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No.909  
Friday 3rd February 2023  
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The Independent  
Student Newspaper since 1947

# VARSITY

## SIDNEY SHAMED

Students accuse college of 'wilfully' neglecting the needs of disabled students

- Student trapped in supervision room as ramp was too steep
- Broken accessible door caused dislocated shoulder
- Wheelchair accessible lift broken for three years
- Disabled students unable to access JCR, computer room, or upper library

**Bethan Moss and Bella Shorrock**  
Deputy News Editors

Multiple sources at Sidney Sussex have alleged that the college is in breach of the Equality Act on several counts regarding its treatment of disabled students, a *Varsity* investigation can reveal.

We interviewed disabled students at Sidney and their peers, who say that they have complained about the attitude and inaction of the college, but claim that “nothing has been done” to the point that Sidney are “wilfully negligent”. *Varsity* has seen documentary evidence of these complaints from multiple sources.

The Great Gate, on Sidney Street, is inaccessible for physically disabled students, so they have to enter at the back of college — yet the back gate is frequently broken. One disabled student told *Varsity* that as a result, they had to go to hospital after dislocating their shoulder trying to open the heavy Great Gate. They complained to the college, but Sidney claimed that the gate cannot be made more accessible for historical reasons.

Poor accessibility also affects students visiting the college, socially or for supervisions. One wheelchair-using student was stuck in a supervision room for at least 30 minutes, after a ramp provided by college was taken away and used elsewhere. The student's supo partner went to inform the porters and was told that only one ramp was available.

After several minutes of discussion, they agreed to come and assist the student.

*Varsity* understands that the porters suggested lifting and carrying the wheelchair out of the room — but this was “entirely unfeasible”, “due to its size, weight and intricacies”. The student told us that “the whole experience was appalling to witness”, claiming it proved college provisions for disabled students are “utterly insufficient”.

For visitors, there are just three disabled toilets in college: one is card access only and students can't enter, one is accessible only by going to get a key from porters, and the only other disabled toilet is in the bar, which only Sidney students can get into.

There is also a shortage of accessible accommodation in the college; there are only three bedrooms that are adapted for wheelchair users. Two of these rooms are accessible only by lift — a lift which has been broken for three years. Within this time it's worked occasionally; estimates vary from ten minutes to two weeks for how long functionality has lasted.

The broken lift means students unable to use stairs can't access the upper floors of the library or the computer room. By not affording disabled students access to the “benefit, facility or service” of browsing books and using college computers, it has been alleged that Sidney is in breach of the Equality Act. The JCR is also not accessible by wheelchair.

*Continued on page 3 ▶*



**'Walkout Wednesday'**  
Cambridge joins in on national strike

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## We have to recognise ChatGPT says pro-VC

**Erik Olsson**  
Senior News Editor

The pro-vice-chancellor for education has said in an interview with *Varsity* that bans on AI software like ChatGPT are not “sensible”, explaining that “we have to recognise that this is a new tool that is available”.

Bhaskar Vira, who assumed the role in October, told *Varsity*: “I’m of the opinion that we have to recognise that [AI] is a tool people will use but then adapt our learning, teaching and examination processes so that we can continue to have integrity while recognising the use of the tool”.

As anxieties around AI-assisted plagiarism envelop the academic world, Vira's comments on ChatGPT mark a departure from the recently adopted policies of other educational establishments. The New York City department of education has notably banned all use of the technology in its schools.

A spokesperson for the department said the ban was introduced in light of “concerns about negative impacts on student learning, and concerns regarding the safety and accuracy of contents”.

Referencing this development in the U.S., Vira told *Varsity*: “I don’t think that’s sensible because these are tools that are out there, that people are going to be adapting to and using.”

As pro-vice chancellor for education, Vira assumes overall responsibility for the University's educational provision, devising and implementing Cambridge's education policy.

Vira's stance on ChatGPT is shared by others in the academic field. Dr Peter Van der Putten, professor of AI at Leiden University, told *Sky News*: “It’s there, just how like Google is there...You can write it into your policies for preventing plagiarism, but it’s a reality that the tool exists”.

Released in November by the tech company OpenAI, ChatGPT is an interactive chatbot which uses AI technology to generate text in seconds. It has surprised many with its ability to create fluent and coherent prose in response to a range of user generated prompts.

Similar concerns have been raised in academia. Asked about how the University would detect AI generated text in work submitted for assessment, Vira said: “I don’t think we will ever stay ahead because it will become like an arms race, I think the AI will evolve quickly and will keep trying to evolve to avoid detection to technologies”.

However, Vira is careful to sound alarmist. He downplays the often lauded potential of ChatGPT. During his interview with *Varsity*, the pro-vice chancellor referenced an article in *The Guardian*, in which John Naughton argues text generating software, like ChatGPT, will eventually become “as mundane as Excel”. *More stories inside ▶*

**'It's sad that this had to happen'**  
Student control under threat at Clare Cellars  
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**Students are entitled to expect more from us**  
Pro VC discusses mental health and Cambridge workload  
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## V Editorial Week 3

“Cambridge was a joy. Tediously. People reading books in a posh place. It was my fantasy. I loved it. I miss it still.” - Zadie Smith

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 Varsity, 16 Mill Lane, Cambridge CB2 1RX. Telephone 01223 337575.

Varsity is published by Varsity Publications Ltd. Varsity Publications also publishes *The Mays*.  
 Printed at Iliffe Print Cambridge – Winship Road, Milton, Cambridge CB24 6PP on 42.5gsm newsprint.  
 Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office. ISSN 1758-4442

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# Editorial

February might be the shortest month, but at Cambridge, we’ve got strength in numbers

February might be the shortest month, but at Cambridge, we have strength in numbers. The stories covered in this edition, from the start of eighteen days of strikes, to the many students speaking out about accessibility, demonstrate the importance of communal action in empowering individuals. As we concluded last edition, life here can be isolating, but if we give each other the time of day, we can learn new things, refashion our own perspectives, and generally make the most of this fleeting month as it slips through our fingers.

Four weeks can easily flash by, and it’s easy to trap ourselves in our own worlds, undisturbed and unbothered. But student journalism gives us an opportunity to glance into other peoples’ lives, expanding the limited scope of the twenty-eight days we each have as individuals. We might imagine ourselves in dialogue with the new Pro-Vice-Chancellor, or reassess our own personal preferences when it comes to Sidgwick coffeehouse staples. For

the first time, we might spend time reflecting on our previously unexplainable desire to steal—or contemplate our own favourite charity-shop haunts.

It can introduce us to people and their stories that we might not have otherwise have actively sought out. Amidst the unavoidable chaos of our lectures, seminars, and reading, we can hardly be blamed. It all works to reassure us that we are one of many, anticipating its end whilst desperately trying to remain in the moment.

There’s no time-limit on certain stories, and it is often ones which cover things we can all relate to which prove most resonant. And though breaking news remains an important (and exciting) aspect of our lives, there’s strength found in taking each day as it comes, and each story as we read it. Some will stay with us forever, and others will prove as vanishing as this month. We hope, however, that whatever articles strike your fancy—you’ll make the most of them.



Famke Veenstra-Ashmore & Meg Byrom, Editors, Lent 2023



What have you stolen from a Cambridge College?

“a sign from Sidney Sussex bar”

“laminated signs”

“wooden bench from Sidney Sussex”

“Joseph Duffy’s heart”

“83878 spoons”

“the matriculation photo from an Oxford college JCR on a sports trip”

“so many plates”

“I could not possibly say”

“my entire glassware collection”

“a plateful of mince pies”

Want to give an answer? Follow us on Instagram @varsitycambridge





Story continued from front page ►

Students have claimed that no wheel-chair-using student has matriculated at Sidney for at least three years – and it's likely that if one were to be accepted that they would want to change colleges, or live off site given the lack of adapted accommodation. If Sidney were to choose not to offer students places due to physical disability, or to pool physically disabled students who apply on the grounds of their disability, this would be in breach of the Equality act.

Students tell us that other “tutorial rooms” allocated based on access needs are not suitable for many physically disabled students due to size and lack of adapted bathrooms, and that the process for applying to accessible accommodation is “bureaucratic, confusing and off-putting”. An email was sent to students last month which said that the College would only consider requests supported by an SSD (Student Support Document), which can only be issued by the ADRC.

When disabled students come to Cambridge, there is no requirement for them to disclose their disability to the University or the ADRC, or to get an SSD. *Varsity* understands that other colleges allocate accessible rooms without requiring this document. While the JCR later sent an email clarifying that an SSD is not the only route to getting an accessible room, students we spoke to said that the initial email is a sign of a culture that discourages students to ask for their needs.

One student claimed: “The attitude of senior staff has been: ‘this is the way I want to do it. And if you’re discriminated against because of that, that’s not my problem’”.

In at least two cases, *Varsity* understands that disabled students have been allocated unsuitable rooms, but have been able to find students in more suitable rooms willing to swap with them. The College has refused to approve such

swaps, sometimes without giving reasons. One student told *Varsity* that “the onus is on disabled students to fight for their basic rights”.

Another student said that it feels like the College is “going above and beyond to deny disabled students accessible rooms”, claiming that there’s “an active animosity towards disabled students’ needs”.

Chapter 2 of the Equality Act 2010, concerning further and higher education, states that an institution must not discriminate against a person “in the arrangements it makes for deciding who is offered admission as a student” or “by not admitting the person as a student”.

The Equality Act also says that institutions cannot discriminate against disabled students “by not affording the student access to a benefit, facility or service; by excluding the student; or by subjecting the student to any other detriment”.

Institutions also must not victimise disabled students with “the terms on which it offers to admit the person as a student; by not admitting the person as a student” or “by not affording the student access to a benefit, facility or service”.

Other areas of the college that are “officially accessible” can only be accessed by ramps acquired from the porters. *Varsity* understands that the scarcity of such ramps means that it takes students who need them significantly longer than their peers to get anywhere in college. One student told us, “it’s not accessible for students to have to go to the porters for a ramp every time they want to enter a building — it takes away your independence.”

Some students claim that college’s advice about access to supervision rooms and other buildings is unclear, citing “Invisible ramps, that don’t work and aren’t safe” — others told us that they believe the permanent ramp, by the Mong Hall,

may be illegally steep.

When students raised concerns with college staff, experiences varied. While some tutors and directors of studies were helpful, students have alleged others, including more senior staff, “just seem not to care”.

Students claimed that staff are “insensitive” and seem to lack training in dealing with the needs of physically disabled students. One student claimed that they were not made aware of available funding for private therapy until after they intermitted, another that their tutor didn’t seem to know what double time was at all.

Another student alleged that the way college deals with disabled students is “dangerous” and “puts people off getting help”. They allege that the attitude of staff means that “If someone’s in a state of crisis, even when it could be life threatening, the thing that everyone says first, is ‘don’t tell college’...The consequences of asking for help can make it not worth it, and I’m really worried that it’ll cause a major incident...I just want something to change”

All of these issues have been raised by students to the college previously, but students told us: “nothing has been done” to the point where college are being “wilfully negligent” — “situations they could have made better, they’ve actively made worse”.

“One day we’ll look back on this and be appalled” that disabled students were ever treated like this.

The JCR responded to the allegations and told *Varsity*: “The JCR cares deeply about disability access, and has raised many of these issues to the college on multiple occasions. We hope this article provides further encouragement to move forward swiftly on this matter. To any students struggling with accessibility needs – we are here for you, please do continue to reach out to us for any advice or support”. *Sidney Sussex College did not respond to Varsity’s request for comment.*

# Student control under threat at Clare Cellars

Amelia Platt  
News correspondent

Clare College is advertising for the role of external bar supervisor at Clare Cellars, raising concerns among students who work there.

*Varsity* has spoken to two student bar workers at the Cellars who claim that the proposed change threatens the student-run nature of the bar.

The bar committee was not consulted prior to the college’s decision to advertise for an external bar supervisor, and were told just last week that the process was underway.

One student bar worker, who wished to remain anonymous, said that the decision came as a surprise to all bar workers.

The student told *Varsity*: “There have been problems before but we all thought that the running was going smoothly and therefore did not justify the employment of a supervisor.”

They added: “The whole point of having student workers and a committee

is so that they can have a collaborative role with the college to make sure the bar runs smoothly. Not involving us in such decisions undermines this entirely.”

