremost. Access should not simply be about getting people

into Cambridge, merely meeting a benchmark or target, and leaving them fending for themselves. It should be about creating a space, a social network, where students from similar backgrounds can support one another and feel as though they belong. If there’s one thing I have now learnt about creating spaces in university, it’s this: where a space exists, participate and engage in it; where a space exists but is inactive or inadequate, revive it and be persistent in shaping it; and where a space doesn’t exist, create it. Perhaps that is what now needs to be done.

▲ ALEX PARNHAM-COPE





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Opinion

Once again, the UCU strikes out

Deputy Opinion Editor **Hugh Jones** argues that rather than a display of solidarity, the UCU strikes are motivated by members' self-interest at the expense of students and other staff

On Monday, the spectre of strikes returned to haunt Cambridge once more. The University and College Union (UCU) are downing tools in protest against plans to restructure the USS pension scheme, which aim to reduce the risk of the scheme running out of money in the future. They are also striking over what the UCU call their “four fights”: pay, workload, equality, and casualisation. The UCU specify which days of strike action are in response to which disagreements; most are in response to pension reforms. But you aren't going to hear about the USS, even during the initial five-day block of strikes which are solely focussed on it. You probably won't even hear about the four fights. Instead, you will hear, non-stop, about supervisors and their exploitation.

Interpreted charitably, what the UCU are doing is an embarrassing cos-play, an attempt by fantasist academics to replicate the glory days of strikes in the 70s. Uncharitably, it is a cynical exploitation of supervisors' misfortune to get taxpayer-subsidised (through tax-exempt status, if nothing else) universities forking out even more on fellows' pensions.

The UCU talk about “unsafe workloads” as if staff were working themselves to exhaustion down mineshafts; the equality demand within the four fights means, apparently, a demand to close the gender and ethnic pay gaps, as if Toope has a magic button to end inequality which he is inexplicably refusing to press. The UCU throw around the word “solidarity” with such abandon that you could be forgiven for thinking that the Sidgwick site is a modern-day Victorian workhouse.

Here, the charitable reading of the strikes falters. You could see the UCU as simply suffering from the cognitive dissonance which stems from discussing anti-capitalist praxis over port in the SCR after a four-course candlelit formal. But the problem is that the UCU aren't simply occupying a position which looks hypocritical. There is nothing wrong with speaking against

injustice from a position of privilege, even if appropriating the rhetoric of genuinely working-class movements to do so is in decidedly bad taste.

If you look a little deeper, the UCU seems to be making a wide range of demands which play to left-wing students and staff, such as “a framework to eliminate precarious employment practises”, and the afore-

▼ LOUIS ASHWORTH



on writers for Varsity earlier this term. Rather than condemning her for implying that Jewish students were part of a media conspiracy against her, they issued a “statement in solidarity”, condemning “attempts to silence anti-racist action”. Anti-racist action is perhaps the most creative euphemism for antisemitism that I've ever heard, but this perfectly encapsulates how performative the

UCU's position is. They take an actual injustice, like systemic racism, and use it as a smoke-screen to advance the interests of their members – Gopal is on the Cambridge UCU's executive committee – even when doing so results in violating the very principles they claim to uphold. Meanwhile, the only support I've received from the SU since joining Cambridge last Michaelmas was when its president friended me on Facebook.

None of this is to deny that there is a real problem with supervisors' pay. Whether it makes sense to regularise the contracts of post-graduates who are doing short-term work on the side to help fund their studies is a question for an economics student, but I would probably support a pay-rise for supervisors to acknowledge the fact that most, if not all, are only paid for the work which takes place in the classroom, and thus does not include the hours of wider reading and marking which they must do. Nonetheless, as you have probably guessed by now, I have had no qualms crossing the rather unenthusiastic picket lines at Sidgwick site, because once you strip away the UCU's misrepresentations, their case simply isn't that strong.

The UCU like to obsess over the University's money. The University is obviously very wealthy, and has apparently had good returns on its investments, but it is no business, it is a charity. Cambridge conducts life-saving medical research, is investing in technologies to combat climate change, and funds research into art, literature, and history, through which our society can come to understand itself better. Call me a scab all you want, but I think that the University's resources would be better spent funding this research, especially the research done by students, rather than on lining the pockets of fellows' gowns.

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The UCU's position
is [performative]”

visors to better spin a wholly self-interested campaign of disruption to our learning is shamelessly disingenuous. It also makes it ridiculous that our Students' Union supported the strikes last term, and will in all probability support them this term.

The UCU act like guardians of the downtrodden, whilst shamelessly covering for its privileged members. By contrast, our SU seems to do very little for its student members, replacing policy with leftist platitudes. This is best, and most sickeningly illustrated, by the UCU's handling of Professor Gopal's antisemitic attacks

Is a reading week

Opinion Columnist **Samuel Rubinstein** and Vulture Editor

Like “justice for college supervisors” or “defend education”, “reading week” is one of those vague, euphemistic slogans that Cambridge would be better off without. Nobody who uses the term really means it: every week in this town is a “reading week”, in theory if not always in practice. There is no point rocking up at the gates of Troy inside a translucent horse, which is why the illustrious sabbatical officers at the Students Union have, in an uncharacteristic fit of intellectual honesty, decided to change their branding to a ‘mid-term break’. Were they to go further, and campaign yet more candidly for a ‘Piss-About Week’, perhaps I'd be more sympathetic.

It's not too difficult to trace the process by which “reading week”, under whichever name, became the latest SU vogue. You matriculate at Cambridge and remain in touch with friends from home. Some are now students at red-bricks or (non-Oxbridge) Russells.

They pour pesti-

lence into your ear, titillating you with exotic tales of “life beyond the bubble”. They tell you all about their “reading week” – drugs, sex, rock ‘n’ roll – and you become ensnared.

Why don't we have a reading week? you wonder. Of course, your friends neglect to mention that their terms are much longer than ours: five or so Piss-About Weeks between terms strikes me as a decent deal. They also neglect to mention that their work during term-time counts towards their degree: they don't need to do very much, but what they do produce needs to be of high quality. So a “reading week” might make sense for them, and might fit comfortably within their system of higher education. But it doesn't make sense for us, and represents but the latest step in the Russell-Groupification of Oxbridge.

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The SU, as ever, is
waging a class war,
but on which side?”

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The “reading week” agenda is being pushed in part because the SU

is run by a cabal of humanities students and HSPSers. Students whose degrees can arguably accommodate

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A “reading week”
cannot be magicked
into existence
out of nowhere”

a ‘reading week’ therefore exercise disproportionate influence over SU proposals. Natscis in particular seem to be op-

posed to the idea, and are frustrated by the SU's related push to

Read the interview with the



scrap Saturday lectures, which cannot practically be moved to any other time in the week.

A “reading week” cannot be magicked into existence out of nowhere. It must come from somewhere. And so it will mean shorter vacations, which will wreak all kinds of havoc: renegotiating staff and teaching contracts; creating problems with arranging outreach programmes and admission interviews; giving undergraduates a narrower opportunity to work and earn money (which we cannot do in term-time). There is, moreover, no escape from an obvious truth: that extending term-time will lead to an increase in rent, hitting working-class students the hardest. The SU, as ever, is waging its class war. But on which side?

ek for the weak?

Lotte Brundle face off over the SU's reading week proposal

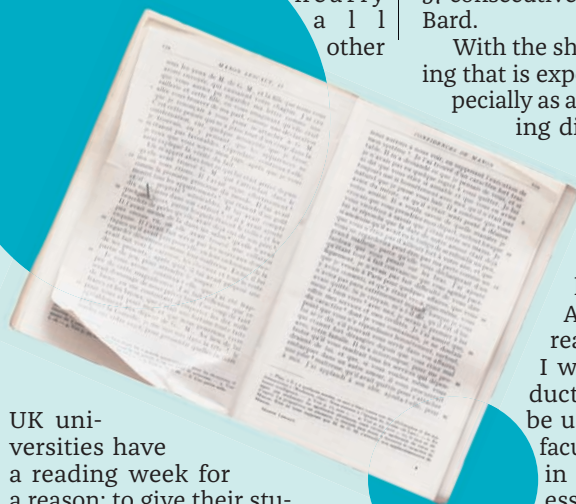
For a long time now, the burnt-out run-down students of Cambridge have been clamouring for a justly deserved reading week, to no avail. Finally, it is set to be discussed by the SU but whether or not the students will get their wish is still very much up in the air. For years Cambridge has denied it's students this privilege. In the work hard/play hard headspace that occupies many, if not all, students here, the idea of a reading week has been marked by many as simply that: weak.

A reading week is something those other universities need to do, but not us, this institution



SU Presidents on page 17

seems to smarmily sneer. But nearly all other



UK universities have a reading week for a reason: to give their students a break; time to think; to consolidate their learning. Some argue that, as Cambridge's terms are shorter - a concentrated 8 weeks compared to the usual standard 12

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It's no surprise that students struggle with chronic stress

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weeks - we need a reading week less than other students, but I strongly

disagree. The reality is that 12 weeks of work are being mercilessly squashed into nearly half the time; it's no surprise then that many students struggle with chronic stress

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I really need a break from the academic merry go round, because I'm starting to feel motion sick

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and devastating mental health issues while at Cambridge. As an English student, the majority of my degree is reading and, when comforting the frankly gargantuan list that awaited me in the short break between Lent and Easter term last year, I felt completely overwhelmed. I was expected to read all of Shakespeare's works over the break, “37 plays in 30 days!”, my supervisor eagerly gushed when I questioned the genuine possibility of this. Once term gets going, it's damn near impossible to catch up if you fall behind. So, if you're unwell for any reason, the Cambridge workload seems to spiral devastatingly out of control. The reading lists, too, seem to completely ignore the fact that many students need to work for financial reasons in the breaks, and don't therefore physically have 37 consecutive days to spend on the Bard.

With the sheer quantity of reading that is expected of me here, especially as a student with a learning disability, I feel like a week to think, reset, catch-up and generally just enjoy living in Cambridge would be a huge game changer. Although I dream of a reading week however, I worry that the introduction of this may just be used as an excuse by faculty members to cram in even more reading, essays and deadlines - stretching our already exhausting 8-week term into a 9 week one. And honestly, I think if the Cambridge terms were any longer my head would explode from trying to consolidate the sheer quantity of learning.

When the University's slogan is 'academic rigour', it often feels like they're keener on having over-worked, unhappy, and frankly unhealthy students, than well, happy ones, and I don't know about you, but I really need a break from the academic merry go round, because I'm starting to feel a little motion sick. Here's hoping...

ANDREAS PRAEFKE & TED EYTAN

Pride flags and prejudice

Following the Caius flag controversy, Kashif Carter concludes that the support LGBTQ+ people and allies offer to one another is far more important than flying the LGBTQ+ flag

Content note: Contains discussion of homophobia and brief mention of racism

When I saw the Instagram stories and articles about Caius' decision to not fly the pride flag, I had the same reaction as a lot of people. As a gay man and person of colour, I instinctively felt upset and defensive. As I've contemplated the situation more, however, my perception has changed from seeing Caius' action as discriminatory to seeing it as a position of neutrality. This issue is more complex than saying Caius is an anti-LGBT institution. When it comes to how best to support the LGBT community, there needs to be a wider conversation about actions, which have greater impact than a flag waving in the wind.

Caius stated that: “The College flag is a symbol which unites all in the Caius community. Choosing to only fly the College flag avoids concerns regarding political neutrality, and the difficulty of choosing between the plurality of good causes for which a flag could be flown”. I can see how many interpret this action as conveying a negative attitude towards the LGBT community, especially since this decision was communicated during LGBT history month, which was not good timing on the college's part. However, the college also made the decision to allow students to display any flag in their room or externally (e.g., on windows or doors), which gives students the freedom to express their support for the LGBT community. Students showing their support more actively, personally, and throughout the college, demonstrates far more support for the LGBT community than one flag flown by the college ever could.

When it comes to visibility, the college also stated that “Flags flown to express opinions about causes and issues, have the potential to divide us. All of us are Caians, so the College flag speaks for all of us. No other flag does”. It is sensible for an institution, especially an educational one, to not pick and choose certain groups, movements, or causes because once they choose to fly some flags, and not others, other groups feel left out, and this leads to a contentious environment. As long as Caius in practice is consistent with their decision to exclusively fly the college flag, they are not discriminating against any group.

Some have said that not displaying the pride flag sends a message that some in the college are not accepting of LGBT people or their rights. This stance fails to take into account that there likely are people who don't support LGBT people in the college. Those people will be there whether or not a rainbow flag is flying above Caius. The true work that will help LGBT people feel welcome, and educate those who want to know more about the

community, is done tirelessly by the JCRs and MCRs of this University, because this directly impacts the student body.

Another point that's been made is that not flying a flag somehow takes away rights, and fails to honour those in the LGBT community, and that as LGBT students we deserve to have the flag up because we have earned our spot here. But how does flying a flag protect and honour one's rights? A flag is a sym-

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Without advocacy, a flag means nothing

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bol, it doesn't give people rights. The only thing that can do that is the law. This raises a bigger issue about why it's only the LGBT community that gets a flag. People of colour and women are traditionally oppressed groups too. The absence of a Black Lives Matter flag or a flag in support of women does not directly equate to a lack of support for these groups. As a queer person of colour, I have experienced discrimination for many years, and a flag representing my ethnic groups will never change that. Similarly, having the pride flag displayed will not do any- to solve problems of anti-LGBT discrimination for me.



When it comes to the display of the flag itself, there is a dichotomy between how people within the LGBT community may actually feel, and the perceived reaction to the symbol. I remember my high school flying the flag in June, before I was out. I didn't know what to make of it, to be honest. There was no significant action being taken by my school to make the place more diverse, so in the end, the flag didn't mean anything to me. As such, it's the action, welfare, and outreach provided by the JCR and wider community, and not the flag, that provides the visibility and support for those who are struggling, or just need a space to figure out who they are, because without this advocacy, a flag means nothing.