The role of the external bar supervisor is advertised online, with the duties described as managing the student bar workers, organising rotas, ordering stock and managing event bookings.

One student-bar worker said that such a role “would result in fewer committee roles and therefore inevitably less student control in the bar”.

Another added: “The thing is that we are students but also adults. Many of us have hospitality jobs at home and are trusted with certain responsibilities.”

“The fact of having an external person present in the bar feels to us quite patronising. We know how to do our jobs. This is not just a hobby, we are getting paid for it. It feels like we are not really being treated as adults.”

They added: “It’s important to emphasise how central the bar is to the social life and culture of Clare.

It’s not just a bar where people buy

drinks. It has real importance to the college, and this decision feels like it is trying to stop that.”

One student acknowledged that an external bar supervisor may be needed in terms of organisation and safety saying: “they would provide continuity which is not provided as the bar committee changes every year” but the committee “has shown that they are very well organised”.

According to one student, the bar committee has met with college leadership to express concerns over the proposed changes. In the meeting, it was concluded that the Bar Supervisor job is necessary for reasons of continuity, and for ensuring the licence agreement is adhered to. However, the college agreed that the committee will have a role in selecting the successful candidate, and will be able to communicate with the college regarding things that they want to stay the same in Cellars.

The student added: “It’s good that the college is being responsive to our concerns, but still sad that this has had to happen.”



▲ ‘It has real importance to the college’: Clare Cellars packed with relaxed students (ALEX PARNHAM-COPE)



# News

## Students are entitled to expect more

**Erik Olsson**  
Senior News Editor

Hands in pocket and legs crossed, Bhaskar Vira leans against the window and smiles for the photographer. The pro-vice-chancellor for education is dressed smartly, wearing a light navy suit jacket and a striped shirt. "I've got to be in West hub for 10," he informs me, now pushing back comfortably into his chair. It's early Monday morning and we're sitting in a conference room inside the Old School's building. Nestled between Senate House and Clare College, the unassuming building is home to the University's central operations. Copies of *Varsity* scatter the desks of a bull pen downstairs.

On paper, Professor Vira's name precedes a parade of lofty academic titles. He is certainly an accomplished man. Cambridge lecturer since 1998, fellow at Fitzwilliam soon after, and head of the Geography department up until recently. He has, by his own admission, "done almost every job in the University".

Now pro-vice chancellor for education, Vira is keen to explain what the role actually entails. "Anything to do with the educational provision in the University

comes under my remit: that's undergraduates and postgraduates," he says.

On today's agenda: the University's student mental health plan for the next three years. The plan is ambitious. Recognising that Cambridge can be "challenging" for some, it emphasises a "proactive and preventative approach", capturing the urgency of the crisis. Yielding occasionally to alliterative jargon like "Suicide Safer", the plan is nonetheless a step in the right direction, allocating greater funding to staff training, mental health services, and out of hours support.

Prefacing its commitment to "listening closely to what students are telling us", the report says the University is "distinctively placed as a collegiate institution" to deliver hands-on support. Do Cambridge students expect too much from the University? "I do, and I think they are entitled to expect more".

Even the SU have said its proposals "will hugely benefit students", noting that "it's great to see extensive time and money being put into student wellbeing". It's clear the University have listened. So why now?

"We all know that the last three or four years have been particularly challenging for young people," Vira says, though

he's notably reluctant to say the mental health of Cambridge students is in crisis. "People have already been talking about a real crisis in mental health, I think that's the terminology that's used," he says. "We do know that this is widely reported."

He points to the pandemic, and the effects it has had on a whole generation of Cambridge students: "the pandemic has exacerbated [the crisis]".

But he also attributed mental health concerns in Cambridge to the "genuine phenomenon...of climate anxiety". "You don't need to be someone who avidly reads the newspapers to be worried about the world," he explains. While certainly of concern, it's difficult to take this comment seriously from a figurehead of an institution with strong links to the oil industry. Besides, the intense Cambridge term doesn't often leave much time for existential angst.

Vira singles out the counselling service's turnaround times as a key achievement of the University. All students who were referred to the University's counselling service (UCS) in Michaelmas were offered an appointment within three working days, meeting all the targets set by the University in October. Pro-

▲ Pro-vice-chancellor for education Bhaskar Vira in conversation with Erik Olsson (TOBIA NAVA)

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# from us, says pro VC

gress certainly, but, as the plan states, “we know we have a long way to go”. Moreover, it’s still unclear how long students have to wait for their second appointment.

Reflecting what the acting vice-chancellor told *Varsity* last term, the plan also identifies - albeit fleetingly - workload as a potential area of concern. “Is Cambridge too hard,” I ask Vira. He hesitates slightly. “So lets start from the beginning,” he says. “We take students who are already self-achievers. Our average intake is higher than our published requirement...they are very self-motivated to continue at that high level. Cambridge continues to match that expectation”.

He doesn’t dismiss workload concerns completely, however. “I think there are questions around the demands we make of you - which is a sort of workload question”. He puts this down to the competitive instinct of Cambridge students.

But doesn’t the University create that pressure? The ranking system not only encourages but facilitates a culture of comparison. “It does and it doesn’t,” says Vira. “At least these days it’s not public knowledge...I see [competition] manifesting much earlier than the exam season...that sense of peer competition is wider

than just the ranking system”.

Vira seems to suggest that it’s not so much the workload which is the issue, but the organisation of work. “So in many subjects, certainly in Michaelmas term, it’s not unfamiliar for people not to have a huge amount of deadlines in the first three or four weeks. And then all their deadlines bunch in weeks five and six of term”.

“I did the tripos 30 years ago and most of what I learnt in the tripos is still in the curriculum, and they have also added on much more,” he says. “I wouldn’t be surprised if we are doing too much”.

Assessment too may be subject to change. Vira says he’s interested in investigating alternative modes of assessment so that end of year exams aren’t the sole indicator of performance.

Mental health is clearly a sensitive issue for the University, and Vira is typically measured. An economist by training, he’s always forensic in his analysis and careful not to dismiss the concerns of any interested parties. But, in some cases, his occasional impartiality risks translating as ambivalence, particularly as this - at least anecdotally - is a concern for so many.

# What is the University's new mental health plan?

Michael Hennessey  
Senior News Editor

Last year an external reviewer branded the mental health services at Cambridge as “ineffective”, “untargeted” and “unsustainable”. A review said that there were “wide variations” of support levels between colleges and expressed concerns that “senior tutors, tutors and other college staff with a welfare role are overstretched and are dealing with often significant issues.”

One student told the BBC that they were left with the impression that “as far as college were concerned, if I were to die they wanted it to be not on their property.”

In response to this, the University have set out a new ‘Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan 2022-2025’ which aims to “develop a whole-institution approach to student mental health and wellbeing.”

The new plan acknowledges that “life for some at Cambridge can be challenging” but highlights that the new plan aims to create “a genuinely supportive and inclusive place to live and study.”

The new plan pledges swifter access to counselling and increased capacity

within the University’s sexual harassment and violence support services. The plan also promises to educate staff and students in leadership positions about the importance of mental health and “rationalise governance arrangements across college Cambridge.”

The plan also vows that the University will set up a University student wellbeing team “with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention”.

Crucially, the new mental health plan suggests that workload may be addressed in the future. The plan says the University will “continually seek input and feedback from students to understand which aspects of their academic life and student experience have the greatest impact on their wellbeing and mental health and take action to address reported concerns (such as workload).”

The University has acknowledged that they have a “long way to go” with the new mental health plan. However, the University has also asked for “the help of everyone across the University.”

The Student Union have backed the proposals made in the plan saying that they will “hugely benefit students”, and congratulated the University for “extensive time and money being put into student wellbeing”.

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# News

## ‘Walkout Wednesday’: Cambridge joins national day of strikes



**Eric Williams**  
Deputy News Editor

Thousands marched on Wednesday (01/02), in what some have described as ‘the biggest strike march Cambridge has ever seen’.

It marked the first of eighteen days of planned strikes that will hit Cambridge in February and March during Lent term.

A crowd estimated to be five thousand strong rallied on Parker’s Piece before marching to the city centre. As a result of the national mandate through aggregated ballots, striking staff from Cambridge University, Anglia Ruskin and the Open University joined forces. Striking UCU members were also joined by members of the National Education Union (NEU), Cambridge & District Trades Union Council, Unison, the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCU), Unite and ASLEF. Postgrads from the ‘Justice4CollegeSupervisors’ campaign were also present, as well as sympathetic students and members of the general public.

Speeches at the rally discussed the cost of living crisis, cooperative action between different unions and cuts to the public sector.

One striking school teacher told *Varsity*: “Right now, we’re teaching in classrooms that aren’t fit for purpose. We’ve got no money for support staff, no money for resources. I’m not just out here because we can’t go on with current take-home pay, I’m also out here because we need better learning conditions for our children - this action is about giving them the education that they deserve.”

Discussing the UCEA’s most recent

pay offer, one striking academic told *Varsity*: “I think it’s despicable, absolutely despicable. Our pay has been hit over and over again over the last ten years. We’re at breaking point.”

Meanwhile another striking member said: “It’s definitely far too low, but I actually think the offer is a sign of our strength - I’m not sure we’d have achieved something like

past.”

Picket lines were staged at Downing Street, the Education Faculty, Sidgwick Site, Senate House and West Cambridge.

The action took place as half a million people went on strike across the country, with teachers, civil servants, Border Force staff and train drivers withholding labour, in what has been branded the UK’s largest day of industrial action in over a decade.

Action also coincided with the TUC’s national ‘protect the right to strike’ day, protesting against the governments’ new bill that aims to guarantee minimum service levels from key workers going on strike.

Dean of Emmanuel College Jeremy Caddick attended the protest, telling *Varsity*: “I’m really worried about the Draconian legislation the government are introducing to limit the right to strike. I think they don’t realize just what they’ve started - unions are getting together and momentum is building. This problem is not one that’s just going to go away.”

In an interview with *Varsity*, President of Cambridge UCU Michael Abberton said: “None of us want to go on strike, eighteen days is a heck of lot of money to lose, not to mention our members’ concerns about the effect on students. However, we have had no choice, as the offers that we have had, like that from the UCEA, are nowhere near being reasonable or realistic in relation to what our members really need.”

●For the full interviews with protestors, go to @Varsitycambridge on Instagram.



► Daniel Hilton for Varsity

## Why are staff on strike?

**Eric Williams**

As two months of major strike disruption begins, what are the disputes, and what do students need to know?

### What’s happening?

Starting on Wednesday (01/02), eighteen days of strikes are set to take place over the next two months, in what has been called the largest action in the history of UK Higher Education.

Cambridge University will join more than 70,000 staff at universities across the UK striking over pay, conditions and pensions disputes, with action affecting over 2.5 million students.

### What are the strikes about?

The UCU is locked in a pay and conditions dispute with the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), and a pensions dispute with Universities UK (UUK).

The Union has said disruption is ‘entirely the responsibility of university bosses who have refused to make staff fair offers’.

### Why are academics striking over pay and conditions?

The UCU is demanding a pay rise 2% above inflation (RPI).

The University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) made a slight improvement on previous pay offers last week, with a 5% package.

However, with inflation (RPI) at 13.4%, the UCU have criticised offers as too small to address the cost of living crisis, and as another real-terms pay cut after a decade of low pay.

### Why are academics striking over pensions?

In April 2022, the employers representative Universities UK (UUK) implemented major reforms to pensions, which are provided by the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). The USS is the UK’s largest private pension scheme, holding the retirement savings of 470,000 university and college workers. According to the UCU, the new policies wiped 35% off staff’s future retirement income.

Reforms were justified on the grounds of March 2020 evaluations that placed the scheme in a deficit between £14.9bn and £17.9bn, which fuelled claims that pensions were unsustainable. However,

late last year, estimations by Cambridge University’s actuary advisors suggested reforms were going ahead despite the fact that the USS pension scheme was in surplus, (and would be even if benefits were restored) - findings which later appeared to be supported by USS financial monitoring data.

The UCU is demanding that benefits be restored to 2021 levels, and for universities to raise their contributions to amounts that they have been shown to be able to afford.