I appreciate the fact that people are in different places when it comes to Caius' decision. I think a respectful discourse on issues like this is beneficial, and we are all so fortunate to be at an institution that welcomes and facilitates these exchanges, because not everyone, especially those in the LGBT community, has the opportunity to even talk about their expression of identity.

If you are against the decision made by Caius, I'd encourage you to ask yourself some questions to further explore your stance. Have your rights been violated by the decision? Has the college actively stopped you from representing your identity proudly? Has the college put actions in place that actively hinder the support systems and welfare provided to the JCR and wider student body? As LGBT people, we don't need special treatment from anyone; we seek an equal and respected place in society. Flying a flag that rises and falls at the wind's whims will not achieve this goal, our engagement and support of each other will.

Opinion

How did the May Ball survive the pandemic?

Senior Opinion Editor **Megan Byrom** suggests that the tradition of the May Ball should to be brought to an end

I realised I'd made a mistake last week when I opened my bank account with both eyes closed. Clicking on the app, I let my screen buffer fluorescent before I even dared to look. I'd bought a ticket to Emma May Ball and it had left a £170 shaped dent in my transaction history.

I'd already begun to soothe my conscience, with interviews booked to work at other colleges during May Week. I'd calculated that if I worked two or three events that ticket price could be repatriated, and it shouldn't be too expensive to give the illusion of black-tie if I found an evening dress on Depop and put on some false eyelashes. But it was more than the cost that bothered me: it was the fear of missing out. After all, I was a fraud of a Cambridge student: I had matriculated over Zoom, could count the number of formals I'd attended on one hand, and my experiences of May Week last year concluded in a trip to Spoons and a drunken swim in the Cam. It was finally time I got the 'real experience', so I'd agreed to go. I'd been lured by a siren call and leapt from the boat, bank card in hand, and nobody had tied to the sails.

As themes have emerged and tickets have been released emerged over the last fortnight, the cost of attendance was met with shock by many undergraduates – many of

whom had not even matriculated when the last May Balls took place. With tickets ranging from around £90 to £225 for a singular evening of festivities, Camfess was yet again laden with those angered by the cost and inaccessibility of something deemed to be so universal within the 'Cambridge experience'.

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May Week doesn't
have to be defined
by its elitism
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The May Week President's Committee has been continuously toeing the line that May Balls are an increasingly inclusive, sustainable and accessible event. But let's be frank, most people's expectations of such a reality ever transpiring are low. Whilst SU led initiatives like Access-a-ball and Sustain-a-ball are highlighting important issues with the organisation of May Balls, their existence is a result of the inherent inaccessibility of the events themselves in the first place. Attempts to open up the May Ball have only illustrated their current inadequacies – and perhaps something more fundamental about the

events themselves.

Take, for example, the cost of the 'bursary ticket', a new initiative introduced by some May Ball committees. Some balls have seen ticket prices halved, while others offer discounts of around £10-40, and so the claim that May Balls are now affordable to all, because of the bursary ticket, is not only an act of egotistical performativity, but a patronising insult to the students it 'seeks' to include. Many students, despite these discounts, still cannot afford to go – and the students that are ineligible for a bursary and similarly unable to pay is an entire discussion of its own.

Additionally, for those who do not attend their own college's May Ball, a price tag is still attached, where many colleges force out resident students for the entirety of the event. Those with vast networks at Cambridge can find a floor to sleep on with ease, but for the rest, an inevitable hotel stay has its own costs. Either way, the practice is outdated and forces students who cannot afford the event to become homeless – all while making room for those that can.

The issues regarding the accessibility of May Balls fit into a larger story within Cambridge. Many students that form the increasingly diverse demographic that the University boast about are unable to fully partake in Cambridge's unique un-

dergraduate experience. Whether that's due to increasing costs of rent, variations of expensive dinners like Halfway Halls, or financial pressures, at a university that bans undergraduates from taking on employment during the term, Cambridge remains closed off despite its modernisation. Wealthier peers take on



Kirsty Allsop-esque persona with hypothetical budgeting solutions, the issue remains unchanged, and May Balls go ahead as usual.

We fill each other's heads with narratives that justify these traditions. I have to wonder, however, if the 'value for money' argument that is so often employed in the defence of the May Ball, where £100+ for a few hours of fun is a bargain, is ever actually used by anyone with one foot in the real world. Are the different stages and world-famous acts really worth the money, when all we really want is a good night in college to remember with our friends? If we have to spend this much to have a good time, then it might be more telling of us than the May Ball itself.

These events were once a very different occasion: all-male, stuffy and formal. Today's May Ball is a very different affair – but, ultimately, the May Ball must go. May Week doesn't have to be defined by its elitism, where students who want to enjoy the fun make a Faustian pact to wait on their peers in return for a ticket.

So here I sit, with an Emma May ball poster pinned to my wall, as a blistering hypocrite with a dwindling amount in my bank account, wondering whether there are some traditions we shouldn't have resurrected post-pandemic.

Cressida Dick might be gone, but she won't be forgotten anytime soon

Staff Writer **Freddie Poser** conducts a post-mortem of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis' policing career

Content Note: This article mentions racism, rape, child abuse, and murder

Dame Cressida Dick, Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis, has announced she will stand down. Seemingly she has finally lost the confidence of the spineless Sadiq Khan. Not a moment too soon – she should never have been anywhere near the helm of the country's largest force. However, we mustn't celebrate her demise too much. Rather than being an aberration for the Met, her tenure is in fact emblematic of the sort of people we trust to run our most complex public services.

In a way, one must admire Cressida's ability to 'fail upwards'. Appointed gold commander in the aftermath of the July 2005 bombings, Dick was the officer in charge when Jean Charles de Menezes was murdered on a tube train at Stockwell Station. She oversaw the officers who misidentified de Menezes, ultimately leading to his shooting. In the aftermath, the Met tried their

best to cover up (and lie about) the shooting. Instead of being fired, Dame Cressida was promoted just one year later. Soon she was working in what Martin Evans described as a "rather shadowy security role" at the Foreign Office.

From here she moved back to the Met, appointed Commissioner in 2017 by the then Conservative

active Home Secretary, Amber Rudd.

Once in post, Dick quickly set about attacking the freedoms of people across the capital. The outgoing Commissioner has been a staunch defender of stop-and-search, a policy that stops Black, Asian and minority ethnic people 2.4 times more frequently than white people. She has also been an enthusiastic proponent of privacy-destroying

facial recognition technology that, should she have her way, would see us scanned near-constantly as we move through cities, inaccurately checking our features against a shadowy police database. And it has been Dick who has presided over failure to learn from Operation Midland, the Met's catastrophically botched investigation into fake claims of child abuse. Worth noting too that a recent report into the case of Daniel Morgan – a private investigator axed to death in a Sydenham pub car park in 1987 – found that the Met to be "institutionally corrupt" and personally censured Dick for obstructing the investigation.

When, in March last year, a serving Met officer abducted Sarah Everard in South London, raped and murdered her, true to form, Dick brought her special brand of petty-authoritarian incompetence to the response. The Met announced that any woman confronted by a police officer that made them feel

Londoners held a vigil marking Everard's death and protesting against the police, the Met responded by violently suppressing

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Dick is not a lone
bad apple
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demonstrators – pinning women to the ground for the COVID-crime of meeting outside to protest.

There's an incredible quote from Dick where she lambasts the BBC drama Line of Duty: "I was absolutely outraged by the level of casual and extreme corruption that was being portrayed as the way the police is". And yet, isn't this precisely what we see in Dick's Met – a litany of lies, closing ranks and cover-ups? It's telling that a show about a professional standards unit, tasked with finding the 'bad apples', is what occupied Cressida's thoughts and got her hackles up. I can't help but think this speaks to her overwhelming priority as a leader: to protect her own. No wonder she got so far in the Met.

What finally brought Dick down, after years of mendacious incompetence, were the twin pressures of widespread misogyny at the Charing Cross Police Station found by the Independent Office for Police Conduct, and the abject failure to investigate the Downing Street par-

ties. These poisoned cherries on the toxic cake that is London's policing have, at last, brought an end to Dame Cressida's sorry career, or at least we have to hope they have...

But we must not celebrate too much. Dick is not a lone bad apple. Her tenure is simply symptomatic of the rot at the heart of our nation's largest police force. The Metropolitan Police is institutionally corrupt, institutionally racist, and institutionally incapable of providing safety and security to Londoners. Case after case shows that they cannot command the trust of the public and nor should they. Two of Dick's three predecessors have been forced out before the end of their terms as Commissioners. Crisis after crisis shows us just how bad things are, whilst seemingly every other failing is accompanied by a wide-scale cover-up.

The Metropolitan Police needs to be completely replaced. The entire leadership needs to be sacked and new, stronger oversight brought in. This has worked before. In Northern Ireland, the Royal Ulster Constabulary was replaced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland in a successful transition that was critical to creating a more just and representative Police Force. This is the sort of radical change London needs and deserves. We can take a moment to enjoy the demise of Dame Cressida, but until politicians get serious about delivering actual change, the hard truth is that come dawn, the Met will still be there. And it will still be corrupt.

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In a way, one must
admire [her] ability
to 'fail upwards'
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unsafe should, perhaps, flag down a bus. Gee, thanks Cressida. When



KATIE CHAN

Science

Botched biology: how Jordan Peterson uses science to prop up his (mis)beliefs

Columnist **Nieve Brydges** offers her take on Jordan Peterson's ideas regarding society and relationships

What comes to mind when we think about science? For many it's green vials in chemistry labs, white lab coats and goggles, and memories of botched biology practicals in which various organs and organisms are at the mercy of 16-year-olds with scalpels. Despite my own academic leanings towards the humanities, I look back on those days of secondary school science quite fondly. It was comforting to feel that, after a long day of English or French in which something might be said any number of ways, that we could be learning something concrete. Filled with heady confidence (and, let's be honest, likely unsafe levels of chemicals) and perched on those wooden stools, we prepared to dissect, label, and explain away everything man had encountered. An exercise at once liberatory and restrictive, the natural world is reduced to a series of truisms as hearts, plants, gills, and stomata alike are splayed out in black and white, bearing labels. When people feel confused it can be philosophy grounded in this biology which reassures. If testosterone and aggression go to 'men' just as pollen to 'bee' and oxygen to 'red-blood-cell' then certain men can feel assured of their place in the social ladder- or at least in their ability to climb it. So, what happens when scientising the

natural world becomes a soul-searching exercise for the lost and disconsolate individual? I'd like to explore this through some of Jordan B Peterson's philosophy. How can science (paradoxically) defer the literal and deny the tangled reality of human behaviours and relationships? Relying on a dogmatic loyalty to the sciences and faith in the perfecting powers of evolution, Peterson endorses extreme individualism and independence. For those of you already acquainted with Peterson's flirtations with evolutionary psychology I can only apologise; for those of you who have thus far escaped his crustacean-centred explanations, I shall provide a brief summary: Peterson's logic follows that natural hierarchies within lobster communities can serve as a pre-cultural prototype for some aspects of human

behaviour. Male lobsters use aggression to ensure access to scarce

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Evolution is far
from an exact
science
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resources. More aggressive lobsters have more serotonin, and thus the lobsters that lose fights are framed as 'depressed'. The logic follows that if, as a human male, you're feeling down in the dumps then the 'natural' solution is to assert social dominance. "Stand up straight with your shoulders back" is an oft-quoted platitude related to an assertion of power and masculinity. Essentially, it's all on you, bucko. Peterson's 'scientific evidence' rests on three central assumptions, which I'll discuss.

Assumption 1: Humans and lobsters are genetically similar enough to be considered to mirror one another's social hierarchies. The short answer to this is that all species can arguably be traced back to the elusive LUCA (last universal common ancestor), and the last time I checked we weren't instigating a return to nature by emulating the mating patterns of seahorses or dancing rituals of bees. The lobster is one creature out of trillions - all of which are distantly related to the first

lifeforms on Earth. Known species only represent around 14% of land and 9% of oceanic organisms, and many more species are disappearing faster than we can count them due to the climate crisis. The lobster is a wholly insignificant drop in the taxonomic bucket. So why does Peterson's logic prove so persuasive? With a bestseller book and Youtube videos garnering millions of views, the man has struck a nerve. I think the power of Peterson's argument comes in part from his misleading explanation (or innocent misunderstanding) of the phylogenetic tree. When Peterson asserts that human beings "divulged" from lobsters, he implies that human beings have evolved from lobsters which could explain similar behaviour. This is simply untrue. Vertebrates (which would, 500 million years later, include homo sapiens) diverged from in-

vertebrates (which would, 150 million years later, include lobsters) approximately 500 million years ago. Human and lobster populations have since had absolutely nothing to do with each other since then, humans have been too busy coming up with stuff like the free

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Flirtations
with... crusta-
cean centred
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market (or defending ourselves from the free market) whilst...
Continued online

▼GAGE SKIDMORE



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Science

Plant extinction and the Ginkgo

Beginning with the Ginkgo tree, **Nicholas Koenig** kicks off a column involving stories of the complex and tentacular world of plant extinction

The poster child for plant extinction, the Ginkgo tree, certainly came close to full extinction. Known scientifically as *Ginkgo biloba*, the Ginkgo tree is related, evolutionarily, to other cone-bearing species like Pines and Hemlocks (both Christmas tree-like species). But the Ginkgo has continued on an evolutionary branch becoming more and more isolated over time, currently the only species in its entire order of the Ginkgoales. To give some context, our species of *Homo sapiens* is in the order Primates, ranging from lemurs and gorillas to humans and baboons — imagine being the sole survivor in such an extensive assemblage! But how did the species survive its relatives' evolutionary trajectory? The solution involved creating a millennia-long-mutualism with humankind in regions of China. While humans cultivated the tree to be ornamental, natural populations slowly died out. Currently, there is an ongoing debate whether there are any “natural” populations of Ginkgo in existence. The story is one of hope in species cultivation that the spe-

ciated a relationship with humans, prospering in cityscapes and landscapes worldwide, ultimately avoiding total extinction. Truly embodying the title of a living fossil, the Ginkgo tree and its genome have shown an evolutionary trend not set for extinction in a biological-sense. Through biogeographical modelling coupled with genetic sequencing, researchers have found a path for the tree to coexist and participate in various ecosystems. These studies have, and will, continue to be vital to the conservation community for salvaging plant species heading towards human-induced extinction. Another benefit of Ginkgo is its medicinal value, elicited through one of the plant's chemicals. Known as EGb761, this chemical has shown to have profound implications on brain function, including increasing cognitive function for people with mild dementia. In addition to the two mentioned, the contributions Ginkgo has made to our lives and conservation efforts is part of a long list, and is simply one species in an even longer list of multifaceted flora. The protection of plant biodiversity and all life is crucial for the preservation of the world we create with other beings as well as continuing to listen to the narratives told by non-human species, a common theme in plant extinction that will be further explored. In future articles in this column, I will be traversing our complex ecosystems to focus on plant species with less fortunate histories and multispecies entanglements that remind us of our sometimes doomful habitats. This is not to foster guilt for what we are doing wrong but, rather, appreciate the beauty of the natural world and remind us what is at stake.



To trust or not to trust science, that is the question...

Staff Writer **Ramya Vishwanath** explores how quick we are to adopt scientific statements presented to us as the truth, and argues that we should always endeavour to question science

Science has been endowed with the role of the “explainer”. Everything we know today can be rationalised by science, with even those who don't wholly understand the subject's intricacies affirming that science is trustworthy.

The other day, a family member forwarded an interesting comic on our WhatsApp group. The comic illustrated a young boy stating that “trust the science” was the most anti-science statement one could make, for “questioning science” was how one “did science.” This comic got me thinking about why science and trust go hand-in-hand for most individuals even though it has time and again proven itself to be fallible.

“Research has been the beacon of hope in these times”

We've all heard the adage “because science says so”. It's often used by slightly impatient and nescient parents when their explanations are insufficient for their curious children. And therefore, from a young age, many of us begin to harbour an inexplicable loyalty towards the sciences.

However, scientific theories are not immutable. Think of how many scientists it took to elucidate the structure of an atom — from John Dalton's basic model to Neil Bohr's solar system-like model to the

most recent quantum mechanics model, science is ever-changing. There are several such examples. Yet, every time a new theory is postulated, people believe in it. This continuous cycle of rejection and acceptance of theories leads us one step closer to understanding the world we live in.

An article in *The Guardian* has a fascinating take on the mantra of “trust the science”. It illustrates how this very rational subject finds its basis in assumptions. It makes an important point of how one can be rational without being certain. Given the available information, science will always present the most reasonable explanation. While the information based on which the conclusion is theorised may change with time, the method of science remains sound.

Despite all the goodwill that science has garnered, it remains esoteric. It is understood by few and remains reasonably inaccessible to most, primarily because few people pursue science beyond high school. Thus, ignorance often overrides trust. Moreover, trust is not uniformly spread over all areas of science. This is especially true when the impact of science is experienced by people directly. For instance, even if someone is ignorant about black holes, they may blindly believe that light cannot escape from a black hole. However, blind trust begins to take the back seat when it comes to life sciences and healthcare. New medicines, vaccines, and other treatments are backed by years of rigorous research, but the slightest hint of side effects are

enough to undo all the benefits of a new treatment technique.

Novak Djokovic's reluctance to get vaccinated despite all the available research to validate the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines is an excellent example of people's unwillingness to put their trust in the life sciences easily.

In these cases, trust is often replaced with scepticism because trust would mean putting their life in the hands of a subject that is eventually driven by erring humans. Despite all the progress made in science, global health emergencies are constantly emerging.

Science has the potential to control emergencies from turning into catastrophes. However, the positive impact of life science research can be realised only if people are willing to engage with science and take a leap of faith. To cite an example, the World Economic Forum's report explains how people's dubious relationship with scientific research has made it incredibly difficult to fight the Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It also highlights how Rwandans have the maximum trust in their scientists and healthcare systems among all the African countries — a whopping 97% compared to the world average of 76%.

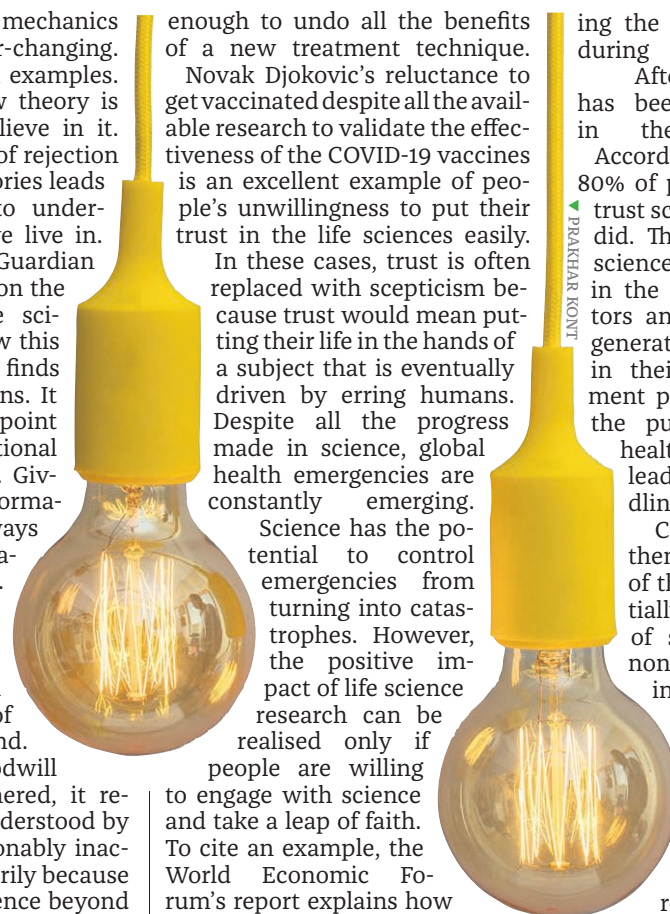
Extensive trust was built via grassroots engagement, and these efforts will pay off with Rwanda having a 95% immunisation coverage. COVID-19 seems to have played a role in strengthening people's faith in life science by highlighting

the role played by scientists during a global health crisis.

After all, scientific research has been the beacon of hope in these uncertain times.

According to the *New York Times*, 80% of people from 113 countries trust science a lot more than they did. This surge in the belief in sciences is promising, especially in the field of health with doctors and other health scientists generating greater confidence in their prevention and treatment plans. This would increase the public's engagement with healthcare treatments and lead to more efficient handling of global health issues.

Coming back to my central theme, I believe that the comic of the little boy was only partially correct. For the process of science to be beneficial, non-scientists need to “trust in science”. Trusting in science can never be “anti-science” because unless people place their faith in the subject, they cannot engage with it. And unless they engage with the results of scientific research, its impact cannot be maximised. After all, science aims to understand the world better, find solutions to pertinent problems, and make it a better place. But on the other hand, if scientists begin to trust science blindly, then the subject will not be able to reach its potential. Scientists need to keep “questioning science” so that old theories can be refuted and replaced with more comprehensive ones. Science thrives when it is driven by curious, probing scientists. It's a two-way process, and only if both parties play appropriate roles can science continue to be held to superlative standards.



Small pharma is outperforming big pharma, new book suggests

Published on Monday (14/2), *From Breakthrough to Blockbuster: The Business of Biotechnology*, demonstrates how the small, inexperienced entrepreneurial companies that constitute the biotech industry have created more life-changing medicines than all of the major pharmaceutical companies combined.

The book was written by Cambridge Judge Business School Associate Professor Nektarios Oraopoulos, biotechnology entrepreneur Dr Lisa Drakeman, and Cambridge Judge Fellow Donald Drakeman. Oraopoulos explains that “the driving force was to bring together the complex reality of running a biotech company with the insights offered by the academic literature.”

Stefan Scholtes, the Dennis Gillings Professor of Health Management Cambridge Judge Business School, has written about the new release, questioning how it is “possible that a few thousand

small companies, many of them short-lived, can outcompete the mighty pharma majors at their own game.”

Despite the high costs required to develop drugs and the complex regulatory environment, the book discovers how the biotech industry's ability to tolerate and manage risk has outweighed the pharmaceutical industry's advantages of scale, scope, and resources.

It also shows how academic researchers and investors have worked together over the past half-century to create an industry consisting of thousands of small entrepreneurial companies, most with fewer than 50 employees — and it is these small companies that have discovered “40% more of the most important treatments for unmet medical needs,” all while while spending less than the highly experienced pharmaceutical industry.

The reason for this, the authors argue, flows from the structure of the biotech ecosystem: the existence of thousands of small

companies, all competing for funding from thousands of different investors, is what generates the high volume of risk-taking required to develop novel products, particularly in an environment where there is no definitive means of predicting the product characteristics needed for success.

However, biotech companies and pharmaceutical companies are not entirely divorced entities. The book also covers the strategic alliances between the two, where pharmaceutical companies form one of the two main sources of funding for the biotech industry, and provide access to drug development expertise and resources.

The final chapter of the book considers the future of the biotech industry, and whether contemporary approaches to innovative drug discovery will endure. As the prices of new drugs have soared to levels unthinkable at the outset of the industry, the book argues that

the future of biotech will be determined by whether costly new medicines provide enough value for governments to fund research — and further, that those decisions will influence whether venture capitalists and other investors will

use to play a role in the biotech industry.

The book has been designed for a variety of audiences, including students, scholars, and policymakers, and the authors have suggested that the book can provide useful insights for any industry seeking to innovate in uncertain and ambiguous conditions.



Interviews

“In this role you realise just how many ducks you have to line up in a row to get anything done”: speaking to the SU Presidents

Editors-in-Chief **Bethan Moss** & **Emaan Ullah** speak to Zak Coleman and Anjum Nahar as they approach the end of their terms, discussing divestment, elections, strikes, and the reading week

Naturally, the pair of us were running late, but we managed to find a meeting point by Corpus. A brisk walk down a very sunny King's Parade later, we entered Michaelhouse Café as the SU's Coffee & Cake drop-in came to an end.

“Lots of people didn't feel like the [Women's Officer by-election] was that important”

The new drop-in was one of the first things we asked Zak and Anjum about. There's always a bit of distance between the average student and their student union president – so has this initiative changed things at all? For both of them, the answer was a resounding ‘yes’. Anjum was glad that they've been able “to talk informally with students in a way that we haven't for ages because of Covid”. Zak added that there are a number of students who are regularly involved with the SU – but that the new initiative was a “nice way of capturing other sections of the student population... and hopefully make us seem less remote and more accessible.”

We delved into what the two of them are up to as they enter their final few weeks in office. Anjum is most proud of her recent success in scrapping the doctoral application fee and reducing the Master's application fee. She's also been busy with the Vice Chancellor advisory committee, which is in place to find Toope's successor – although she told us that there are “no sexy updates” on that front. Something she's found more difficult this year has been postgrad funding, since “the remit is out of the University's hands”. She told us that the University is asking the right questions on PhD funding, but that “in the UK higher education landscape, we're still at a point where Master's students pay so much money. The term ‘cash cows’ comes up a lot – I think Cam-

bridge could be doing more on that front.” She's also currently running a consultation for PhD students left without supervisors.

One of the first things that Zak mentioned was the now-scrapped UAE deal, which hit the deadlines in July, and would have been worth £400 million over the next decade. He said: “We saw that as a really egregious affront to what the University should stand for...It was due to a lot of behind the scenes campaigning from us that the University essentially decided to pause and has now essentially said to us that it's not going ahead.” Toope revealed to Varsity in an October interview that the deal had been put on hold, but a University spokesperson further refused to rule out the deal entirely to Varsity late November.

Zak was also keen to talk about his work on divestment. He sits on the committee which “approves or rejects controversial funding including from fossil fuel companies”. He told us that he's been pushing “to stop the university [from] greenwashing the reputations of these companies...We simultaneously say it's unacceptable to invest in Shell and BP, and then in the same breath we accept millions of pounds from their first sustainability research.” “I don't deny [that these projects are important] but we are the wealthiest university in Europe... if we decided it's a priority for us

“Due to a lot of behind the scenes campaigning from us, the University essentially... said to us that [the UAE deal] is not going ahead”

to dedicate specific university resources to fundraise specifically for climate-related research we wouldn't need to put our researchers in [a] really difficult position”.

Next the conversation turned to the upcoming SU elections, voting for which will run from 28 February to 3 March. Thirteen positions are up

▲ ALEX PARNHAM-COPE

for

election, with nominations closing this Tuesday (01/02). We put it to the presidents that in a University of over 24,000, less than 200 students voted in the recent Women's Officer by-election, in which Heidi Chen stepped into the role after Milo Eyre-Morgan resigned in January.

Anjum said: “Everything was really pressed in terms of timeline. This election wasn't expected by the student body...lots of people didn't feel like it was that important.”

Zak added: “The reality is that student unions across the country have this problem and I think Cambridge has a particular issue partly because of the J and MCR system.”

He stressed that they don't want to be complacent about turnout, however, and Anjum noted that this will be the first elections since 2020 with in-person campaigning. Finally we turned to the SU policy which has garnered the most attention from students: the proposed reading week, or as they are rebranding it, the mid-term break. A University review on the mat-

ter was circulated earlier this year, and the SU will host a student referendum on the matter in March. Zak said: “In this role you realise just how

told again and again by students that they want a break”

We finished by talking about the most recent round of UCU strikes, which the SU voted to support last term.