### Strikes have happened before - what makes these different?

This is the sixth year of strike action at the University of Cambridge, with the series of disputes beginning in February 2018 over pension cuts. Predating the majority of the current student body’s arrival in Cambridge, academics were striking against increased pension contributions, and Cambridge saw occupations of the Old Schools administrative building by sympathetic campaigners.

However, this time the UCU has particularly strong leverage, because it secured a *national* strike mandate in October last year, when members across the country voted to strike in an aggregated ballot. This was the first time an education union, and third time a trade union, had managed to win a nationally aggregated ballot since the 2016 Trade Union Act tightened laws on industrial action.

### When will the strikes end, and could impacts on students go beyond the 18 days of strikes?

Action will end if a resolution for the disputes is agreed upon. If that doesn’t happen, action could extend past the end of March, if the UCU chooses, and successfully manages, to reballot its members.

If the dispute is not resolved, the UCU has warned that the sector will face ongoing action throughout 2023, with promises to reballot and renew the national strike mandate.

A key part of the union’s leverage is the threat of a ‘marking and assessment boycott’ from April if the employers representatives do not make a satisfactory offer - with any marking boycott in the summer likely to cause major disruption to exams.

▼ The protest started at Parkers Piece, before marching to the city centre (DANIEL HILTON)





# ‘Seriously concerned’: Breakaway JCRs rebel against SU voting system

**Suchir Salhan**  
News correspondent

A breakaway group of JCRs, composed of Trinity, King’s, Jesus, Queens’, Robinson and Lucy Cavendish, are “seriously concerned” by recent reports concerning a data “breach” at Cambridge’s Student Union, which led to students being “outed without even knowing”.

The JCRs have formed the Cambridge Online Voting Consortium to set up an open-source election system as an alternative to the SU’s ‘outsourced’ election system, electing Jesus College JCR as chair of the consortium last week.

Jesus College JCR President Nicole Ling Yan Lee and other representatives from the consortium told *Varsity* that they were “shocked to discover that a list of LGBTQ+ students existed on the platform at all”, following *Varsity*’s report on data issues on the SU’s voting system. The SU is now conducting a student-led inquiry into the data breaches to determine why “the incident occurred and was not resolved for over nine months after first being raised”.

Representatives from the consortium told *Varsity* that the data breaches had been a “foreseeable outcome”, as the SU chose to outsource the development of a “clunky, closed source, obscure piece of voting software”.

The SU had originally used a secure ‘basic online ballot’ system (BOB) to cast over 300,000 votes in university elections since 2005, where votes were not stored with CSRs and students could transparently verify election results. However, there were problems with the old voting system, as the presence of a list of students who voted in an LGBTQ+ campaign election could still potentially out LGBTQ+ students.

*Varsity* understands that when this secure system was retired by the SU in September 2021, concerns were raised that the new system “could not provide the anonymity and verifiability” of the old system. Representatives from the concerned JCRs have said that despite raising these security concerns “the SU decided to proceed with the system switch”.

Earlier this year *Varsity* reported that

chair of the SU student council Fergus Kirman and Sam Carling also claimed to have faced obstacles from the SU when they raised the issue with the data breach.

In response to the difficulty of using this new system, the consortium developed CamVote last year - an open source voting system which promised “verifiability, anonymity and instant-counts”. They have promised that this system, unlike the SU system, would never store data about student self identities. Representatives from the consortium told *Varsity* that “data which doesn’t exist can’t be breached”.

They argue that CamVote offers “self-governance by and for JCRs and MCRs, without alternative missions or goals which might crop up in a larger organisation”.

“Rather than trusting the SU and their contractors to correctly count an election and have a secure system, the goal of CamVote is to make it so that you don’t have to trust anyone - if you suspect election tampering, you can check for yourself (and we are happy to show people how to do this).”

The spokesperson for the consortium continued: “If we want our representatives to be taken seriously, by students

and by the University and colleges, there needs to be trust in the way they were elected. Delays to results, not being able to audit results, and confusing voting and election administration all degrade the quality of democracy.”

Last year, members of the Student Council raised concerns about the voting system and proposed to return to the BOB system. The trustees decided not to ditch the new voting system despite concerns over its usability and transparency, citing time constraints before the Lent elections and a desire to reform the existing system.

## ‘Serious neglect’ has caused high levels of phosphate in the Cam

**Finley Brighton**  
News correspondent

Local environmentalists have found that phosphate levels in parts of the River Cam are 70 times higher than the acceptable amount, according to laboratory tests of water samples.

Concerns were initially raised by district councillor Richard Pavitt, who has been testing the river water for the past two years.

Pavitt’s findings were then validated by Cam Valley Forum, a Cambridge-based charity which was set up to gain a better understanding of contamination in the Cam and determine sources of waste.

Phosphate is found in sewage and household waste and removes oxygen from water. The high levels of phosphate in the River Cam is distressing news for Cambridge’s aspiring open water swimming community.

Phosphate has been emitted into the river from sewage water treatment centres in Great Chesterford, Newport and Quendon. Councillor Pavitt claimed that this is the result of “serious neglect” by Anglian Water and the Environment Agency.

When asked about the findings a spokesperson for Anglian Water told *Varsity* that sewage treatment works in Quendon and Newport will be “upgrad-



▲ The Cam was found to be 40% sewage effluent in an investigation last year (REBECCA TYSON)

ed to reduce phosphate concentrations entering the River Cam by the end of 2024” as part of the company’s £800m environmental investment programme.

However, this is not the first time Anglian Water has faced criticism for their environmental record. The Environmental Agency recently issued a fine to Anglian Water of £560,170 for a sewage leak in 2017 that killed 5,000 fish. 6 million litres of sewage was discharged into River Great Ouse for 23 hours, which is enough to fill two Olympic size swimming pools.

In response to their recent prosecution for the sewage leak, a spokesperson for Anglian Water told *Varsity*: “We take our duty of care to the environment incredibly seriously and deeply regret any negative impact when things go wrong.”

They reasserted their pledge to “improve further and progress towards achieving our zero pollutions goal.”

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# News

## Girton College therapy dog passes away

Darwin Kershenbaum, the Girton College therapy dog, passed away on Thursday, after suffering a stroke last week. Darwin had served as the College's therapy dog since 2018. Darwin made one last appearance on Saturday (29/01), with over 50 students turning out to see him before his retirement. After his stroke, Darwin was wheelchair-bound before later passing away.

## Synagogue rebuild rejected by council

Plans to rebuild the synagogue on Thompsons Lane have been rejected by councillors. The application was submitted by the trustees of the Cambridge University Jewish Society due to the current space being no longer fit for purpose. Despite council planning officers supporting the proposal, councillors rejected the development, citing concerns about the larger building blocking light to nearby homes.

## Giraffes set to invade Cambridge

A large herd of giraffe sculptures are set to descend on Cambridge in March 2024 as part of an art installation by the charity Break. The art installation, a sequel to the Cows about Cambridge trail in 2021, will feature 40 giraffes decorated by artists and sponsored by local businesses. The proceeds will support Break's charitable aims of supporting young people in care in East Anglia.

## Addie's expansion to open in summer

Three new surgical theatres at the Cambridge University Hospitals are on track to open this summer. The new theatres are expected to reduce waiting times for routine orthopaedic surgeries, and provide an additional 40 beds for those receiving surgery. It is expected to increase capacity by 20%. The hub is part of a scheme to provide 50 new surgical hubs across England.



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▲ FAMKE VEENSTRA-ASHMORE

## University watch

Eric Williams brings you the top student stories from the other place(s)

## Oxford dons sue over 'Uberisation' of teaching

A landmark 2021 supreme court ruling against Uber's employment practices is now being used to sue Oxford University for employing academics as gig economy workers.

The two lecturers suing the University were employed on fixed-term "personal services" contracts for 15 years before the university failed to renew them in 2022. The pair have also claimed "unfair dismissal", arguing that previous involvement in trade union activism contributed to the decision not to renew their contracts.

## Durham rent strike

Durham saw protests on Saturday, against what student newspaper *Palatinate* has called the "biggest ever increase in accommodation prices".

Inflation including housing costs (CPIH) was 9.2% in December, but Durham's student accommodation fees have risen 10.3%. As a result, standard catered rooms with shared bathrooms have reached £234.77 per week.

Students' demands include a reversal of accommodation fee increases and price caps calculated relative to maintenance loans.

## High court to hear against UCL fees

The High Court is set to hear a group litigation order against University College London (UCL), as the first of a series of cases aiming to sue UK universities for failing to financially compensate students for recent strike and COVID-19 related education disruption.

This is the first part of broader planned legal action by Student Group Claim, which has collected more than 75,000 signatures from students at 18 universities.

Lawyers have argued that the cancellation of in-person tuition amounts to a breach of contract, entitling them to go to court.

If successful, students could receive an average compensation of £5,000.

UCL will argue that students should go through internal university procedures.



# College hardship fund applications are ‘humiliating’, students say

**Bethan Moss**  
Investigations lead

Cambridge has increased its central hardship funding by £500,000 to help students cope with the cost of living crisis, but often struggling students turn to their colleges for help first. *Varsity* interviewed students about their experiences with accessing financial help from five different colleges, and found that some claimed the process was “humiliating”.

“It’s not something I’m very comfortable with, so I try to only ask when there are no other options,” one student told *Varsity*. “Only those suffering the most dare to reach out,” another student said.

Shame was a common theme among students interviewed – experiences vary, but many have found applying for college hardship funds invasive or overly bureaucratic.

Jesus student Susan began to experience financial difficulties in second year. His maintenance loan – which had been reduced by £6,000 – was less than rent, but his parents were in debt, and unable to support him. He told *Varsity* that college were initially “a bit investigative” but eventually helped him apply for their hardship fund, and deferred his college bill, which they agreed he could pay off over the course of his degree.

However, Susan claims that last year, once the member of staff who he’d made the agreement with had left Jesus, he was told to “pay off the debt [he] had to the College at once”. This amount was over £2,500 on top of his college bill. He says he was told by the new staff member that his initial agreement “no longer holds” and he would have to pay within “a few days”. Susan then had to resort

to applying for hardship directly from the University.

The experience “made things really difficult”. He told us: “It made me realise how the support was not really a system, it’s just person by person, worker by worker.”

Another undergraduate at Jesus, Shannon\*, expressed other concerns to *Varsity*. Particularly, she claims that the cost of living outside of term time feels “largely unacknowledged”. Shannon’s parents need her to contribute towards household expenses and bills when living at home. When asking the College for support, she said she feels “ashamed to have to spell out exactly what my needs are”.

The process of applying for hardship is very off-putting, Shannon told *Varsity*. Applicants must “fill out a six-page document” detailing “every source we may receive money from”.

Jesus’s Senior Tutor, Dr Paul Domini-

**£500,000**  
The amount that the University of Cambridge has increased its central hardship funding by

ak, told *Varsity* that the College “understand the impact of financial hardship and offer a range of support, working closely with students to support their financial needs appropriately”.

He continued: “We have a dedicated Financial Tutor to ensure consistency and support the application process, and we explain how to apply for funds on several intranet pages and in regular

emails to all students. If anyone has any concerns about the process, I encourage them to contact me.”

Students at Murray Edwards have also had difficult experiences when trying to access hardship funding. Mia says she told her tutor that she needed support to buy groceries and other essentials in Easter 2022, and filled in the appropriate forms. Her request was approved, but the money was only received at the end of term, after “pestering”. Needing to cover debt from last academic year, she started Michaelmas 2022 with no savings, and increased rent; she’d been left with less than £100 to last all term.

Mia contacted college two days into term, and says she was forced to detail every single expense. She claims that Murray Edwards then “began to nitpick everything” and didn’t “recognise that my SFE dropped and rent rose”.

She continued: “The financial tutor told me it would be ‘economical’ to change lease from a 29 to 36 week one to save money, even though it was more expensive — I didn’t choose a longer lease in the first place because I couldn’t afford it”.

Mia was told to apply to a separate fund for medical taxis and get re-evaluated by student finance, and says it felt like college “were trying to find a way to blame me, or to redirect me to anywhere else”. Eventually, when she forwarded her emails to tutorial, Mia was told that she could pay rent late, something which had never been given as a possibility before.