Zak said: “After the last two years of education, it's pretty devastating that there's going to be additional strikes...We believe that the goals of the strikes will secure the long term future of education”. He also emphasised that the SU have been doing all that they can to mitigate the effect of industrial action on students, such as a guarantee from the University that mitigations will be put in place for exams.

“After the last two years of education, it's pretty devastating that there's going to be additional strikes... [but] the goals of the strikes will secure the long term future of education”



many complicated governance structures there are and how many ducks you have to line up in a row to get anything done let alone something as big as changing a term structure that's been in place for hundreds of years.” When we asked about students that were not in favour of the reading week, and the concern that more work would be plugged into the break, Zak said: “A lot of the nervousness often comes from what the problem is in the first place, which is a completely understandable concern.” He argued that if a reading week were to be implemented, a “robust system” would be put in place to ensure workloads do not increase, and said the SU could ensure no lectures or seminars will take place in the break. “We can't let intermission remain to be the system which the university uses, sometimes, to sweep all of its problems into... We've been

Interviews

The Cambridge Majlis: Historic debates, police reports, and South Asian quotas

Akshata Kapoor speaks to Sara Saloo about reviving the famous South Asian society

A few days before speaking to Sara, the President of the Cambridge Majlis, I went for my first ever Majlis event. Behind the imposing doors of the Old Divinity building at St John's, the committee had created a cosy space. It was an incredible atmosphere – South Asians (and some non-South Asians) from across the university had turned up, a smattering of brightly coloured traditional wear in the sea of puffer jackets and sweaters, and an unmistakable stream of belly-laughs and chatter filling the room with a warm, familiar glow.

I spoke to Sara about reviving the Cambridge Majlis and what makes the society a special place for those interested in South Asian politics, culture, and other discussions. “Majlis is a historic and prestigious debating society that focuses on South Asia. It has hosted some of Cambridge's and South Asia's greatest minds, including Amartya Sen, who was president when he was a student at Trinity College, Mahatma Gandhi, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and non-South Asian speakers such as Keynes and EM Foster. It was founded in 1891 by the people who would

go on to be the leaders of the independence movement in India. Majlis was a forum for knowledge sharing and debating for quite a long time.”

Despite its historical fame, the society has not been heard of for the past few decades, dwindling away after its prime in the mid-20th century. “After the partition of Pakistan and what is now known as Bangladesh, around 1971, the society filtered away due to lots of divisions. Since Majlis was supposed to be a society that unites people from different parts of the subcontinent, it simply wasn't working very well.”

“In 2018, a couple of students

“*[The Majlis were] being monitored for spurring anti-colonial activity*”

who were looking at the archives discovered the history of the Majlis and decided to revive it. Now, we

are trying to recover some of the legacy of the Majlis that has been lost.”

And the legacy of the Majlis is a formi-

da-ble one, having been a forum for some of the most influential speakers, people and debates that would change the course of history for the Indian subcontinent. “It is always important to us to retain the history of what the Majlis was – there was clearly some-

thing amazing about it that made it last for almost a century. But, while we want to stay true to those roots, we also want to bring it into the 21st century and make it relevant for our members.”

“When students looking into archives found out about the historical Majlis, they realised that this was something that was missing.”

It seems crucial that the Majlis was able to revive itself and garner significant interest in a time when South Asians of all identities have had to face some difficult questions. “In the last decade, there has been a tendency to move towards division rather than unity. In the subcontinent and in our home, we see a lot of those divisions, a lot of people withdrawing into their specific communities. While community is great it's also very re-

freshing to have a forum open to all people.”

For Sara, Majlis has been that uniquely open space. “For a lot of people, when you come to Cambridge you feel like you have to pick one thing: for example, you pick IndiaSoc or

PakSoc. When I came to Cambridge I picked PakSoc even though I'm Indian, because I was Muslim. I regretted this later and wished I had picked IndiaSoc as well. With the Majlis, I felt like I didn't have to pick and choose parts of my identity.”

One of the most interesting things about the society that its openness is perhaps directly related to the historical role Majlis played in fighting for its place at Cambridge, and in the world. While doing archival work in the

“*[Majlis] have hosted some of South Asia's greatest minds, including Gandhi*”

British Library in London, Sara found “a bunch of police surveillance reports. The metropolitan police kept detailed records, probably more detailed than the society minutes themselves, on everything that the Cambridge Majlis did because it was being monitored for spurring anti-colonial activities.

For the Majlis, it was just a place to talk, but for the white establishment, it was this site of dissidence.”

In some ways, by simply creating a space for themselves, the members of Majlis were dissenting against British rule. The archives show us that despite being surrounded by loo m - ing portraits of old, white men, it is undeniable that South Asians have a history at Cambridge.

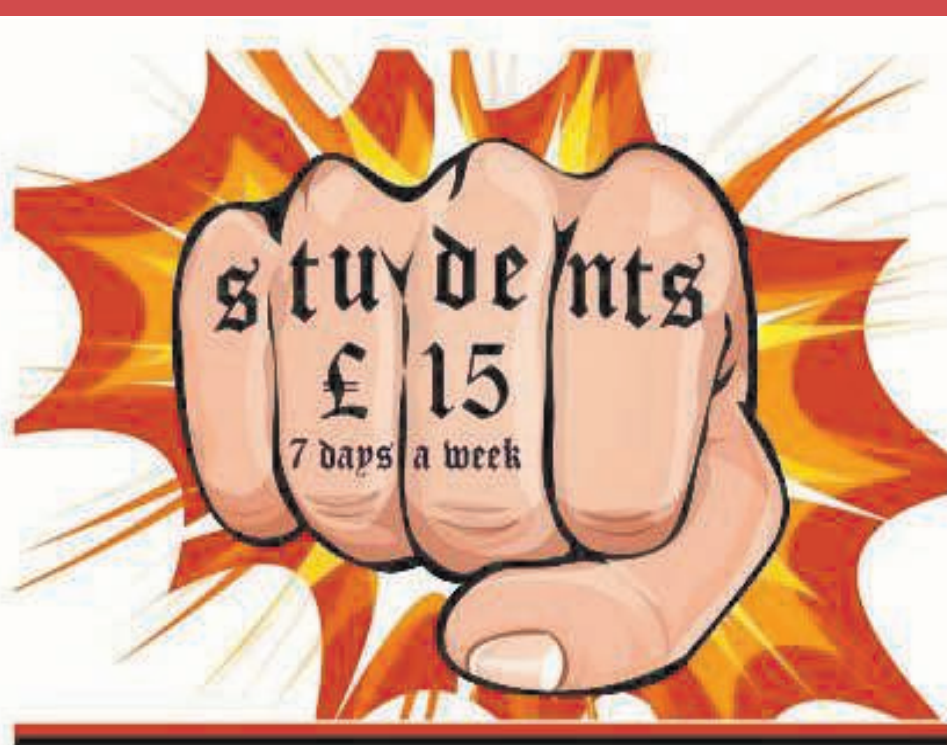
“We have a surprisingly strong history, but also a history of being alienated. We recently found out about the ‘Indian problem’ at Cambridge. On 19th March 1909, politicians and the people in charge at

the University met to discuss the fact that there was a large number of Indian students coming to Cambridge. They all agreed they were going to place a limit on the number of Indian students that could be taken into each college to stop this from happening. The interesting part was that the master of Downing College refused to reject Indians on the basis of quotas. This was 100 years ago and continued for quite a while. It's incredible that despite this history, Indians have managed to form such a strong and influential community.”

While being a space of revolt, the historical Majlis was also an intellectually elite and privileged space. I ask Sara how the revived Majlis will tackle this: “Breaking away from the intellectual tag is very important to me. I come from a very working-class, industrial Northern community. Some of the debate motions at Majlis have tended to be niche in a bad way. We want to move towards discussions that are very relevant to the everyday South Asian and student, to something that matters to us. One of the motions we'll debate in Week 6 is on the impacts of being raised in the diaspora. The motion we just debated on the state of Indian democracy is something we have all discussed, it's very topical if you are South Asian.”

Majlis has been involved in helping out the South Asian community beyond the debate forum. “At the start of the COVID pandemic, there was a collaboration between five South Asian societies. We lead the collaboration, finding grassroots organisations that were going to provide immediate relief to the migrant workers on...

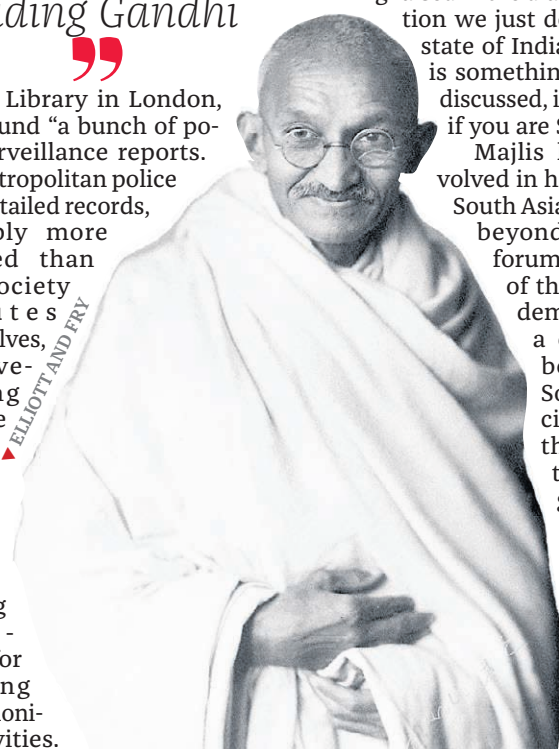
Continued online



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Vulture



Arts

The Symphony of Art Magazine interview: shifting with the seasons

Arts Editor **Famke Veenstra-Ashmore** interviews Varsity's Lifestyle Editor Nadya Miryanova about the development and evolution of her new zine



▼ NADYA MIRYANOVA

Autumn, winter, spring and summer are the core temporal pillars governing the Symphony of Art magazine. As I interview founder and co-editor Nadya Miryanova, it becomes clear that guarding and amplifying the creative arts and all its elements is the primary occupation of the zine. With the shifting of the seasons, the team wish to portray the constantly evolving arts sector and scene, loud voices, and develop a unique image which incorporates creativity in a unique way. The publication first entered the scene in Michaelmas 2021 with its cleverly titled 'Hallowzine 2021', which drew on "ghostly creations" evoked by the dark and enigmatic autumnal season. A festive teaser issue which introduced the team behind the zine, it clearly marked the zine as a

co-editor Lotte Brundle, Miryanova curates and co-edits pieces that fall broadly into the categories of art, stage & screen, literature, and music, but says the zine aims to be a "safe space for all creatives to share their viewpoints, stories, artistic projects" and to "promote the freedom of creative expression". Symphony of Art is entirely self-funded, with the zine based online with a website Miryanova "built from scratch". With many creative publications migrating online, Miryanova talks about the "flexibility and accessibility" which this approach lends itself to. Free to read, the zine is part of a greater movement towards free creative expression and publication. However, print is not out of the question for the team; Miryanova is hoping to craft a "print version in summer which combines some of our favourite articles into a publication that encompasses the year as a whole — thus spotlighting all the seasons". The publication also derives its aesthetics from the seasons, with a blending of colour, format, and layout all corresponding with the times of year portrayed. Miryanova wants to "evolve within the format we currently have, using a similar yet alternative style for future editions as time goes on." Nadya Miryanova points out how much of Cambridge zine culture revolves around termly calls for submissions and editions. With her new zine, Symphony of Art, Miryanova aims to disrupt these designated termly patterns of creativity somewhat by finding guidance in the natural passing of time. She describes how the zine, by "taking the seasons as a form of reflection and inspiration", has flourished into a diverse and ever-changing publication which can be "interpreted as innovatively as creatives would like". While naturally submissions windows will coalesce with terms as we move through the year, Miryanova hopes by

branding it by the seasons she can detach the formality of normal bases for submissions. The zine's adaptability is striking, with a website that can be "changed and altered at any time — mirroring the shift in the seasons". Unlike other zines which publish highlighted

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Symphony of Art's accessibility is inspiring
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pieces online or publish print-style on formats like Issuu, Symphony of Art's website is designed to be interacted with, and boasts a "distinct style" which refuses to be "fixed". In an industry where funding is scarce, and value is constantly overlooked, Symphony of Art's accessibility is inspiring. Miryanova reflects on her motivation behind developing the zine, citing how she "thought of the idea in the first lockdown when I was reading about the defunding of the Arts sector in schools and society more generally — it became worse with the pandemic". She sees the magazine "as a vehicle to promote creativity and give people a space dedicated to writing about the creative arts", which has been historically and currently overlooked. We discuss how Symphony of Art is unique in its emphasis on the creative arts as a sector; Miryanova reflects on how "no individual magazines within Cambridge specifically promoted them." Symphony of Art aims to be that preserving and flexible force. Collaboration is a vital aspect of the magazine's structure, Miryanova argues, citing how it "wouldn't exist if not for the input of other people". The team consists of section editors, columnists, and illustrators, who work together and are bound by the influence of the seasons. When asked about whether creating her own, independent zine gave her greater creative autonomy, she responded "in some respects. I started up the magazine from scratch and was able to choose the website to use — the design for the issues — there was nothing

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The zine is a safe space for all creatives to share their viewpoints
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pre-established. But working for publications such as Varsity and CLC does still involve a lot of creative autonomy, but as with any personal project, you have more liberty in shaping it". The overarching drive for it to be governed by the seasons is evident in its design and structure — "spacing, structure, and reflection is the design's primary focus." This certainly

shines through in the zine's public image. Moving forward, Miryanova is excited at the prospect of increased involvement. "Anyone can get involved with writing articles or sending art — our emails are always open but we especially welcome pieces that are fitted to the different editions". The zine will be publishing a Winter edition in February, with a double-edition for Spring and Summer seeking submissions and applications in "mid-March, as it's a busy time for students". Miryanova looks forward to developing the reach and presence of the Symphony of Art zine further as a creative outlet for creatives at Cambridge who share her desire to preserve, defend, and contribute to the creative arts.

The Symphony of Art zine can be found here: <https://symphonyartzine.co.uk/>. Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/symphonyartzine> Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/symphonyartzine/> Email: symphonyarteditorial@gmail.com.

WEEK 5 READING LIST

Feeling blue? No problem! The Arts team are on hand to with their favourite feel-good books to see you through Week 5.

Pride and Prejudice
by Jane Austen (1813)

Anne of Green Gables
by Lucy Maud Montgomery (1903)

About a Boy
by Nick Hornby (1998)

Wise Children
by Angela Carter (1991)

The Book Thief
by Markus Zusak (2005)

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society
by Mary Ann Shaffer (2008)

▼ CHRIS LAWTON



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It is part of a greater movement towards free creative expression and publication
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space intended to "spotlight the creative arts". With no delineations between fiction and non-fiction, which Miryanova points to as one of its unique aspects, the zine welcomes submissions of any kind within this artistic bracket. Poetry and fine art, such as in-house poet's Renée Eshel's 'Full pantry' and artist Phillipa Murphy's gallery 'Halloween in Art' make up many of the pieces which Miryanova has published from her internal team, but "not one format is favoured". Alongside Vulture

Fashion

Y2K: is it here to stay?

The **Varsity Fashion team** debate the motion "This house believes that Y2K influence in fashion is here to stay"

Y2K nostalgia has dominated the fashion scene on TikTok, in high fashion and on the high streets for the past two years. The Varsity fashion team has split up into ayes and noes to debate whether we love or hate it, and whether we think it has a long shelf life.



▲ TWITTER / @YUNG MULITA

To begin with the ayes...

Amy Reid (Fashion Columnist)

When neutral tones and sleek, mature, form-fitting design dominated the mid-2010s, my heart yearned for a little of the gaudy fashion that reigned supreme in the early 2000s. Before the age of every celebrity look being the brain-fart of a team of professionally boring stylists, red carpet looks consistently walked the line between trashy and glamorous, and it was genuinely fun. Y2K fashion pioneered a spirit of unapologetic tackiness whilst producing some of the most breath-taking runway moments in recent history (you know the J-Lo Versace dress I'm referring to). When was the last time you could remember something a celebrity wore in 2014? That's right, you can't. After the snooze-fest that was the 2010s high-waisted, block-colour, 'American Apparel' era, I couldn't be happier to see people swinging around a comically tiny handbag, dressed like they're about to step onto the set of *The Simple Life*.

Kasia Truscott (Staff Writer)

The Ugg boot is back with a fleece-lined vengeance, and honestly? I'm here for it. They're cosy, they're comfy, they're practical - in a way, I'm surprised they ever went out of style in the first place. Sure, maybe we'll skip the phase where celebrities wore them all over the red carpet (Ashley Tisdale, I'm looking at you), but the Ugg boot remains, in my opinion, one of the most versatile trends to strut back out from the early-2000s graveyard with style.

The Mini Ugg boot is every 'it' girl's choice of indoor-outdoor shoe right now, donned by the likes of Kaia Gerber and Gigi Hadid.

Dressed down with a pair of leggings and an oversized vintage sweatshirt for a day of running errands, or dressed up with some baggy jeans and an oversized blazer for a more tailored look, it's a versatile boot that brings the perfect blend of comfort and Y2K nostalgia.

Anna Chan (Fashion Editor)

Let's talk about the brand carrying the current Y2K renaissance: Blumarine. Under the helm of Nicola Broganano and stylist Lotta Volkova, it's become "dirty, bitchier, sexier" (in Broganano's own words). The fur-collared knit cardigans, silky floral prints, matching sets, famous butterfly tops, sequins, sheer fabrics, low-waisted trousers and frills are after my own heart.

The colour combinations are bold and exquisite: there's a bright blue outfit with red hot boots, light blue fur trim on a red and lilac cardigan, baby pink with rosy pink, a yellow set with blue fur, a lime green fur shawl over a red minidress. And I love how the clothes sit on the body - it's so laid-back, flirty, unabashed and glamorous. We all need a bit of that attitude in the 2020s.

Then the noes...

Eva Morris (Fashion Editor)

Every couple of months I see the same article: 'Y2K is making a comeback!'. Cue style guides on how to wear your velour sweats, low rise trousers and perfectly smudged eyeliner. I do agree, the noughties had some great style, with hyper-feminine over-the-top 'everybody look at me' kind of looks. Right up my street. But Y2K has been around for a while. It's nothing new. What we're seeing now isn't really the same Y2K revival we saw in 2018 with Burberry monograms and Juicy Couture. Instead we have gorpcore, everything crocheted and subversive basics. It's highly influenced, sure, but let the same dull Y2K comparisons go. The 2020's era is just beginning, it needs space to breathe and heaven forbid don't start claiming Y2K is back again.

Emaan Ullah (Editor-in-Chief)

Characterised by low-rise jeans, rhinestones, and bubblegum pink, Y2K has made a return. There's no arguing with the playful and experimental nature of the trend: it pushes the boundaries of unfashionable fashion, and, for just a moment, makes us forget that we're adults as we browse for baguette bags, baby tees, and butterfly clips.

However, it's precisely this desire for nostalgia that will be its downfall. As we embrace the layers and the ludicrous, Y2K enters into a deadly conflict with timelessness - and unfortunately, this is not a battle that Y2K can win. Before we know it, Von Dutch will be Gone Dutch, Betsey Johnson will be Betsey Johns-done, and Juicy Couture will be Juicy No-more.

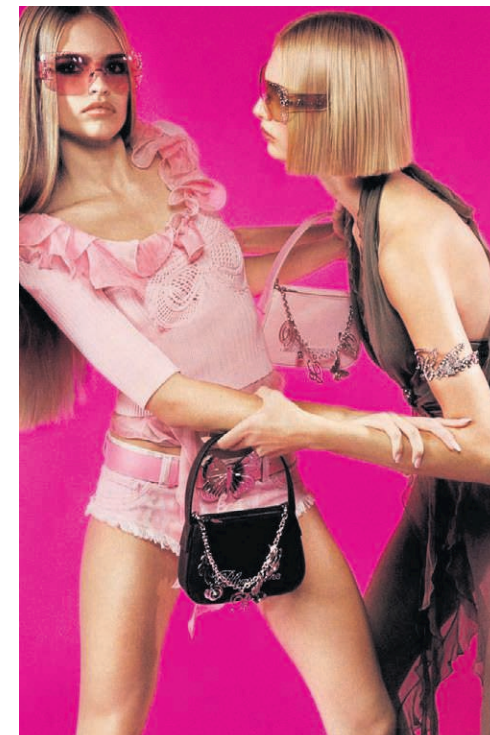
Sarah Abbas (Fashion Columnist)

I'll admit, the reimaged styles of the Y2K

era may periodically take my fancy. However, let's not romanticise an age where the go to look was 'burnt-out-disney-star-goes-to-collect-a-kids-choice-award'. With jeans under dresses, unnecessary belts and the urge to print 'JUICY' on everything, some things are better left in the past. The accessory vomit that dominated the 2000s is simply

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It's no wonder society needed a minimalism era to fully recover
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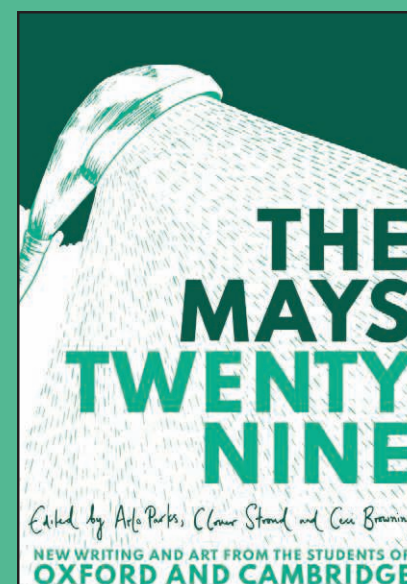
too much to handle alone; add clashing colours and excessive denim and it's no wonder society needed a minimalism era to fully recover. So, while the 2006 babies scavenge through Depop in their endeavours to find a baby tee, can the rest of us move on to the next decade?



▲ TWITTER / @STYLED BY JAIME

The Mays 29

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Guest editors: Arlo Parks and Clover Stroud

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Queerly Beloved / Learning to Love

Varsity's Creative Director **Leah McLaine** and Vulture Editor **Lily Maguire** with their Creative Team explore queer loving through the stages of discovery, dating and intimacy

Varsity's Creative Team has taken on a breathtaking project seeking to explore queer love and loving. Varsity's Creative Director Leah McLaine and Vulture Editor Lily Maguire worked with thirty-one models, eight stylists, three photographers and two videographers to capture the innumerable ways queer identity is navigated across a trilogy

of spaces. Queer models perform what it is to see, understand, mimic, fail, become frustrated at, and interpret how to love queerly, fleeting between heterosexual imitations and authentic self-expression. From the discovery of sexuality in the hidden corners of Downing's Howard Theatre, to self-conscious presentation in Emmanuel's opulent dining hall, to unfiltered intimacy within a

bedroom, a multitude of narratives are explored. Yet surveillance and performance runs through the shoot with the models presenting to the public which is always watching as videographers, undetected, filmed interactions behind the scenes.





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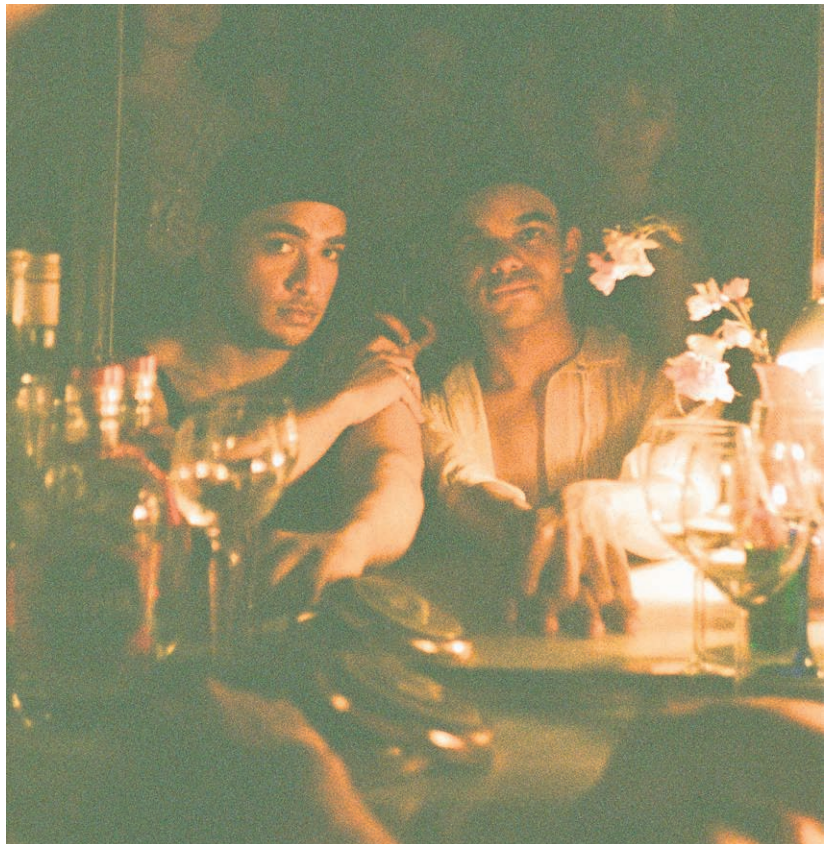
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Fashion Director: Zoe Geall

Stylists: Ella Curry, Eve Blain, Oyinkan Akinbolagbe, Beatrice Coulter, Freya Beard, Alex O'Shea & Anna Chandler de-Waal

Set Design: Caitlin Van Bommel, Catherine Knight, Katheryn Sheaf & Scarlett Ryan

Models: Sarah Mulgrew, Connor Phillips, Elizabeth Laurence, Charli Cowgill, Lily Silence, Edoardo Chidichimo, Hetty Opayinka, Clara Grosz, Ani Goddard, April Egan, Naphysa Awuah, Madeleine Anderson, John Palmer, Maisy Redmayne, Bella Cross, Kirsty Turnbull, Taisa Martins, Isobel Maxwell, Alexander Morgan, Matthew Cormack, Abdullah Khan, Jen Ocran, Larisha Apete, Ines Magre, Isobella Todini, Nathan Fernandes, Evie Hinchliffe, Jaden Tsui, Kailan Hanson & Jude Jones



Lifestyle

Who nose when this will end?

Benny Soran comes to terms with the jarring effects of long COVID



Content Note: Brief mention of anxiety and allusions to disordered eating

Imagine the worst smell you've ever smelt; now multiply that by 20, add 5, and then multiply that number by 100. That's the smell that I've been living with ever since I caught COVID-19 in July.

After catching a relatively mild case of COVID-19 over the summer and suffering from the list of now-ubiquitous symptoms known across the world (loss of taste/smell, fever, etc), I thought that following my infection, I would be able to move freely through the world, protected by my miracle-of-modern-medicine AstraZeneca cocktail, with a dash of natural immunity.

How wrong I was.

Three weeks after the end of my isolation I started noticing pungent smells that reeked of

“
The thought of eating would
fill me with anxiety
”

rotten meat: sickly sweet with notes of metal. The smells were all-encompassing: deodorant smelled like decaying flesh, coffee smelled like battery acid, eggs like rotting carcass.

I began to look for answers online. Having spent hours scrolling, looking for anything that resembled my symptoms, I found my answer in a niche group on Facebook: AbScent Parosmia and Phantosmia Support.

Parosmia, according to WebMD, refers to a smell disorder in which taste and smell become distorted. Scientists are not sure exactly what causes parosmia, but recent research has suggested that there could be a link between certain odour molecules and the receptors in the nose. If this sounds vague, it's because it is; scientists do not understand which odour receptors in the nose these molecules link to, or why these molecules impact recovering smell receptors.