Zara told *Varsity* that the Murray Edwards finance tutor suggested she use her overdraft to fund her living expenses, and that they expect students to be their

parents’ financial responsibility during the breaks. When applying for hardship funding, Zara says the College asked her “very personal questions” about her family relationships, seemingly unrelated to her financial needs. She described the process as “undignified” and “humiliating”, saying that: “Sometimes it feels like

**£350**  
The Fitzwilliam College cost of living payment given to students who receive the Cambridge Bursary

you’re being told off”.

Students at other colleges have had more positive experiences with accessing hardship at a college level. Cleo, a student at Caius, told us that she needed money to stay in College over the break — she didn’t receive money from her parents and her home situation made it impossible for her to stay there at the time. All she had to do was fill in a form and her tutor handled everything else, speaking on her behalf in a meeting.

She said that she appreciated not having to give a sob story to “convince anyone [she] was deserving of the money”, and her tutor “was able to negotiate a 75% reduction (the full 100% was reserved for full bursary holders)”. She never had to speak to anyone but her tutor.

Other students at Caius have also had similarly positive experiences with rent reduction for personal issues but some have found, when applying for help purely on a basis of financial reasons, that there are “many more hoops to jump

through”.

Caius Senior Tutor Dr Andrew Spencer said: “We endeavour to support all Caius students in hardship and treat all applications on their individual merits. As a charity we have a duty to ensure funds are shared responsibly and sometimes that involves a form of financial disclosure.”

He continued: “We hope the majority of students are happy with the support we provide and the ways to seek support” and encouraged “anyone who is not content” to bring their concerns to him or their tutor.

In other positive experiences with financial help, Amy told *Varsity* that she appreciates how Fitz has given “financial support without being prompted”. She says those who receive the Cambridge Bursary were automatically given a cost of living payment in Michaelmas of £350 by the college.

Amy said that the payment “mitigated the potential of financial stress for the future”, adding that she was “very grateful”.

A spokesperson for the College said that they “recognise the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, particularly for students on fixed bursaries” and clarified that the payment had been made to all Fitz students receiving the Cambridge Bursary, and select others, with awards totalling £54,950.

They continued: “Any Fitz student experiencing financial hardship is encouraged to speak with their tutor, who will help identify sources of funding.”

*Some names have been changed.*

*Murray Edwards College did not respond to a request for comment.*

## Deaf students criticise ‘ridiculous’ shortcomings in accessibility

**Claire Gao**  
News correspondent

Deaf students have told *Varsity* of substantial administrative responsibilities, complications with lectures and significant impacts on mental health as a result of shortcomings in the University’s resources and disability awareness training.

First-year History student Ria Patel has described the “ridiculous” amount of administrative work necessary she has to do to get the support she needs.

According to Patel, in cases where problems arise and coordination between different departments is necessary for support, the responsibility is put on the student. Patel told *Varsity* that these issues are “time-consuming and stressful” for students.

Students have reported lecture accessibility shortcomings, with claims that supervisors and lecturers are not undergoing Deafness awareness training

when necessary. Patel told *Varsity* that students need support beyond relying upon the “understanding” of sympathetic supervisors.

Patel told *Varsity*: “There’s a lot of other stuff [staff] need to know about. Amongst others, important accessibility requirements include limited background noise, good acoustics, good talking pace and facial direction, and lecturer microphone use.”

According to fifth-year Medicine student Ashna Biju, inadequate arrangements have undermined her ability to participate in hospital briefings.

Limitations on provided services such as note-takers in lectures have also been reported. Biju said that throughout her time at Cambridge, she has tried all the different resources, but that resources were extremely difficult to acquire and often of bad quality.

Students who need support have criticised the service of external companies funded by the Disabled Students’ Allow-

ance (DSA). Students have told *Varsity* that the University’s Accessibility and Disability Resource Centre (ADRC) often has to step in.

However, even with the University’s note-takers, students have complained that notes are often inadequate. Deaf students have said this can be due to ‘remote’ note-taking from lecture recordings which can be poor quality with auto-captioning of dubious quality.

*Varsity* has seen an email from 23 January from a note-taker who said that they could not understand a recorded lecture at all. Disabled students have told *Varsity* that this issue is compounded within some faculties, such as History, that do not provide lecture recordings to all disabled students due to lecture timetabling issues.

*The ADRC, Student Union’s Disabled Students’ Campaign and Faculty of History have been contacted for comment.*



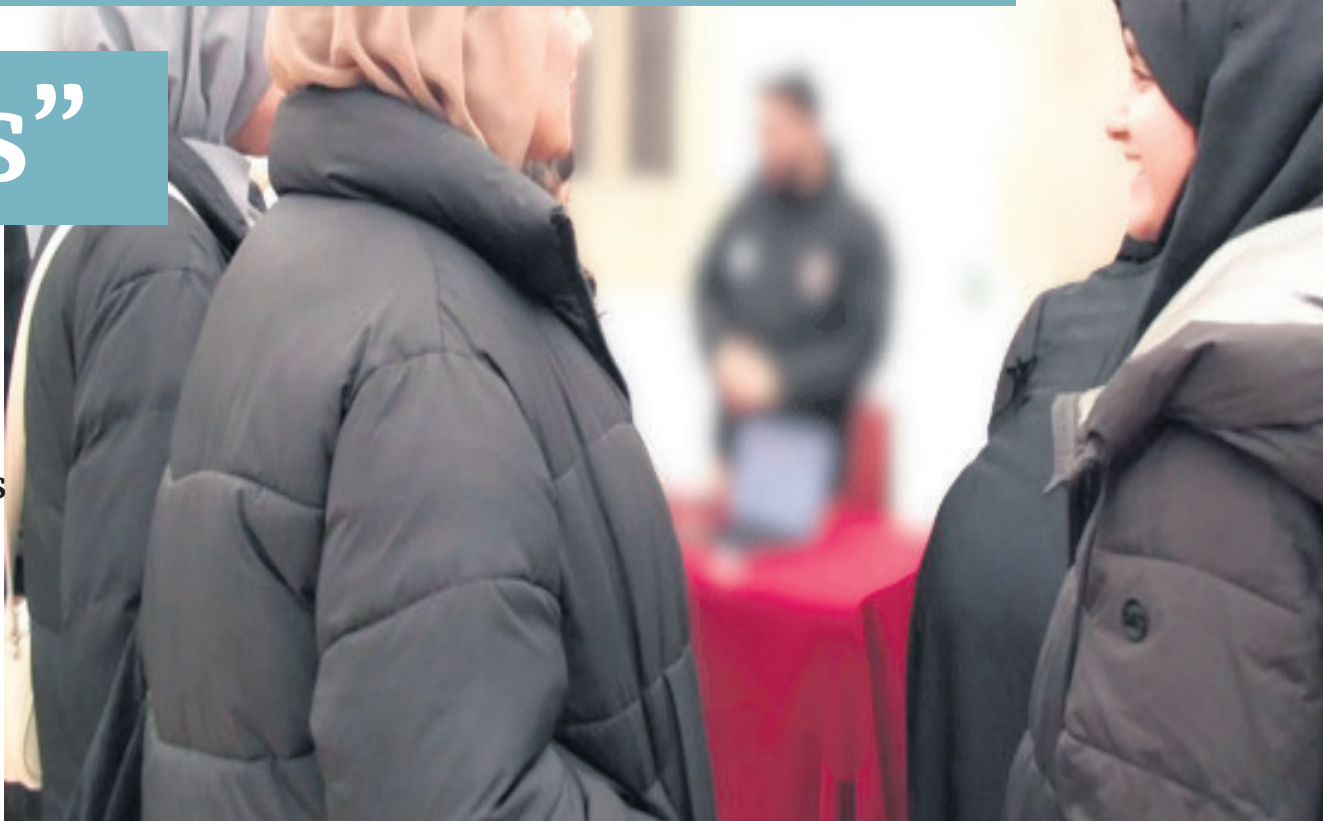
▲ Climate change activist group ‘This Is Not A Drill’ broke windows at the Department of Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology in the early hours of Sunday morning (29/01) - Read the full article on the *Varsity* website (ANASTASIA PERYSINAKIS)



# Features

## “I feel like I'm living two completely different lives”

**Lara Ibrahim** speaks to Muslim students about navigating Cambridge and finding community through faith



“Everything here is centred around drinking,” Zeynep explains over a coffee. “It’s a shared cultural experience for others that I just can’t access.” Now in her third year, she feels comfortable putting her own boundaries in place, and has found community in other students. But it hasn’t always been easy.

There are points of stark contrast between traditional Muslim and UK university culture. For the estimated 255,000 Muslims studying at UK universities, navigating these differences is simply a part of everyday life. I spoke with six students to explore their experiences as Muslim students in Cambridge.

For most, the idea of “uni culture” exists hand-in-hand with drinking culture. Regular drinking is often seen as the hallmark of university life and permeates many of our schedules: bops, pub socials, nights out. What impact does this have on students who don’t drink?

Almost all the students I spoke to mentioned that alcohol was a barrier when engaging with uni life. A survey conducted by the university in 2016 showed that 40% of Cambridge students felt there was a need for more alcohol-free spaces.

As one Architecture student relates, Cambridge’s “party hard mentality” often leads to her feeling disconnected from her coursemates. “I don’t think they offer anything of equal value for people who don’t want to drink.” Another student, Fatima, tells me about times she hasn’t felt comfortable entering her own kitchen while people are using it as a space to drink.

Freshers’ Week is especially daunt-

ing. Most people are leaving home for the first time; everyone is seeking connection. But socialising can be much harder for teetotal students during a week that revolves around alcohol.

“I didn’t really make many connections in Freshers’ week...all I remember was dancing awkwardly around drunk people and making eye contact with the few people who weren’t drinking,” Ayesha recounts. Like many of the students I speak to, I get in touch with her through a group chat run by Cambridge’s Islamic Society, ISoc.

“When you have a scarf on, it feels like everyone is wondering why you’re there”

There is no universal Freshers’ experience, however, and other ISoc members tell me they were able to integrate into college life through alcohol-free social events. “I think having non-drinking activities in Freshers’ timetables is so important. Most of my friends now are people I met this way during Freshers’ week,” Farah tells me.

The prevalence of alcohol-dominated events means opportunities for socialisation are significantly narrowed for students who choose not to enter spaces

such as pubs and bars. But even going to such events presents its own issues for Muslim teetotallers. Nadia shares her experiences going to the pub while wearing a hijab: “When you have a scarf on, it feels like everyone is wondering why you’re there.”

And for Muslim students who do choose to drink, there remains a sense of dissonance. Describing the link between drinking and guilt, one student tells me: “Coming from a family that doesn’t drink, I feel like I’m living two completely different lives.”

The obstacles Muslims face at Cambridge don’t end with drinking, however. A common thread throughout these conversations was frustration towards the university for failing to accommodate its Muslim students and their cultures.

A representative for ISoc tells me about the ongoing battle to find more prayer spaces for students. There is only one prayer room owned by the University, located on Sidgwick Site. Students who use the prayer room tell me it is an important space for community, where you can always see familiar faces. Paired with the absence of Muslim chaplains in colleges, the lack of spaces like this is both disheartening and highly inconvenient for Muslim students.

Summing up his experiences, Abe explains: “It’s always small things – they add up.” From having to justify why you aren’t drinking, to being forced to delay daily prayers due to lack of prayer-spaces, the obstacles faced by Muslim students are numerous. Ramadan at Cambridge is a particularly difficult time for students who fast, with inconvenient

hall times, gyms without stoves or freezers and difficulty finding halal food.

But what stands out to me is that every student I spoke to has found a sense of belonging in Cambridge. ISoc for one is a thriving community: the WhatsApp groupchat buzzes with event reminders, study group arrangements and supportive advice.

Of course, there is no homogenous “Muslim culture”, just as there is no sin-

“It’s always the small things - they add up”

gle “student experience”. Nevertheless, despite the apparent differences between university and Muslim culture, it is clear that what unites them is stronger than what divides them. “I don’t think there is such a disparity with being Muslim and uni life – at the end of the day, most of us are here to learn and are respectful of each other,” says one student.

“I think it’s been a big learning curve,” another student concludes. “It’s been interesting to put those boundaries in place for myself.”

*Some students’ names have been anonymised at their request.*

▲Photo by Charlotte Conybeare

## Perspectives: faith

**Reuben Baldwin**

I may be a Quaker, dreading all things noisy and showy, but when I descend into central Cambridge on a Sunday I love the ringing of the bells. Pause and listen, and the ringing seems pervasive, as though, despite centuries of schism and slaughter all the churches were calling out as one.