The frustration and uncertainty regarding any conclusive evidence towards what I was experiencing led me to seek out answers for myself. When I first joined AbScent's support group, there were about 4,000 members. That number has since skyrocketed, representing 21,000 people who are no longer able to experience the smells and tastes that used to characterise their lives.

Our sense of smell is vitally important, and having now lost mine, I've come to understand the extent to which it is under-appreciated. Smell plays a key part in our perception of hazardous environments, relationships, and overall wellbeing.

This condition also has long-term ramifications in terms of safety, both for myself and for others. Last term, one of my housemates left her oven pizza in for too long, leading to the kitchen filling with thick smoke. At the time, I was seated in the living room, absent-mindedly doing some work. Seconds later, my housemate rushed in, flabbergasted that I was unable to smell the smoke.

Now that I know I'm incapable of smelling smoke, I often find myself quadruple-checking the stove after I'm done cooking to ensure that I haven't left the gas on.

However, despite the safety ramifications, what affects me the most is the impact that this has had on my day-to-day life. During the worst parts of my parosmia, when the smells of food were at their foulest, the thought of eating would fill me with anxiety. Despite knowing I needed the nutrition that food would provide, eating would often end up with me vomiting; ultimately incapable of eating more than just plain bread, yoghurt, and refrigerated vegetables, food lost its allure for me.

No longer was food something to be enjoyed with friends and family. Nights out, often beginning with dinner outings to restaurants, became an artefact of the past. The simple joy of meandering down Mill Road, greeted by the intoxicating aromas of grilled meat, velvety coffee, and fresh soap has been stolen from me.

But it's not all theft. Cognisant of my parosmia, my housemates have humoured me by opening our windows and doors when cooking to allow smells to dissipate. As the amount of time I spend going out to eat or drink has dwindled, my housemates and I have begun to host more at our house, whipping up the

“
Deodorant smelled like
decaying flesh, coffee smelled
like battery acid
”

foods that I find palatable.

While my parosmia is no longer the debilitating condition it once was, I still know that I have a long way to go in terms of my recovery. There are still dozens of foods that I can no longer stomach and, some days, the list seems endless enough to threaten to send me into a spiral.

But other days, when it feels like an insurmountable challenge to eat or drink anything, I stumble across a food that smells a little bit like it's supposed to. And that is what encourages me to take a bite.

The Beverage Report: A 'Posh Pint'

Columnist Sam Stern reviews Selwyn's College bar

Selwyn's bar is not the usual college bar. It could easily be mistaken for a hotel saloon bar or a swish boozier in the City of London.

It was renovated around two years ago and looks relatively modern, with retro features in parts. The floor is light, sanded herringbone parquet and the wall is painted in soft pastels with shades of yellow. The college character stands strong, with its crest sculpted into one of the walls. There is also a cabinet of Selwyn's trophies to celebrate their sporting triumphs. The room is lit by bright spotlights and mod-chandeliers shaped in the form of an old lightbulb. Students place their drinks on white marble-textured tables and recline on sumptuous red leather benches, some in jeans and some in gowns after a formal.

The atmosphere is upbeat and intimate. The bar is open plan. There is a large space by the bar counter where students interact while buying a drink.

They have good reason to, given the vast array of drinks on offer on the tap. Lager, ale, cider – they have it all. The range is impressive. They even have their own college beer, which is enjoyed by many. At £3.65 per pint, it is the cheapest drink at the bar with the other on tap beers costing upwards of £4. The main gripe most students have about the bar is that the drinks are priced like a pub rather than a college bar. However, the range of drinks, the quality of service and bar design are far finer than most college bars. Behind those taps, spotlights shine on the great range of spirits sitting on a golden shelf.

Martin Luther once said, “whoever drinks

beer, he is quick to sleep; whoever sleeps long, does not sin; whoever does not sin, enters Heaven. Thus, let us drink beer!” Selwyn students follow his teachings with impressive industry, though are perhaps hampered by the bar's aspirational atmosphere. They drink but they don't appear to lull into a drunken sleepiness.

There are some nights for putting on your best pair of jeans and jacket, and going to a bustling bar. The smart and refined design, the atmospheric lighting and the high ceilings with echoes of conversation reverberating around the room meet that occasion. If you are looking to catch up with mates in a tracksuit and a loose hoodie, and then go to sleep, Selwyn's bar might not be the best place for that.

Kebab fans might be familiar with ‘posh shish’ kebab restaurants, where folks eat seasoned shish kebabs with knives and forks. Selwyn's bar is a ‘posh pint’ pub, rather than a normal college bar. You need to dress up and pay more than at most college bars for a pint. I rate Selwyn's bar a solid 8/10 overall.

Selwyn's bar has a brilliant range of beers, striking design, a vibrant atmosphere and welcoming staff. I would definitely recommend a visit to Selwyn bar for a fancy night out.



LGBTQ+ History Month: What's on

Jasmine Hearn tells us about queer events in Cambridge

February is not quite over yet, and neither is LGBTQ+ History Month. There are still so many more events happening all over the city. If you haven't yet been able to get involved, now is your chance. If you can't get enough of the Cambridge queer scene, then get out there and keep enjoying it. Whatever your story, you're sure to love one of these events.

Safe Distance (2021) Film Screening + Q&A

19 FEBRUARY, 11.30AM

Jamie Chi's documentary Safe Distance will be screened at Cambridge Central Library, and will conclude with a Q&A with the director herself. Safe Distance explores how the lives of queer Chinese individuals in the UK have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and draws comparisons to the HIV/AIDS epidemic; the documentary covers themes of identity, migration, home and community.

Pride Patch & Badge Making Workshop

21 FEBRUARY, 7PM

Newnham CraftSoc is hosting a pride-themed craft workshop; get to know some new faces over a gentle afternoon of collage, or bring your pals for a break from the library. The event is in the Anna Bateson Room at Newnham, with limited capacity so arrive early!

Newnham LGBTQ+ Seminar Series

24 FEBRUARY, 6.30PM

The series, at Sidgwick Hall, concludes with talks from Pauline Eller and Iga Szlendak on a topic to be confirmed.

Poetry takeover

24 FEBRUARY, 7.30PM

Cambridge's cosiest and friendliest cinema, the Arts Picturehouse (above Spoons), is hosting a poetry and spoken word open mic night in the bar. Come along to celebrate queer history and be among friends.

Zine Workshop

26 FEBRUARY, 3PM

Cambridge Central Library is hosting a zine making workshop to document the lived experience of the queer community of Cambridgeshire to be archived in the Local History collection. Materials will be provided, or you can submit artwork or writing beforehand. Free tickets available on their website.

A full calendar of events open to the public on <http://encompassnetwork.org.uk/history-month/>

Film & TV

Feel-good TV shows to Binge in Week 5

Feeling burnt out by Week 5? Vulture Editor **Lotte Brun-**
dle has you covered, with this list of feel-good shows to
help you balance the stress of the Cambridge workload

Crashing

Starring Pheobe Waller-Bridge (*Fleabag*) and Jonathan Bailey (*Bridgerton*), a group of dysfunctional roommates live together in a disused hospital-turned communal accommodation - 1 Season, available on All 4 and Netflix.

White Gold

Ed Westwick (*Gossip Girl*) stars alongside James Buckley and Joe Thomas (*The Inbetweeners*) as the slimy but charming window salesman Vincent Swan in this comedy series set in Essex in the 1980's - 2 Seasons, available on Netflix and BBC iPlayer.

Chewing Gum

In this uproariously funny sitcom, writer and actress Michaela Coel plays lead Tracey who is obsessed with losing her virginity, but hindered by her innate awkwardness and religious upbringing - 2 Seasons, available on All 4, Netflix and Amazon Prime.

Lovesick

Originally questionably titled 'Scrotal Recall' by the Channel 4 production team, but later re-branded by Netflix, this show follows Dylan who, after contracting an STI, has the unfortunate task of contacting every woman he's ever slept with - 3 Seasons, available on Netflix.

Fresh Meat

Jack Whitehall stars alongside a strong ensemble cast in this university based sitcom. Follow 6 first years as they tackle the highs and lows of university life after being put together randomly in a student house - 4 Seasons, available on Netflix and All 4.

The Duchess

Canadian comedian Katherine Ryan shines in this series about a single mother and her relationship with her daughter - 1 Season, available on Netflix.

The 'Euphoria' of teen dramas de

Tabitha Chopping explores the gloss, glitz and glamour of its controversy is exactly what draws in teen viewers

Content note: This article contains brief mentions of sexual assault and drug use, as well as spoilers for the show

Teenage hedonism, with its thematic ability to shock and disgust, has concerned the mediums of film and TV for decades. Now, more than ever, with the *Euphoria* season two premiere bringing in two and a half million viewers, young people are clearly aching to see validation of their struggles on their TV or laptop screens.

Plotlines are racy, raucous and romanticised, where perhaps they shouldn't be

I had not watched *Euphoria* before; largely, I had cast it aside upon hearing the accusations of its hyperbolism, its romanticisation of addiction, and its unrealism. However, it was impossible to cast aside the onslaught of social media posts that mostly detailed the show's fashionable cast, its dazzling costume and makeup design, and its contemporary soundtrack with artists such as Labrinth, Migos or Megan Thee Stallion. *Euphoria* has young people in a cultural chokehold, and I felt it close its grip on me once I watched season one and the first three episodes of the second season.

“No young person wants to be lectured and brought to moral virtue through the media they watch”

Immediately, the show inserted itself into the canon of what you might call “teenagers-screwing-around-and-screwing-up” media. Rue (Zendaya) lands herself in the middle of a \$10,000 drug deal at the ripe old age of seventeen. Sydney Sweeney's Cassie gets tangled up in a steamy affair with her best friend Maddy's (Alexa Demie) abusive ex-boyfriend. Plotlines are racy, raucous and romanticised, where perhaps they shouldn't be. The show's situation inside this canon places it alongside similar media, such as *Skins* (2007), *Gossip Girl* (2007), and the controversial cult classic *Kids* (1995). It's hard not to be reminded of *Gossip Girl*'s iconic use of outraged parents' feedback to drum up more outrage for the show, by creating a campaign that used direct quotes as taglines such as “every parent's nightmare”, or “mind-blowingly inappropriate”.

Might we have a similarly outraged response to *Euphoria*? Both *Gossip Girl* and *Euphoria* are purposefully making their target demographic see their lives through a hyperbolic lens to allow teenagers a glimpse of teenage life as they might want it to be perceived. When I watched *Euphoria*, I certainly felt euphoric, as I remembered being seventeen and comforting myself with the hope that my problems were that thrilling, and my life was that glamorous.

To sit down and watch the grittier, grimmer *Skins* or *Kids*, both with their border-line-un-

comfortably realistic portrayal of teenage sexuality

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Being young: how depict indulgence?

of HBO's 'Euphoria' and its predecessors, and argues that

and hedonism, you certainly feel seen — although at times you might want to turn away from seeing the screen yourself. There are certainly instances of hyperbole, particularly in *Kids*, where pre-teenagers are exposed to drugs, HIV, murder, and sexual assault. Deemed by *The New York Times* as “Lord of the Flies with skateboards, nitrous oxide, and hip-hop”, a film with “no thunderous moral reckoning, only observational detachment”.

I think that this “observational detachment” hits the nail on the head in describing what teenagers want to see on their screens. No young person wants to be lectured and brought to moral virtue through the media they watch. Even fewer young people would turn away from a show marked “every parent’s nightmare”, and *Euphoria* does, arguably, an even better job of this than *Gossip Girl*.

There is no moral reckoning, but the show is not morally void. While the cast, musical choices, costumes and makeup are attractive, I think it is far more likely that the show resonates with so many young people due to its handling of the more poignant subjects of addiction, attachment issues, self-esteem and abuse, where it was incredibly moving and raw.

Simultaneously extravagant and down-to-earth, *Euphoria*’s glitz and glamour might be seen as overblown by some, but in fact renders it entertaining and relatable. Its more “polished” approach to teenage hedonism, in contrast to the grittiness of *Skins* and *Kids*, does not exactly depict a realistic snapshot of what it is like to be a teenager — but few teenagers want to see that.

Moral outrage is far more attractive on the screen to most viewers than moral reckoning, but *Euphoria* certainly doesn’t shy away

from tinges of realism and poignancy. The show’s romanticisation of particularly unromantic issues in no way encourages similar action in its viewers. By dressing up very real and raw issues of addiction,

“Immediately, the show inserted itself into the canon of what you might call ‘teenagers screwing around and screwing up’”

abuse, and self-destruction in an I.AM.GIA outfit, rhinestone makeup and setting it to an R&B song, *Euphoria* differentiates itself from its grimmer predecessors in the “teenagers-screwing-around-and-screw-ing-up” canon by romanticising and glamorising (rather literally) its dark themes reflect how teenagers romanticise their own lives.

For the anniversary of last week, Kaya Scodelario posted a memory on Instagram (@kayascods) in which she summed up the experience that perfectly encapsulates the aim of *Skins*, *Euphoria*, and what it is like to be young: “It wasn’t perfect. Far from it. But f**k it was fun”.

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ers ticise lives. fifteenth *Skins*

▲ ALL IMAGES FROM TWITTER / @EUPHORIAHBO

No to Netflix? Bring on BFI

Film & TV Editor **Nadia Sorabji Stewart** weighs up the pros and cons of our favourite streaming platforms, and points us in the direction of something a little more ‘arthouse’

It’s February, that time of year when Cambridge students are at their least flush. Non-existent cash is being splashed on May Ball Tickets and the like. Bank accounts start to look more like penny jars than weekly budgets. So, what better time to review which streaming services really give you bang for your buck?