Christianity, however, is broader than this image implies. Christianity structures our lives, but over time this faith has expanded and splintered. I am a recent convert (one year since I went to my first Quaker meeting) and encountering this community that I now call my own has been a lesson in openness and humility. You won’t find Christianity epitomised in one place. You’ll have to penetrate the ringing of

“Faith becomes the beating heart of our day-to-day lives”

the bells and listen to what each church has to say.

Cambridge is home to many denominations: Anglican, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, and others beside. All have different styles of music, architecture and worship. Customs change from steeple to steeple; I worship in silence — but spend a Sunday in Cambridge, and it is clear that others do not.

Christian students of all denominations meet in various faith-based societies and organisations. Fisher House tends to Catholics; Student Christian Movement meets in Michaelhouse, to discuss faith and social action. The Christian Union is perhaps the most extensive and influential, its members often the lifeblood of Cambridge’s central churches.

Students mingle with their communities at Bible study groups, at church events, or over a hot drink after Sunday services. The week is packed with religious activities, drawing connections between University and town. My meeting house is populated by both alumni and locals. Through talks, interfaith events and food banks, faith becomes the beating heart of our day-to-day lives.

▼IGORS JEFIMOV

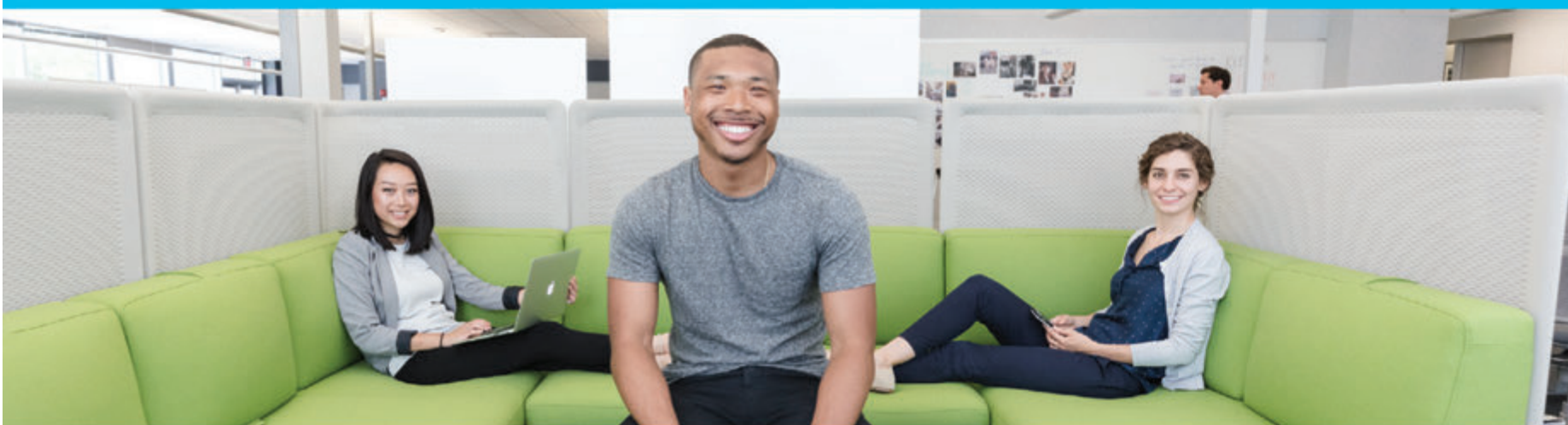






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Esme Bishop

## Is Clare killing Cellars?

Student bars should not put profit before people

Picture this: it's a Friday night. Bored of the library, you pack up and head to towards the chapel — but the chapel is not what you're here for. You enter a side door and follow a narrow staircase down to another, glass door — it really looks like it should be a push, but you know that it's a pull. You're met with the smiles of the bartenders; your friend is on shift tonight. The sound of music, just a bit too loud, fills the room to its arched brick ceilings, always a reflection of whoever is working. The somehow both sweet and acrid taste of Clare lager tingles on your tongue, and in you go. Tattered but absurdly comfortable sofas, cluttered sound equipment, and a mysteriously sticky pool table: you are in Clare Cellars, and life is good.

Clare Cellars is one of the most popular college bars in Cambridge. Universally loved for events like Clare Jazz and Queer Night, it is a social space of central importance, for both the Clare community and for the University as a whole. It is also, for now, one of the only entirely student-run college bars left.

It functions transparently: there's a bar president, who until this year was chosen by the outgoing president (now, they also have to be approved by college management) who oversees the running of the bar, and a committee of Clare students: shift-manager, treasurer, stock, bookings, maintenance, and events — and then, of course, there are the bar workers. Shifts are organised flexibly, providing students with the opportunity

“Cellars being student-run is at the heart of its tradition and culture”

to earn extra cash without jeopardising their studies. This philosophy trickles down, producing one of the friendliest

bar atmospheres in Cambridge.

Despite the success of this tried-and-true model, the committee were recently informed that the College has begun interviewing candidates for a “newly created role”: an external supervisor “with the main responsibility of running the College Student Bar”. The successful applicant would “manage the student Bar Workers, be in charge of rotas, ordering stock and managing the Bar and JCR Events bookings” — in other words, a job description which outlines exactly what the existing bar committee already does, and very successfully at that.

This announcement has outraged Clare's students and alumni. Cellars' student-run status is at the heart of its tradition, culture and appeal. A survey of current students and Clare alumni compiled by the Bar Committee revealed widespread disapproval with the decision, with many seeing it as evidence of the College's fundamental lack of respect for its student workers. Others felt patronised and expressly uncomfortable at the prospect of having an external person supervising them on shifts. “I feel

deeply saddened that College does not value its students enough to trust them and allow them agency in their own college,” expressed one bar worker. “Who is the bar for, if not for its students?”

Clare College administrators appear to view students working in the bar as a hobby or an extracurricular activity. This is completely out of touch: as enjoyable and fulfilling bar work is, it is also a much-needed source of income for many, even more so in light of the cost of living crisis. The unnecessary hiring of a bar supervisor should be seen for what it is: the first step in the killing of Clare Cellars, which jeopardises its role as a safe and inclusive social space as much as it threatens



FAMKE VEENSTRA-ASHMORE ▲

the financial security of its student workers.

The motive for this callous decision is no mystery: a former bar president said that they were, upon being appointed, “charged with the task of making the Bar as profitable as possible”. The bar is not for anyone it would seem, but rather for the financial benefit of the College. Unsurprisingly, it seems student workers were not good enough at prioritising the College's financial interests above the needs of other students.

Clare's College administrators are not the first to sacrifice character and affordability to maximise profits. King's and Selwyn are among the latest victims of this trend, with the former's bar now colloquially referred to as the “Premier Inn Bar”, fit for conference attendees and wealthy donors, with overpriced drinks to boot. Making profit the sole purpose of a student bar — especially Cellars which, crucially, also serves as the College JCR — goes against everything colleges should seek to nurture and protect. This is a university, after all, not a business.



Hugh Jones

“Personal statement”. Two words sure to make any Cambridge undergraduate flinch. They conjure up unprocessed trauma from the admissions cycles of yesteryear — and make us cringe at past attempts to convince admissions tutors that having been elected bin monitor in year 6 makes you the academic equivalent of ‘not like other girls’.

Five years from now, however, rather than inducing a nervous twitch, saying those two terrible words on the Sidgwick Site will generate nothing more than blank stares. For UCAS is ditching the personal statement and replacing it with a more structured set of specific questions. Cambridge is cheering them on.

Kim Eccleston, UCAS's head of reform, has said she hopes the move will “create a more supportive framework” for students, as well as “broaden participation”. Given that UCAS polling last year showed that 83% of students found submitting a personal statement stressful, and given that progressive academics have been gunning for personal statements as “barometers of middle-class privilege” for a while now, it's easy to infer what she means: personal statements are too difficult

— except for well-coached private school pupils.

I'll start with the first objection by claiming, heartlessly, that applying to university should be difficult. I am sure that it is easier to answer a handful of generic questions than it is to justify your existence in a 47-line, 4000-character essay. But UCAS's polling also found that 72% of students felt positive about personal statements. Students found being forced to think hard about a life-changing decision stressful. But they found it valuable too.

Are most personal statements masterpieces of self-discovery written in clean, sharp prose? No. By and large they're ramblings about the personal growth engendered by bronze DofE. But they, at least in theory, put self-expression at the heart of an otherwise all too bureaucratic system. Take away the personal statement, and the university admissions process (Oxbridge interviews aside) would involve little more than weighing GCSE results and predicted grades. This would deny students the chance to show skills that those data points might not reflect.

Axing the personal statement, unsurprisingly, depersonalises the application process. It stops really brilliant applicants from showing what they can

do, and those in difficult circumstances from giving admissions tutors the information they need to make a fair decision. If applicants themselves think the stress of writing a personal statement is worthwhile, UCAS should acknowledge the same.

The second claim levelled against the personal statement, that it suits coddled private school pupils too nicely, is obviously correct. As a coddled private school alumnus myself, I can confirm that my English teacher and my school's head of university admissions both looked over my personal statement many times, suggested changes, and offered feedback. I am sure that what I produced was better for their help.

The problem, however, is that private schools are always going to outperform state-funded ones, because they have access to far greater resources. I imagine my old school is rather pleased with UCAS's proposal to make the personal statement more structured. By making the process simpler, UCAS lets private school teachers tell their students more or less exactly what to say. The current open-ended exercise, by contrast, resists coaching and rewards the kind of creativity that cannot be taught.

The fact is that the personal statement is broad, tests valuable academic

skills, and avoids the myriad cans of worms that would be opened if UCAS went ahead with its other suggestion: replacing the statement with a pre-recorded video. Introducing secondary

“The personal statement rewards the kind of creativity that cannot be taught”

factors like accent, posture, even dress sense and physical appearance, into the admissions process, as a video surely would, is never going to make things fairer. Additionally, while the personal statement does benefit private school pupils on paper, university admissions tutors are not fools. They have access to a range of contextual information, and know that a private school statement has been practically ghostwritten by a team of teachers. They are capable of making

a decision with this in mind. In an imperfect world, the personal statement is the best option available.

Ditching it, then, is a very obvious mistake on UCAS's part. So how did it get made? The answer is that mistakes like these are the product of letting political pieties come before good policy.

UCAS feels that because the personal statement benefits privileged private school pupils, it has to go. It doesn't matter that that privilege is deeply entrenched, and that nothing UCAS does can fully level the playing field. It doesn't even matter that the personal statement as it stands is probably the fairest option anyway. In the world UCAS's executives seem to be living in, there is no such thing as a compromise, or accepting something as the lesser of two evils. If a policy transgresses, it must be cast out.

The personal statement's demise is another product of the replacement of realist policy-making with ideological purity tests. As a result, young people will lose a valuable chance to be challenged academically, our university admissions system will become yet more impersonal — and inequality may well get worse. Perhaps if someone had made UCAS justify their decision in 4000 characters, they'd have realised where they were going wrong.

## UCAS: Don't scrap the personal statement

Doing so might look progressive — but depersonalising admissions helps no-one





Fabian Apostoaie

# Why do Cambridge students love to steal?

From crockery to candlesticks, we can't seem to resist the allure of crime

From traffic cones propped up in staircases to formal forks lined up neatly on bookcases, Cambridge students revel in the cheap thrill of taking something from their college... and putting it somewhere else. This impish instinct has us in its grips. There's apparently an invisible demarcation line around the university, one that establishes it as a world in which theft seems infinitely more alluring than it does anywhere else. Back at home, I was always wary of the consequences of stealing things from those in authority. Sod's law felt palpably real, as I was haunted by the gut feeling that somehow I'd always get caught.

Upon arriving at Cambridge, this was turned on its head. Older years displayed their pilfered crockery like family heirlooms, friends cooed in awe at their mate who swiped the Master's name card after formal, and there were always mutterings about bigger and more ambitious heists. Only last Michaelmas, news of the candlestick that had mysteriously "disappeared" and then re-appeared in college was the topic of conversation for a solid week or so ("Butcher, Baker, Candlestick-taker" becoming my go-to

cheap quip at the time). A friend from my own college admitted having taken "just" a fork, only to follow up by mentioning his mother displays it in their home. A Newnham student who had taken their fair share of Christ's plates remarked that they wanted a collection for when they'd leave Cambridge. Everywhere you go you meet someone who has taken a little piece of college away with them. But why?