The main problem with streaming services is that there are too many: Netflix, Amazon, HBO Max, Disney... They try to keep you loyal by switching out their film collections regularly, but most of

the website is more polished than the silverware at your college formals. You’d better be prepared to choose wisely, though, if you want to avoid sleeping through a beautiful, pre-

“Does this huge selection just lead to more problems?”

us are too busy to ever watch what’s new before it’s removed again. I’ve decided it’s time to play them at their own game — Netflix, you’ve just been switched out for BFI Player.

Subscribing to BFI could

▲ GIORDANO ROSSONI

tious, self-indulgent yawn-ercoaster like *The Souvenir*. It has a huge collection of films, most of which you’ll likely never have seen because they’re new and fringe.

But does this huge selection just lead to more problems? Most of us don’t feel we have the time to commit to an entire film when we’re working on busy schedules. Personally, I think I’ve

“Netflix, you’ve been switched out for BFI player”

found a solution: I only watch films that I know are ‘classics’. Hold the cry of ‘sheep!’ please. By doing this, if I gain nothing from the film in terms of enjoyment, at least I’ll know who my flatmates are talking about the next time they mention Céline Sciamma. I had hoped the BFI would give me access to such ‘classics’, and yet, while they do have a great collection of particular directors from different countries, they’re not so great on the popular classics. The most famous you might want to watch — *Moonlight*, *Pain and Glory*, *I Am Not Your Negro* — must be rented for an extortionate £10 each! So maybe I’m not ready to commit to BFI permanently. But when I’m bored of them, I guess it will be time to check out HBO.

hardly be more of a step in the opposite direction. It’s a place to watch films for the sake of watching films. They’ll advertise all the new releases in ‘arthouse’ cinema and



Music

Viva Zapata! The legacy of a grunge icon

Genevieve Badia-Aylin discusses the life of grunge singer Mia Zapata, who was murdered at just 27

On the 7th of July 1993, Mia Zapata, the vocalist of the underground Seattle group The Gits, was walking home from a music venue in the Capitol Hill area of the city. She had just stopped off to visit a friend in their basement apartment, but had headed off into the night shortly after, last being seen at around 2am in the morning. She was alone. At approximately 3:30am, her body was found by an intersection; however, due to the lack of ID found on her person, it wasn't until fairly later that she was able to be identified, recognised by the medical examiner – themselves a long-time fan. The killer had run off without a trace: it would take almost a decade for him to be found, identified in 2002 as one Jesus Mezquia, after a burglary arrest. It was a random assault, with no previous connection between the two.

Mia was only 27 years old.

Viva Zapata! is the second studio album by the punk band 7 Year Bitch, hot on the trails of the feminist Riot Grrrl movement that had recently originated in the Pacific Northwest. Bands within the city were generally familiar

with one other, thanks to the organically close, DIY nature of the Seattle scene: original guitarist Stefanie Sargent and drummer Valerie Agnew had played together before in the band Barbie's Dream Car, while the name '7 Year Bitch' had been recommended by the group's friend, Ben London of the band Alcohol Funnycar. So, when the news broke of Zapata's passing, it was not simply a question of a fellow musician being brutalised – but a friend, too.

The record was released in 1994, bringing 32 minutes of ear-splitting chants against male entitlement, domestic violence, and patriarchal codes of female sexuality.

Within the third track on the album, simply titled "M.I.A.",

frontwoman Selene Vigil screams her questions into the devastatingly empty space:

'Society did this to you? Does society have justice for you? If not, I do.'

It is 2022, and I cannot help but feel the same. Sabina Nessa, Sarah Everard, Blessing Olusegun – of course, these are only the names in our newspapers. Women still can't walk home, whether night or day, without the ever-present danger of astonishing, sickening



▲ FLICKR / MINETTE LAYNE-WORTHEY

violence – questions of geography, clothing, attitude, 'modesty', none have ever made a difference, despite what the laments of insecure misogynists on half-rate podcasts or 'well-meaning' politicians will have you believe. As Roisin Dunne's crushing guitar riffs collide Agnew's relentless drum parts, each track on Viva Zapata! embodies the same old anger that these women felt 30 years ago, and which I and many others still feel today. In

“
When the news broke of Zapata's passing, it was not simply a question of a fellow musician being brutalised – but a friend, too
”

the fourth track, "Derailed", there is the feeling of a plummeting freight train, metronomically driving forward as Vigil spits out her biting soliloquy; similarly powerful, "Rock A Bye" contains an insidious bass line, which lures the listener into a slow detonation of personal fury.

The whole record is rough around the edges, untouched by the pop glosses of autotune, sickly-sweet vocals or synthesisers. Listen to any of the pop music of the time – the dance-inducing tracks on Madonna's Erotica, or Whitney Houston's gorgeous cover of "I Will Always Love You", for example – and your ears might just start to bleed from the saccharinity of the contrast. Of course, Viva Zapata! is a thoroughly underground album: it never reached the commercial heights of some of its grunge contemporaries – and of course, it was never meant to.

Following Zapata's death, the non-profit

organisation Home Alive was founded, offering self-defence classes for women as well as organising benefit concerts to raise funds for the murder investigation. Of course, there is an immense sadness within Viva Zapata! – it is, after all, an album risen out of trauma. However, in the midst of all its rage, there is also an unmistakable feeling of hope, of resistance. In our current, mass-communicated world, we are rapidly seeing the commodification of the political: what is 'meaningful' must now, as we see through pretty infographics, 'rainbow capitalism', and the rise of meticulously produced 'political' chart-toppers, be sold as a product. I am reminded of the recent film Don't Look Up, where Ariana Grande's character performs a pop song in an absurd effort to save the world from a 'planet-killer' meteor: the song's gilded 'impact' comes from its capacity to be consumed – and yet, in these efforts to make the meaningful palatable, it does nothing. The meteor falls, of course. Those in power do not listen, as they're mo-

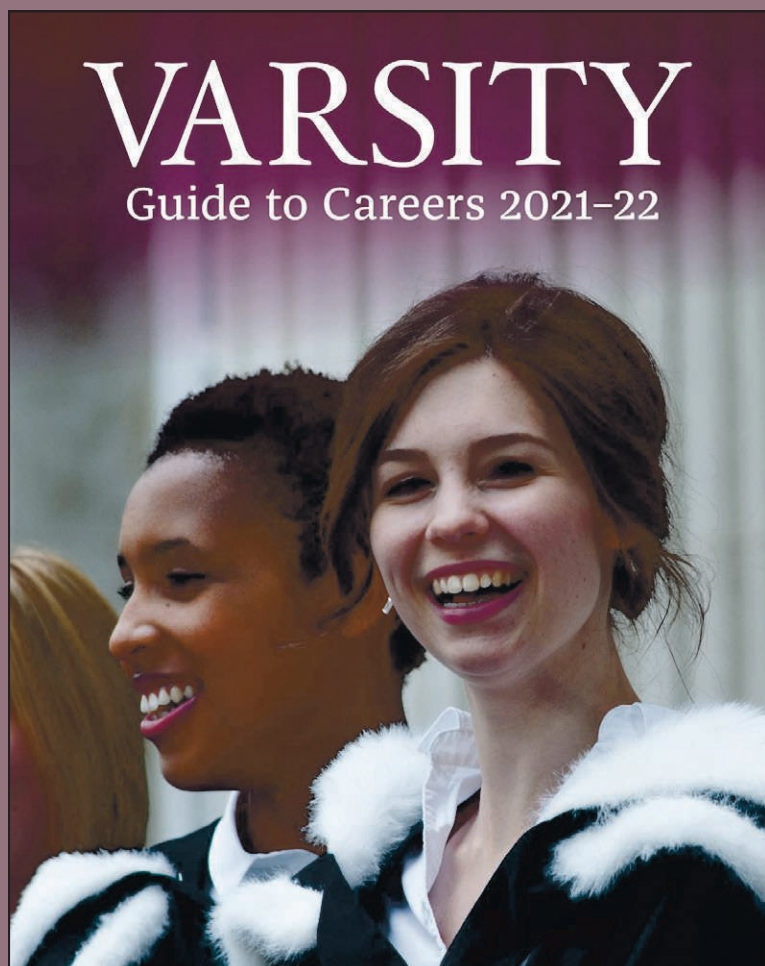
Viva Zapata! Was recorded by the band in Mia's memory. Listen by scanning the code below:



tivated by the same capitalist consumption as the music is. I do not believe that music can be truly impactful without a certain level of rawness, of ugliness, inherent to it – that resistance can be genuinely found in a record that prizes beauty above all else.

Viva Zapata! is not a beautiful record.

The Varsity Guide to Careers 2021/2022



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Designed by Sir Robert Smirke, the architect responsible for the British Museum, the Club's impressive façade illuminates Pall Mall. Inside, a burgeoning social scene sees a host of diverse events take place each month, including Cocktail Making Masterclasses, Wine Tastings and Themed Dinners, as well as visits from highly distinguished speakers, including politicians, authors, ambassadors and academics. Members needing somewhere quieter can seek inspiration in the Club's impressive library – home to nearly 20,000 volumes – or head to its dedicated business area.

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Theatre

'Football, fathers, friendship': Chakira Alin's double award-winning play

Co-producer **Lotte Brundle** and Chakira Alin talk all things *Heroes*, which will be making its debut at the ADC Theatre next week

Content Note: This interview contains discussion of knife crime, addiction, poverty, and lone-parent families

The process of co-producing *Heroes* this term has been so rewarding and this, I think, is first and foremost a testament to the sheer beauty and authenticity of the script. Writing a play can't be easy, but *Heroes* playwright Chakira Alin has truly made it seem effortless. Last week I caught up with her to get a better understanding of the chain of events that transpired to bring this wonderful new piece of theatre to Cambridge this February.

LB: So, the first question I have for you is, what inspired you to write a play in first place?

CA: I had always wanted to write one. I wrote it specifically for The Marlowe Other Prize, so the deadline was coming up, I missed it in first year and I really wished I'd done it, and I just ran out of time. So, for second year I thought I'd try to write one. And it was when we were doing Lent Term from home, so I thought, well, I have no social life right now, so I'm going to knuckle down and write a play. Yeah, I just thought it was perfect timing really!

LB: *Heroes*, as well as having moments of lightness and comedy, discusses quite a lot of dark themes – important themes – are these themes that are personal to you?

CA: Yeah, so it's all about East London, which is where I'm from, and I started with football – so that's not a dark theme at all – it's a really fun one! But then, related to that, I started thinking about issues that happen in inner-city areas: so knife crime, addiction, poverty, lone-parent families: this is just the world I grew up in. In particular, knife crime is something I feel has risen a lot recently – every day I'll hear about someone who has been stabbed. So, it's just something

that is often at the forefront of my mind. And you get used to it and you can become kind of, numb to it, and I realised that actually this doesn't happen everywhere. I thought it was a normal thing, but it's not, and that's why I wanted to speak about it: because you never hear about that stuff in a play. Maybe for good reason as it's quite dark, but it does happen. I wanted to try to take theatre out of the middle-class dining room and onto the estate. But it all started with football really, that was the main driving force.

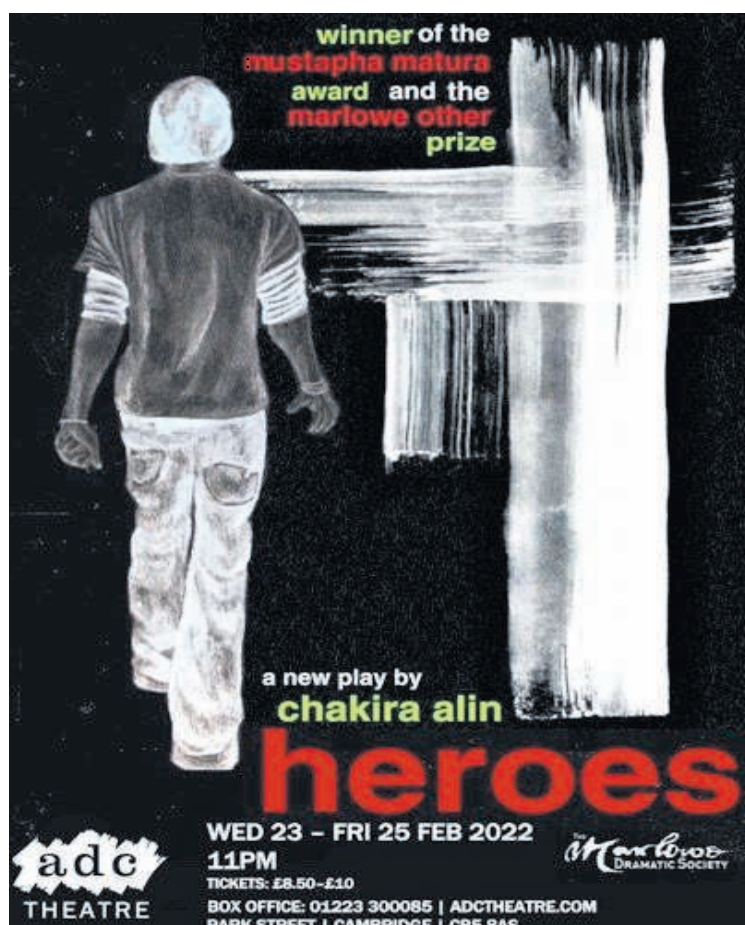
LB: So, I guess coming off of that, the follow up question I have is: Cambridge is a really middle-class place, how do you feel about staging a play with that background in this environment?

CA: I actually think it's really funny that *Heroes* is having its debut in a place like this, which historically is so shut off to the people I'm writing about. I remember submitting it to The Other Prize, and thinking, 'You're not going to win!'

I was really worried, wondering if they'd even understand it. But I think, people in Cambridge can find something in it hopefully. I know it's very different from what they're used to, but I think that's good – a shock to the system. Let them have it.

LB: My next question is: why football? Are you a footballer?