“  
Theft becomes part of the fabric of the University's oral history  
”

What is it about Cambridge that compels people to behave this way? Everyone who had admitted swiping the odd plate or two said they wouldn't do so at home, or at any other university, really. Picture in your mind what this institution may uniquely be imagined to be like for

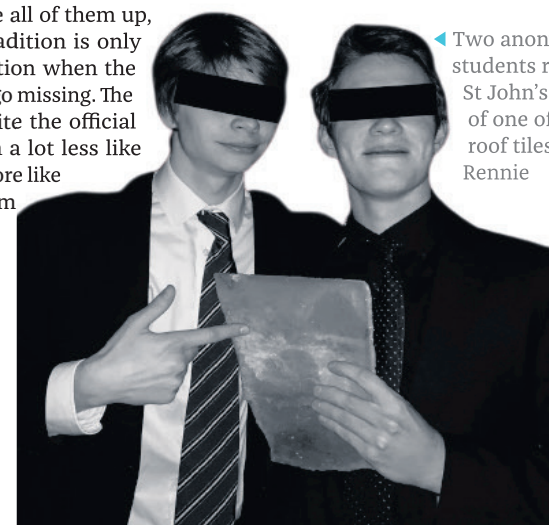
someone from beyond "Reality Check-point". A few words spring to mind: "Academic rigour", "history" or even "innovation". But I think there's also a real sense of "magic", a folkloric quality to these walls. It's what we emphasise to prospective applicants on open days. Yes, there is a lot of chat about ensuites and gym facilities, but there's also always a mention of quirky traditions and the surreal nature of Cambridge life. Dashing across the grass before the porters catch you, various not-so-secret 'secret' societies, the urban legends of pennyng, punting, and porterings going on. These all add to the story of this place, and the few places like it.

What's this got to do with taking things from formals? Well for a lot of us, the magic of the university is somewhat defanged and demystified upon arrival. It's hard to feel especially part of the academic fairytale whilst trying to juggle supervisions and nights at Revs. Now, since anyone can bring back a coaster or a postcard, the best way to confirm that they're part of this "mystical" world within a world, is to take things that really only university members have the chances to take. Unlike a giftshop Cambridge mug, a stolen spoon is the physical confirmation that you're "in",

as is the story behind it. Tales like the chair taken from Sidney's lawn become part of the fabric of the university's oral history, and there's no reminder of your time here more permanent than going down in the annals of college larceny.

Occasionally, of course, there are consequences. In practice, however, colleges are more likely to just give their students a mere slap on the wrist or a strongly worded email when things do cross the line. There are simply too many instances to be able to chase all of them up, so this unwritten tradition is only brought to our attention when the more valuable items go missing. The way it persists despite the official curbs makes it seem a lot less like pickpocketing and more like taking mementos from some ancient ruins. Still theft, sure, but one motivated by a sense of wanting to be part of something bigger than yourself. As one thieving interviewee I asked put it, "you want to feel important – Cambridge and Oxford feel important".

For many, everyday life at Cambridge seems surreal, and the occasional theft appears to inject a dash of sophomoric fun into accepting it as our day-to-day reality. Either by bringing a small trinket back home or, better yet, by becoming yourself a little piece of the university's thieving folklore, you always seem to be one butter knife closer to feeling a true part of the story.



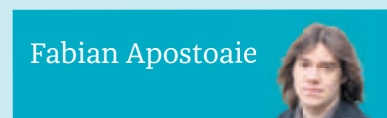
Two anonymous students relieve St John's College of one of its roof tiles / Jack Rennie

## Cantabs just wanna have fun: what's the best night out in Cam?

Your favourite *Varsity* writers offer their hottest takes on the mystery that is Cambridge's nightlife



The best night out in Cambridge is so bad it's good. It's Sunday Lola's. Going to Lola's requires grit and dedication. Tickets for Lola's are like gold dust. I spend hours of my Sunday scouring Facebook, spending whatever's left of my weekly budget to have a chance of lining up in its prestigious ticket queue. And for what? This ritual is at least an hour long, usually in sub-zero temperatures. In a desperate attempt to make the experience more bearable, my friends and I pass round stomach-turning drinks in reused milk cartons, containing more vodka than mixer. Inside is even worse. The music is terrible, drinks extortionately-priced and, worst of all, the place is heaving with men in drinking soc ties. If I'm not lost, crushed and suffocated, I'm pleasantly surprised. Each Monday morning at 3AM, I swear that I'll never return. Yet, by the following Sunday, I find myself back on Ticketbridge, ready to sell a kidney to return. I don't know what it is, but Sunday after Sunday, I just keep coming back for more.



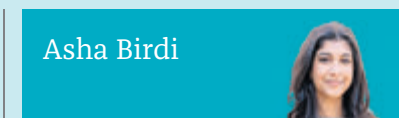
The best night out is the simplest one: go to the pub. Feeling down? Go to the pub. Feeling up? Go to the pub. Feeling slightly in-between those two options? Go to the pub. Which pub? The pub. There are many to choose from, but one thing is certain: they all fulfil the criteria of being a pub. Any pub that you can go to, you should go to (although I have a soft spot for the Elm Tree). Nowhere else but the pub can I spend £12 for two mediocre pints, before drunkenly stumbling into hour-long conversations discussing everything from EU passports to Donkey Kong. A night in the pub puts one somewhere between a philosopher and a court jester. The chatter is often madcap and meandering, but if you're among friends, what reason is there to care? The closeness of those seats, the warmth of the lights, it all adds up to create fonder memories than the awkward chaos of the clubs. I will agree, it can be a bit unadventurous sitting in the same spot for the whole night. But the best nights are the ones where your next moves are made after the most crucial one: going to the pub.



The best night out in Cambridge is not a Slipped Disc All Nighter, a gig at the Cambridge Junction, the sweaty madness that is a Wednesday Revs, or even a sophisticated evening at the Arts Theatre. It's not a Union debate, a romantic dinner at The Ivy, a college formal, or a *Varsity* social (but feel free to join us fortnightly at The Anchor on Thursdays!) In fact, the best nights out are the ones you don't expect, when the pres are the end of a work shift, a seminar on the Renaissance you didn't want to go to, or a long day in the library. The happy accidents. The chance encounters. The nights out wearing your glasses, not your contact lenses, and when your backpack and cycle helmet end up coming with you to the pub. The best nights out are those spent talking nonsense with your dearest friends, over a cup of tea at whoever's accommodation is closest – because those are the memories we'll cling to when our time in this city is done, not the Cambridge fripperies that sparkle for a only brief moment before vanishing.



My best night out at Cambridge required a reluctant change of heart. For all of second year, my friends and I complained about the endlessly thumping bass of LaRaza which kept anyone living in the neighbouring streets up until 4am. One evening, bored of Revs and Lola's, we did the unthinkable and went to LaRaza ourselves for its fortnightly Funk Jam. Sober and feeling the midweek blues, we had the lowest of expectations — but this may have been part of the magic. A bit awkward at first, the underground bar was soon filled with people boogying up a storm, as the live band's clarinettist somehow managed to squat jump while playing. Funk Jam is an open mic night where acts hold the floor for only a few songs each, and its upbeat atmosphere is infectious. Live music with words you can sing along to (sorry Jazz Soc), no entry fee and a switch up from the countless nights of sameness at local clubs made me change my mind on LaRaza. The best night out at Cambridge was on my doorstep all along.



There is no 'best night out' in Cambridge. It exists only in the fevered imaginations of serotonin-deprived students, myself included. This 'best night out' is merely an incentive used to deceive oneself into finishing that overdue suppo work. Whether it's Sunday Lola's or Woo Wednesdays, you will be met with overpriced drinks (the cost of living crisis says hi), a frustrating amount of ABBA and a pervading sense of dissatisfaction when the night ends. The only good thing about Wednesday Revs is the idea of it. Nevertheless, the collective hope that, maybe this week, things might be better keeps us going back. My friends and I pathetically buy into it at every pres. We giggle, we self-deceive; we have a good time with the people we love and pretend that the rest of the night will be just as fun. Riding high on adrenaline, we ignore the impending disappointment. The doublethink would make Orwell shudder. So maybe sit the next night out and chill with some friends — we all know pres are the best bit anyway.



# Comment



**Lotte Brundle**

**F**riendships *are* like ships — when you rock the boat too much, you are liable to capsize it. Lord knows, the seabed of my past relationships is positively littered with those that didn't make it. Corpses of ex-colleagues, best-friend betrayers and, worst of all, the ones who got away lie waterlogged and forgotten.

For clarity, I didn't drown my ex-boyfriends and leave their lifeless bodies to swim with the fishes — although given what some of them got up to, many gals said they would have deserved it. I just mean that, growing older, you find that human relations are less like a pool of constant connections, and more akin to an ever-flowing trickle of interactions. Often, strangers turn to acquaintances, who turn to friends, some to lovers — some not — before most become strangers again. Or worse — enemies.

"You can only have six real friends at one time," my housemate stated confidently the other week at our daily post-

dinner gab sesh. Where did he learn this, I asked. BuzzFeed probably. Is it true? Oh, definitely. As any good journalist would, to test his theory we carried out a thorough investigation. That is to say, we counted.

One, two, three, four, five, six. We proudly listed the names of our nearest and dearest like they were condiment

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Friendships do not  
renew automatically  
like a Netflix subscrip-  
tion  
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items on a shopping list.

If you consider yourself to be my friend and are wondering if you made the cut, sorry to break it to you. You didn't. If you're really someone's friend, you don't have to wonder. Those who know, know,

and I'd like to think my six are sure of it.

It might sound brutal, but as I prepare to leave uni, I've been facing up to this stark reality. How many of these people will I really, *truly* know, once the bonds that tie us up in daily life are loosened? Once the invisible threads that connect us to one another are not simply stretched across the city of Cambridge, but run county-, maybe country-, wide? The answer: very few. Once you make a change to your life, only the strong survive. And I've got my suspicions about who will sink and who will swim.

Call me a cynic (I've been called worse) but I've played the friendship game before, and I know how it ends. Very few players make it to the finish line. I've played the best-friend game too. And the boyfriend one (though admittedly in that particular category, I'm currently a three-year reigning champion). But it's a universal fact that each human relationship is brutally punctuated by choices. Friendships do not renew automatically like a Netflix subscription. As you reach certain junctions in your life, you are forced to decide: do I carry on with this person, or do I jump ship? Or

else, take the easy option, do nothing, and eventually let yourself drift away from them. Worse, they might have already left you in the boat alone — you just didn't realise.

As I learnt the hard way in first year

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It's a universal fact  
that each human  
relationship is brutally  
punctuated by choices  
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— the youngest person in a mature college, the oldest in my undergraduate cohort — making friends at uni is hard. Keeping them is even harder. So, I have decided. I've selected a bunch, like flowers, those who bring the best to my life, who challenge me, who make me think deeply and passionately about the kind of person I want

to grow to be. My 'best' friends, not in the conventional use of 'best friend', are my friends who are, in my opinion, the best of people. Who are kind, who are good, who are honest, and who are loyal, and I plan to hold on, if they'll let me, so that we don't drift apart as Cambridge becomes a distant island on the horizon of our pasts.

That said, I am, after all, merely a captain of a six. In this friend-ship, there is limited seating, and once those 6 places are taken, I'm afraid there really isn't room for any more passengers. Stragglers will, unfortunately, be thrown overboard. Let's just hope the brutality of this article doesn't make them all band together and decide that it's me who should be made to walk the plank before graduation. Because, without my mates, I'd really struggle to keep myself afloat in this place.



▲ Cantab12 / CC-BY SA 4.0



**Olivia Young**

**S**eventeen seasons is an old and wrinkled age in TV years, and the creators of 'The Apprentice' seem desperate for the show to feel young again. Much like a midlife crisis-induced Jaguar purchase, however, the result feels like a let-down — for both entertainment and inclusivity. Indeed, it seems its producers have decided the only way to keep their show fresh and attractive is to make the candidates just that.

In 2005, the only thing the contestants in ill-fitting suits and somewhat awkward grey skirts had in common was their desperation to work with Lord Sugar. Skip forward to today, and it appears there are more stringent requirements to be among the lucky few fighting for his mentorship.

In what has been described as the Love-Island-ification of 'The Apprentice', the vast majority of its contestants are now young, very attractive and already boast social media followings. With all but three of this year's contestants being

under 35, we have to ask ourselves where the age diversity has gone. No one would ever want to watch a TV show with homogeneous casting based on race, ethnicity or gender — and for good reason — so why is it blindly accepted when it comes to age? Why should a show with cross-generational appeal like 'The Apprentice' exclusively cast contestants from one narrow age group?

For a show that was traditionally good at promoting age inclusivity precisely by demonstrating how success can come at different stages of life, this shift has been more than a little frustrating. When

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The most intelligent  
candidates are never  
selected for the show  
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questioned about the lack of older contestants on the show, Lord Sugar reiterated that 'there are no age limits on applications'. Nonetheless, the fetishisation of reaching career milestones as young as possible is overpowering the

importance of highlighting individuals succeeding thanks to, and not in spite of their professional and life experience.

This bias is at the very heart of television's ageism problem. According to research by the Centre for Ageing Better, only 3 in 10 believe that TV and film show older people to be full of potential, with the same amount believing it makes being 50+ seem depressing and with limited opportunities.

Age is not the only factor at play: this new iteration of 'The Apprentice' has a broader, more sinister obsession with appearance. Thomas Skinner, a contestant in 2019, has said that the producers made the hopeful auditionees arrange themselves in order from 'prettiest to ugliest'; when did 'The Apprentice' become a beauty pageant? Amy Anzel, a contestant on last year's show branded it a 'wannabe Love Island' as 'A lot of the female candidates are quite beautiful and it was interesting that the first episode was on a beach', joking that: 'I'm surprised they weren't in bikinis, but it is the BBC.'

In what Lorraine Candy called the unwelcome return of the '1980s Boardroom Barbie', women's business attire now looks far closer to the misogynistic ideal male bosses dreamt up decades ago than ever since. This isn't to under-

mine women who feel at home 'power dressing' in stiletto heels and hourglass bodycon dresses — it is simply to question the notion that this should serve as a mandatory uniform for female 'Apprentice' contestants and women in business more generally.

The series has also faced allegations

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This new iteration of  
'The Apprentice' has  
a sinister obsession  
with appearance  
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that producers intentionally shy away from platforming smart contestants, instead promoting ditzy and uninformed, stereotype-bound characters — especially women. Former show aide Nick Hewer has levelled that "the most intelligent candidates are never selected for the show, because audiences couldn't keep up", and that producers tried to prevent a contestant from being fired because she was blonde and 'thick as a fridge door'.

Of course, there is no escaping that television is a visual medium and being intelligent and attractive are certainly not mutually exclusive.

However, the show's blatant preference for looks over entrepreneurial spirit is problematic for what purports to be a 'serious business reality show'. On a show which should judge candidates first and foremost on the basis of their business competency, the choice of ageism and lookism as selection criteria is worryingly outdated.

These issues are wider than their display on the set of 'The Apprentice'. Despite being one of the most pervasive forms of bias, 'pretty privilege' is hardly ever acknowledged nor engaged with on serious terms. And yet, studies routinely demonstrate that attractive people are more likely to be interviewed for jobs, hired, promoted and even earn around 15% higher wages than their less conventionally attractive counterparts.

The Apprentice's producers believe they are trading inclusivity for the easy rating gains of the young and beautiful. They could not be more wrong. Setting such stringent preconditions for achieving reality TV success could potentially narrow the target audience of the show and alienate viewers seeking relatable personalities.

## The Love-Island-ification of 'The Apprentice'

### When did all reality television shows become beauty pageants?



## Interviews

# Why CU Nigerian Society want the Benin bronzes sent back

Riannon Chaplin

"The society really provides a space for students to feel a link to Nigeria while they're here," Folakunmi Pinheiro, president of Cambridge University Nigerian Society (CUNS), tells me. He is open and friendly, and speaks passionately about the society and its impact.

It was the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA)'s decision in December 2022 to return its looted Benin bronzes that first prompted me to sit down with Folakunmi, and fellow CUNS member, Stanley Jachike Onyemechal. But I am also keen to learn more about the society's work and its role in the Cambridge community.

In particular, the society aims to put on events for Nigerian students and those interested in Nigerian culture. One of their favourites is the *Ówàribé*, a traditional party with Nigerian food, music, dancing and games, which the society hosts at the beginning of each academic year. "It helped me to step back from work," Stanley tells me, smiling. "I could dance, for the first time in a long time, to Afrobeat and Nigerian music, and ate food that tasted like home."

It's this sense of community and

“They tell the history of the community and the kingdom”

cultural connection that makes the society so valuable. "It provides a space for Nigerian students to feel safe at Cambridge, and feel like they can have a taste of Nigeria even though they are 3000 miles away," Folakunmi adds.

He is particularly proud of the annual Democracy Day event, which celebrates the handover of power to an elected civilian government in 1999. Last year's symposium hosted Noimot Salako-Oyedele, Deputy Governor of Ogun State and one of the few prominent female politicians in Nigeria. "It's very uplifting for us," Folakunmi, a PhD student in Law, continues. "The women in the group can see that there's some-

one there who is striving and trailblazing."

What was their reaction, then, to the MAA's decision to return 116 Benin bronzes to Nigeria? "Finally!" says Stanley, and his exasperation is clear. The bronzes refer to a diverse range of thousands of objects made from brass, bronze and other materials, such as ivory, which were looted and later auctioned off after the sacking of Benin

“Repatriation is just one step in seeking justice”

City in the Kingdom of Benin by the British in 1897; the country we now know as Nigeria did not yet exist. Their cultural, historical and spiritual significance is hard to overstate.

"They tell the history of the community and the kingdom," Stanley explains. "They were a set of writings, a sort of library, with pages of objects that told stories about the most significant moments in history. Many were not supposed to be seen by people outside a specific group."

It is hardly surprising, then, that many believe the display of the bronzes in museums across Europe and North America to be a continuation of imperial violence, of what Stanley calls the "destructive injustice" which stains colonial history. In October 2021, Jesus College, Cambridge became the first institution in the world to return a Benin bronze. Later, in September 2022, Germany agreed to return dozens of bronzes to Nigeria, and in October of that year the United States returned 31 bronzes from two institutions..

It appears there has been a shift in opinion in both academic and public spheres. The University of Aberdeen has also returned its bronzes, and Glasgow Museums and the Horniman in London have promised to do the same. Is Nigerian Culture Minister Lai Mohammed right when he says that it's a matter of 'when, not if' the British Museum does the same?

"Of course," Stanley, himself a PhD

student in archaeology, tells me. But he urges caution — if there has been a change in public opinion, it has still not been enough to force the British government to act. This may be partly due to the persistence of some myths around museums' rights over the bronzes.

Folakunmi points, for example, to the popular notion that more people will be able to see the bronzes if displayed in a national museum — the British Museum is thought to hold around 700 of them. But this, Stanley says, misunderstands the bronzes' original purpose as objects of deep cultural and spiritual significance, never intended to be so publicly displayed thousands of miles away.

Recalling a CUNS trip to the MAA, Stanley tells me of students' reactions to seeing the bronzes in glass cases. "You could just feel the emotions they had. What is it doing here? Why is it here? Send them back. Things like that." Yet he believes that govern-

▼ PHOTO CREDIT TO CU NIGERIAN SOCIETY



ment red tape enables institutions such as the British Museum to hide behind the law. Here he is referring to the National Heritage Act 1983 and the British Museum Act 1963, which the museum has argued prevent it from returning such objects and which non-national and university museums are not subject to. And so the issue is swatted between government and museum without real progress, never high enough on the agenda to exert real pressure from voters. "Repatriation is just one step

in seeking justice for past injustices." The importance of CUNS' work in providing a safe, vibrant community couldn't be clearer, with music, dancing and food that tastes like home. The Benin bronzes and the academic and public debates happening around them are deeply significant to the diverse Nigerian cultures the society celebrates. "It's the Benin bronzes now," Stanley says as we wrap up the interview, "but it could be another people's cultural materials later."

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## Interviews

# Getting things in order with John Bercow

The former Speaker of the House of Commons about his controversial career and how to shut up a room full of MPs

▼ ALEX LAU

Chris Patel

Thirty seconds into my conversation with John Bercow, I know one thing for certain – it is nearly impossible to interrupt him. But if you could limit him to one word, it would be a sonorous roar of ‘Or-derrrrrr!’ I ask him if he ever goes the opposite way, and embraces a bit of chaos. “In retirement, you’re more inclined to do so”, he tells me. When he was Speaker, quite the opposite was true – he stuck steadfastly to his station. “I was sometimes accused of hogging the chair”.

Aside from accusations of overstaying his welcome as Speaker, Bercow’s political critics, particularly Conservatives, loved to accuse him of impartiality. “I frequently made decisions which somewhat irked the Cameron government, which gave an opportunity for Eurosceptics to express their point of view. They were able to challenge ministers with urgent questions that I granted because I took the view that, although they were a minority, they were an important minority and their view had to be heard. Unfortunately, when I did the same for Remainers during the Brexit period [...] they didn’t like it.”

From 2009 to 2019, Bercow commanded the House of Commons from the vantage point of the chair, and was often more effective at calming down the house than many of the other Speakers we’ve seen. When the chamber became cacophonous, Bercow resorted to teacherly tactics: “One technique that



was quite effective was to say, ‘Look, it doesn’t matter how long it takes, I’m going to get through this order paper [...] If we have to sit here for another 10 or 15 minutes, 20 minutes, so be it.’”

The most disorderly MP on each side of the house, Bercow recalls, were the Conservatives’ Michael Fabricant (“regarded himself as a very significant figure, I always thought he was a rather

absurd individual”) and Labour’s Karl Turner (“goes from 0 to 60 in about five seconds” but “would come up to me afterwards and apologise”). Overall, Bercow characterises his leadership style as “firm voice, and good humour.”

Maybe too firm a voice, and not enough good humour? Last year, an independent inquiry, which upheld 21 out of 35 complaints made against Bercow

by former colleagues, judged him to be a “serial bully”. Bercow maintains that, due to the statute of limitations, these charges wouldn’t have been heard in court.

“Some of these events were 12 years ago, including, for example, the question of whether I stared at somebody in a hostile way, on a date which the complainant couldn’t remember.” Bercow has

not spoken to any of his accusers since: “I left that workplace 3 years ago, so why would I make contact with them?”

Bercow maintains that he kept “fantastic relations” with all of his staff members but his three upheld accusers. “And I had an overwhelmingly stable Speaker’s office, in which the turnover was relatively low.” His bugbear, he says, was overly officious advisors: “I insisted on running my office, not being run by it. [...] You’re absolutely entitled to offer your advice. But I was elected, and re-elected and re-elected, which no Speaker in the post-war period has been.” Bercow’s one guilty plea is “to being a very decisive character.”

After we discuss his past, Bercow looks to the country’s future. He calls Liz Truss, uncontroversially, an “unmitigated disaster”, and says that the current Conservative government is potentially in “terminal decline”. He wants to see more Prime Ministers from non-Oxbridge backgrounds, feeling that being as “materially privileged” as someone like David Cameron or Rishi Sunak makes one necessarily out of touch with the electorate.

John Bercow is a paradoxical and divisive figure – 5’6” but larger than life, warm in public but accused of bullying in private. However, he does not shy away from what people say about him. As he wishes me the best of luck in my future endeavours, he announces that “you’ll write what you will” – and if people can’t handle that, Bercow says, then maybe a career in politics isn’t for them.

## Cambridge’s Iranian students speak out

Three Iranian students speak to Chris Patel about Mahsa Amini, the morality police and what Iranians are fighting for

Chris Patel

On the 16th of September last year, 22-year-old Iranian Mahsa Amini was beaten to death by the ‘morality police’ in the Islamic Republic of Iran, after they arrested her for supposedly improperly wearing her hijab.

This provoked worldwide outrage, but as the events in Iran fade from our news feeds and social media pages, it is easy to forget that protests are as strong as ever: Iran is in the middle of a revolution. Three Iranian Cambridge students agreed to speak to me about how the revolution has transformed their lives.