CA: I'm not a footballer – I wish! That's like my pipedream. I wish I was a footballer but I actually grew up 5 minutes away from West Ham Stadium; I would pass it on my way to and from school. My dad used to take me, he was a season-ticket hold-



▲ BERNIE CARTER

er. Football is what I think of when I think of my dad. I wanted to write about fathers and I thought, 'What do I closely associate with my own father?' – and it was always football.

LB: I know that you've been involved with the casting process and choosing the production team: how have you found that?

CA: So, I was really nervous about finding the crew because, similar to my hesitancy about staging it in Cambridge, I didn't know if anyone would get this play, if anyone would care about it. But thankfully I found Thea [Co-Producer], you, Dixie [Director] and Izzy [Assistant Director]; Izzy and Dixie are amazing at what they do: such great directors. The first cast read through, hearing these characters I made in my head come to life was amazing.

LB: Finally, could you briefly summarise what *Heroes* is about for Varsity's readers?

CA: The three 'F's': Football, fathers, friendship. It's about a young man in East London who's never met his dad, and then, one fateful Father's Day, he gets to meet him for the first time, and the play follows the fallout from that meeting, and how that reverberates into the rest of the community. That's all I'll say, I don't want to spoil it, so you'll have to come and see it!

Heroes will be playing at the ADC Theatre from 23rd-25th February at 11pm.

“I wanted to try and take theatre out of the middle-class dining room and onto the estate”

“Hearing these characters I made in my head come to life was amazing”



▼ RICHARD H. SMITH

What's on

Up for a night at the theatre? Here are the shows on offer in Cambridge this fortnight

The Calligrapher, 19:00, Corpus, 15th-19th Feb

Equus, 19:45, ADC, 15th-19th Feb

LOUD, 21:30, Corpus, 15th-19th Feb

Dragtime! Presents: Unhinged, 23:00, ADC, 16th-19th Feb

The Glass Essay, 19:00, Heong Gallery, Downing College, 17th-19th Feb

The Merchant of Venice, 19:30, Union Chamber, 18th-21st Feb

And Then There Were None, 19:45, Fitzpatrick Hall, Queens' College, 18th-20th Feb

When we were normal, 19:30, The Portland Arms, 20th-22nd Feb

Marlowe Lent Hatch Night, 20:00, ADC Bar, 21st Feb

The Children, 19:00, Corpus, 22nd-26th Feb

Out of Water, 19:30, Main Lecture Theatre, Old Divinity School, 22nd-25th Feb

The Winter's Tale, 19:45, ADC, 22nd-26th Feb

(Re)Present Monologue Night, 23:00, ADC, 22nd Feb

Splinters, 19:30, Robinson College Auditorium, 23rd-26th Feb

Blue Lagoon, 21:30, Corpus; 23rd-26th Feb
Heroes, 23:00, ADC, 23rd-25th Feb

The Yeomen of the Guard, 19:30, Girton Glebe School Hall, 24th-26th Feb

A Trip to Scarborough, 19:30, Howard Theatre, Downing College, 24th-26th Feb

CUMTS Gala 2022: I Got Rhythm, 23:00, ADC, 26th Feb

Speakeasy, 20:00, ADC Bar, 27th Feb

Smörgåsbord, 21.30, Corpus Playroom, 28th Feb

Unsoiled, 19:00, Corpus, 1st-5th March

Footlights Spring Revue 2022: When Life Gives You Lemons, 19:30, ADC, 1st-5th March

The York Crucifixion, 21:30, Corpus, 1st-5th March

Footlights Smokers, 23:00, ADC, 1st March

MODERATION, 20.00, ADC Larkum Studio, 2nd-5th March

Sport

In defence of the international break



Tom Bullivant
Deputy Sports Editor

It's the 6th of October, 2001. In Gelsenkirchen, Germany are playing out a frustrating 0-0 draw against lowly Finland. Meanwhile, in Manchester, England, with their fate in their own hands, are 2-1 down to Greece. It looks like England will lose out on the group's single automatic World Cup qualification spot to Germany, who are a point ahead. It's always Germany. In the 93rd minute, England get a freekick. It's 30 yards out but is their last chance to grab the crucial point they need to qualify. David Beckham steps up, commentator Gary Bloom says his famous line "Beckham could raise the roof here with a goal", and the rest, as they say, is history. Beckham scores a screamer, the keeper stands and watches, the country goes into delirium, and England go to the 2002 World Cup. As Bloom says in the seconds after the goal, "give that man a knighthood".

Most vocal football fans claim to hate the international break. They tell you moments like Beckham's only come around once in a blue moon, that games are boring, not competitive enough, and there's

It is a stage which has no equivalent and produces narratives that don't either

not enough at stake to warrant watching. They are not completely wrong either. Sometimes games are drab, and often the Premier League serves up higher-quality, more watchable games. Most of these fans, however, give the international break little chance. It is a time like no other, when some of football's craziest, most thrilling, dramatic, and romantic narratives are produced. The interna-

tional break should be looked forward to, not complained about.

In case you're wondering, no, we don't have to go back twenty years for the last time the international break served up some fine drama. In the most recent break, Liverpool keeper Alisson was given two red cards on the same

These games offer valuable preparation for teams before big tournaments and can unearth footballing gems too

night (27/01), both later rescinded, in a crazy game with a goal and a sending off for each team, as Ecuador managed to hold Brazil to a famous 1-1 draw - another in a series of shock results that will likely send them to Qatar later this year. Meanwhile, on the same night halfway around the world, Iran hosted Iraq in a fiery derby which the home side narrowly won 1-0, sending them to Qatar at the expense of their gulf rivals.

Often, those who complain about the international break only follow European football, which has little on the rest of the world in the drama rankings. South America generally takes the biscuit. You probably remember the chaos that unfolded last September, seconds into Brazil's game against Argentina. Five Argentinian players had lied about visiting the UK before entering Brazil, leading to the game's swift abandonment and making international news. You probably weren't following, however, when the president of the Bolivian FA was arrested in the stands for corruption halfway through their game vs. Ecuador in 2020.

On the pitch, the drama is even more bonkers. CONMEBOL's final place at the last World Cup, a process decided

over three years and around ninety games, was handed to Peru in the last round of fixtures, as Colombian keeper David Ospina palmed an indirect free-kick into his own net and gifted Peru the point they needed to qualify.

That said, the European international break has served up some classic encounters recently.

Just the previous one gave us Alexander Mitrovic's last minute winner for Serbia over Portugal, sending his side to Qatar and condemning Portugal to the dreaded playoffs. A day later, Northern Ireland put in a superhuman defensive performance to keep Italy at bay in a 0-0 draw and relegate the Euro 2020 champions to the playoffs to Swiss delight. On that same night, although it counted for little, Scotland smashed Denmark, registering perhaps their best result for years, one for every non-English football romantic, proving Scotland now is a different beast to the Scotland of 2019.

International break snobbery usually comes from a fairly privileged position. Many of those who decry the break support Premier League teams or their European equivalents, and

are understandably frustrated by the drop in football quality the break can sometimes herald. A great majority of England's most devoted fans, however, support clubs far lower down the football pyramid. For them, the break is a rare chance to travel away in Europe and support world-class players that they simply don't get during the rest of the season. For instance, at Yeovil Town a few weeks ago, I heard fans behind me whimsically reminisce about the time they saw the Steven Gerrard play with Wayne Rooney and score a worldie for England at Wembley, a far cry from Adi Yussuf at the 9000-odd capacity Huish Park. For Welsh, Scottish, and Irish fans, north and south of the border, this is often even more true. For them, their national teams are often a healthy step up from domestic football, and the fans turn up passionately as a result. Try telling Wales fans, delirious after Keiffer Moore's equaliser against Belgium, or Scotland fans after beating Israel to reach an international competition for the first time since 1998, that the international break is boring.

Granted, both the international break and European tournament qualification could, and indeed should, be improved.

For instance, one of the few things the proposers of the biennial World Cup did argue well was the air miles and carbon emissions created by players flying to and from far flung destinations every three or four months is a downright disgrace, but this is another debate in itself. Small tweaks to the system, however, can preserve the drama and romanticism yet get rid of the undesirable negatives. These games offer valuable preparation for teams before big tournaments and can unearth footballing gems too. To appreciate the international break is to understand part of what makes football special - it is a stage which has no equivalent and produces narratives that don't either.

If you've read this far, there's a chance you somewhat agree. If not, give the international break a final chance and follow the next one closely. The European playoffs for the final spots in Qatar are fast approaching. Either Portugal or Italy must miss out, Wales could face Scotland in a winner-takes-all game, and a shock or two will inevitably happen along the way. All in a week's work for football's most underappreciated facet, the international break.

▲ JBPRESSS

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▲ This year's Boat Race will take place on Sunday 3rd April in London, and CUBC's Women will be hoping to win their fifth consecutive title (Mike Taylor)

Fast, fearless, and female: the reality of rowing for CUBC

In the build-up to The Boat Race 2022, **Ceci Browning** talks to Women's President Bronya Sykes and seasoned rower Sarah Portsmouth on their respective experiences in Cambridge

Sarah Portsmouth is wearing a necklace with a small silver pendant in the shape of an oar. This is the first thing I notice when I meet her, along with Cambridge University Boat Club Women's President Bronya Sykes, to discuss what it is like to represent Cambridge as a female rower. Perhaps this is because she is so tall, and my eye-line meets with her collarbone, but it seems suddenly significant. Even when she is not rowing, Portsmouth carries her sport with her.

Last April, the Cambridge women crossed the line in sixteen minutes and twenty-seven seconds to win the Boat Race against Oxford. After the 2020 Race being cancelled due to Covid, it was a major comeback. Both Sykes and Portsmouth had been selected for the crew that had been supposed to race. "What was that like?" I ask. "What did it feel like to win after two years of training?"

"You can see it in my reaction," Portsmouth replies, "it definitely took quite a while to set in." Sykes agrees: "People had said it's Ely, you know it really well, it's home water, but I didn't realise we had crossed the finish line. You can see in the video, we keep rowing because none of us have realised that we've done it, that's it, we've won. I think you don't quite believe it when it happens."

The 2021 race was very different from Boat Races that had come before. It was on home turf in Ely and hosted without spectators because of Covid restrictions. Sykes believes that this changed the spirit of the race: "From the moment we

woke up that morning we were just having a great time. We obviously were so lucky that in the middle of a pandemic we were able to do that, so I think that's what we were focusing on: the fact that we just enjoyed spending so much time together, doing something that we loved. We spent most of the time giggling, even before we got on the

“When we actually start rowing, that’s when I truly leave things behind”

water. That was the biggest focus because of the situation and the circumstances."

Portsmouth also recalls the oddness of the day: "It did feel weird. I remember being on the start line and it was deathly quiet. There was no noise. I can't imagine that's what it's like when you race on the Tideway. Without any spectators, it really was just us and them."

The women's Boat Race was only moved to the Championship Course – between Putney and Mortlake on the Thames in central London – in 2015. Before this, it was rowed at Henley and was less than half the distance. Talking to Portsmouth and Sykes, one of the things I'm most

interested in is whether the merge of CUBC and Cambridge University Women's Boat Club (CUWBC) into one club has made any practical difference, namely whether the women are beginning to receive the same admiration and respect as the men always have.

Portsmouth assures me the change is as good in reality as on paper: "It's changed a lot of things. In the years that we've been here, I think the men's and women's teams have slowly been becoming more integrated, up to this year where it's the best it's ever been." What the women's side has to be careful of, she adds, "is that it isn't just subsumed within the structures the men have in place." She continues: "It's really important as well that we don't lose the traditions from the women's side, especially because of the lockdowns last year, which meant they didn't happen as usual. It's been up to people who were here two years ago to make sure that kind of thing gets carried through. There are lots of things that are unique to the women's squad that we love and we don't want to lose in the process of the merger."

After rape allegations were made against an Oxford University Boat Club rower by a rower in their Women's Boat Club [when], I'm also curious whether the historical 'boys club' reputation of the Boat Club has any foundation. Sykes rushes to the club's defence: "There's a really lovely atmosphere and attitude among everyone. Everybody is so supportive of one another. I certainly feel that I can walk into the boat club and if I need help I could ask absolutely anybody. People are

incredibly friendly, open, willing, and supportive.

"From my experience, that's the essence of the club. There are these awful situations that do happen, but the club are very aware of that and want to make sure that these things don't happen. At the beginning of the year we had these equality workshops that went down really

“In the years that we’ve been here, I think the men’s and women’s teams have slowly been becoming more integrated”

well. We all mixed together and everyone got to talk about their experiences. It's really good that we're doing these things."

Such procedures highlight the institutional rigour of the squad, and the space that the light blue women have carved out for themselves, but CUBC is not always a slick, well-oiled machine. The people in the club are real people with fears and anxieties just like the rest of the student body, and so occasional inter-crew arguments are inevitable. "The buzzword this year

has been communication," Sykes says. Portsmouth laughs, raises her eyebrows: "Issues arise when people disagree about something but they don't communicate it. What's important is keeping open dialogue and feedback."

Other times, problems originate outside the Goldie boathouse. Both Sykes and Portsmouth are finalists and feel academic stress more acutely than in previous years. "Sometimes it is tough," Portsmouth admits, "it's so intense for so long. It feels like a lot of pressure. I actually spoke to my coach at the beginning of the season and he was incredibly supportive. He told me to take a bit of time to reset, and when I came back it was fine. Everyone gets it because we're all doing the same thing."

Nevertheless, more often than not, rowing is a relief for the pair. "You come to the boathouse door weighed down by all this other stuff that's going on and you have a bit of a meltdown. But then you're surrounded by all these people that are so supportive, that you love hanging out with, and doing something you love. It resets you. It gets you back on track," Sykes explains. Portsmouth nods in agreement: "When we actually start rowing, that's when I truly leave things behind. There's no room in your head to think about anything else. It's quite meditative."

If there's one thing to take from these two young female athletes, it is that the sporting world is wide open. As Sykes so aptly put it: "there's nothing I feel like I can't do or I've been stopped from doing as a woman."