Kimia\* was in Iran when Mahsa Amini was killed, and left 10 days into the protests. “I heard shooting, I smelled tear gas, I smelled smoke.” Being a woman in Iran amid the nascent revolution was particularly terrifying, as she tells me that the morality police have arrested her many times, even when she “literally had the most amount of hijab possible”. Even though she’s not in immediate danger while in Cambridge, Kimia has “been having more panic attacks than [she’s] ever had in [her] life” over the past two months.

It is extremely difficult for Iranian students to contact their families. Kimia explains how the Islamic Republic government has blocked access to all messenger apps, and is now even making communication via VPN impossible by using a firewall.

Iran’s internet is so slow that even

when she can briefly call her parents, they are abruptly disconnected. All three students we interviewed worry about their families, because, as Kimia says “I know how brutal [the morality police] can be even when you are not protesting.”

All three students also have friends in prison, with Mehdi\* mentioning a friend who was imprisoned and tortured for a week for protesting. Four men have been executed since the revolution began, following summary trials, often without a lawyer, but Mehdi argues: “executions don’t silence people at all”. If anything, “there’s more rage.”

Mahsa Amini’s death was not the start of the unrest in Iran – there have been tensions since 1979, when the Islamic Republic was first established. Mehdi explains that the IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) have long been committing acts of terrorism, such as shooting down a Ukrainian flight in 2020. Saeed\* adds how, more recently, “there’s been incidents where [the morality police] blind people,” while Kimia recalls that “they literally shot a person who was taking a video” of the protests.

So what are Iranians fighting for? In three words: ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’. The students emphasise that Iranians are not protesting against the hijab, they are fighting for a woman’s right to choose whether she wears one. Kimia explains that the misconception that the recent protests are anti-hijab is exploited by the moralising Iranian government: “what they are saying is that people want to

get naked”.

There are many different reasons why Iranians are fighting. The students directed me to a song by Iranian artist Shervin Hajipour called ‘Baraye’ (Persian for ‘For’), which has become hugely popular in the revolutionary movement. The themes in his lyrics range from “child labour” to “polluted air” to “the fear of kissing” one’s lover in public. Predictably, since releasing ‘Baraye’, Hajipour has been arrested.

As ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ suggests, the Iranian revolution is a women-led revolution – the women of Iran earned Time Magazine’s Heroes of the Year award in 2022. Mehdi notes how, since the first Iranian Revolution in 1979, the percentage of women who complete primary education has increased massively, from around 30% to the high 90s. “They know what they’re doing, they know their history”. Saeed adds, “maybe that’s why the Taliban doesn’t want a woman to be educated.”

This is, however, not just a women’s revolution. Mehdi mentions the chant: “from Kurdistan to Tehran, I’ll die for Iran”, to illustrate that supporters of the revolution come from all over. “For 44 years, the Islamic Republic has been saying that if they are not there, different parts of Iran are going to get separated. But in 44 years, I’m telling you, Iran has never been united like this before.”

That’s the reason, Mehdi continues, that what some call protests, or a crisis, Iranians from all walks of life call a revolution – because they are confident that

a change will come, “even if we don’t see the results in the next two months, three months or next year”.

Kimia, Mehdi and Saeed are all extremely active on social media and speak at many protests, and they know the consequences of this – if they were to return to Iran, they would be arrested at the airport. Movingly, Mehdi tells me how he doesn’t expect to ever return to Iran. “It wasn’t an easy decision at all. I was born and raised in Iran. Until I die, Iran will be my home.”

The students point out that Western countries’ responses, namely sanctions targeted at the Islamic Republic, are ineffective, because they hit specific people rather than financial institutions. They also say that the University of Cambridge needs to do more to support the people of Iran. When Mehdi emailed Pro-Vice-Chancellor Kamal Munir in October, asking if Cambridge would issue a statement condemning the Islamic Republic’s actions, Munir said no, dismissing it as one of “several live conflicts around the world”.

Mehdi cannot help but feel aggrieved, given that Cambridge released a statement condemning Putin’s invasion of Ukraine just 8 months before. The University also provides a Hardship Fund for Ukrainian students, but no such scheme exists for Iranians, despite the fact that Kimia’s master’s degree “[costs] 40-50 years of an average worker in Iran’s income”.

I conclude by asking Kimia, Mehdi

and Saeed if there is anything ordinary people can do to help the cause. There is plenty, they assure me. Email your MP. Be there for your Iranian friends – “not just Iranian friends, Afghan friends, Ukrainian friends.” The easiest thing to do, they say, is to “use your social media [...] by sharing the things that are coming from the people of Iran”.

Some Iranians who live abroad, she explains, do not protest or repost about the revolution because they want to be able to travel to Iran with impunity to see their loved ones, but Kimia has no patience for these people. “I don’t want to travel to Iran, I want to live in Iran”. The only way to achieve this is for the world to speak out.

\* Names have been changed.





# Science

## Breaking down STEM Superiority: The experience of a medic intercalating in humanities

Toby Smallcombe

One of the big decisions medical students have to make during their undergraduate degree is what subject to take during their third year. For a lot of students, this boils down to whether they want to do a project and write a paper or take a 'year off' after a hectic second year. I thought there was no better way to do this than to spend my third year doing History

So, what's the deal with STEM, why would I have ever wanted to leave? Somewhat fitting with the alleged 'grind mindset' attributed to STEM students, STEM degrees can be really draining. I found that second-year medicine moved at a relentless pace, jumping from contact hour to contact hour with few breaks in between. Pre-clinical Medicine started to feel stagnated, parroting facts and working through methodical problem sheets. The promise of a more free-form structure and seemingly optional lecture timetable became all too intriguing.

How people react to my transition to History hints at the dichotomy between STEM and Humanities. STEM students mostly seem relatively unbothered, most interested in how I'm spending all my new free time. Humanities students on the other hand seem impressed and excited to hear how I'm finding the new degree. This discourse has been seething on the University of Oxford 'confessional' Facebook page recently and the alleged superiority of STEM over Humanities de-

grees is a frequent topic of discussion on Camfess.

In what other ways do medicine and history differ? Ironically, given the stereotype of Humanities as a social degree, I've found history has been a much lonelier experience than Medicine. The structure of Medicine meant I was always busy, with short-term but manageable deadlines constantly throughout the week. Lectures and practicals are a social event, with the whole cohort gathering daily and a great time to catch up with friends in and out of college.

“  
Critical thinking  
from studying History  
will be useful at clinical school and beyond  
”

Motivation and discipline are key as a Humanities student, in contrast to medicine I will typically have two big deadlines a week and maybe a similar amount of lectures. Free time becomes its own burden, with little to organise yourself around.

This all paints a very sad picture, but I'm also having the best year of my university experience so far. History does

give me time to relax and engage with friends, as well as myself. I'm by far the fittest I've been at university and have become much more proactive in my social life. Honing the skills to make and allocate time both for work and yourself is crucial, and Humanities degrees help you do that.

A lot of people ask what I hope to get out of a History degree, given that I'm still planning on heading to clinical school. At its most basic - rather than having a year off - it's more that I'm hoping I'll be refreshed and excited for clinical school after a year of doing something different. In a six-year-long course, a little bit of change is a good thing. Critical thinking and motivation that I'm developing by studying history will be very useful at clinical school and beyond. Despite the idea of Humanities degrees allowing laziness, I've become much more productive this year as a result of changing my work habits and adapting my way of thinking. Overall, I know when I look back on this year, I'll miss it.

This is by no means a piece against Medicine or STEM or a love letter to Humanities and History. But having been part of both camps, it's helped me appreciate the differences between the two and the importance of broadening education. For anyone who is ever tempted to make a temporary or even permanent redirection, don't let the rhetoric and distinctions between STEM and Humanities stop you.

## Research Round-up

Suchir Salhan and Tom Malloch



### Rebuilding sheep from their skin

Scientists from Cambridge and elsewhere have tested an innovative technique, attempting to settle the 'contentious' chronology of the Agricultural Revolution.

Laying the groundwork for the Industrial Revolution, it saw the adoption of field rotation, enclosure and wider use of fertilisers. Until now, traditional methods have proven inadequate to pin down the precise timeline of developments. The team measured the proportions of carbon and nitrogen isotopes in sheep parchment, used for dated legal documents. From this, they can reconstruct the sheep's health, diet and more, relating change in feed for instance to trade expansion following the Napoleonic wars.

### Anti-depressants and the brain

Research from the Department of Psychiatry in collaboration with the University of Copenhagen has found that anti-depressants cause half of users to feel emotionally blunted. This is due to their effect on reinforcement learning, which allows humans to form behavioural patterns from the environment. They found no significant effect on 'cold' cognition, like attention and memory, or 'hot' cognition that involves our emotions.

### GPs: Can they understand us?

Our GP is usually our first port of call for access to the NHS, so ensuring GPs understand our symptoms is therefore vital - both to maintain trust in the service, and even more importantly to guarantee access to appropriate treatment.

In a bid to improve GP care in the future, the team studied 28 taped primary care consultations of patients describing abdominal pain - although usually benign, it can be an important warning sign of serious illnesses, including gastro-intestinal cancers. They found GPs more frequently wrongly interpreted patients' descriptions than correctly, especially when patients used vague description or referencing issues not already documented in their record.

### Explaining the productivity slump

Recent analysis gives a potential resolution to the 'puzzle' of the UK's productivity slowdown. Cambridge economists used ONS data to decompose the economic growth into 19 distinct sectors, like manufacturing, finance and agriculture.

The paper found within-sector slowdowns were on the whole responsible; mainly from ICT and manufacturing industries, though there was a slight effect from labour reallocation.

Could YOU  
be the next  
Zadie Smith?



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Science

Cambridge at the bottom of Tripas for sustainability

Thomas Idris Marquand and Suchir Salhan

Cambridge University’s environmental policy has been ranked at the bottom end of a 2:ii class in an independent league table of UK universities ranked by environmental and ethical performance. Ranked 84th out of a possible 153 institutions, down two places from last year, the report suggests that the University has not met emissions targets. Cambridge sits below Anglia Ruskin, ranked in the mid 2:ii class, and significantly below Oxford University, sitting at a comfortable 2:i, ranked 41st. First class universities include Bristol, LSE and KCL.

The findings of the survey

Based on the University’s publicly available environmental policy, People & Planet found that the University is working to target Emissions and Discharges and Biodiversity, but is neglecting to set targets for other areas such as Construction & Refurbishment, Waste Management, Travel and Transport and Sustainable Procurement. After a long year of climate protests in Cambridge, the University was scored zero out of five for its commitment in policies to reinvest divested funds in re-

newable energy or community-owned energy. However, its Carbon Emission Plan is consistent with the 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050, with at least one milestone towards this target being set before 2030. The evaluation also comprised metrics associated with workers’ rights and the use of a “Can’t Buy My Silence” pledge, which makes non-disclosure agreements unenforceable for anything other than sharing intellectual property.

Varsity reached out to Thomas Idris Marquand, a PhD student working in the Department of Earth Sciences. Thomas studied Natural Sciences as an undergraduate and started working as a supervisor this year. He hopes to use his experience as a climate scientist to help undergraduate students understand how they can address the climate crisis and help shape the University’s climate agenda.

Thomas’ advice: how can students combat the Climate Crisis?

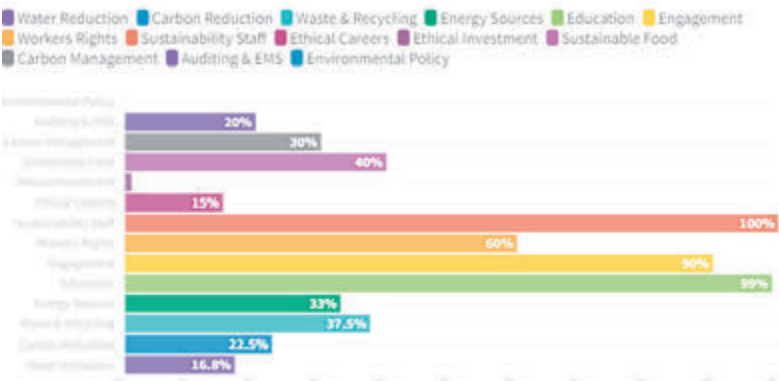
Tackling climate change is not always as black and white as we environmentalists would like it to be. Some fantasise about a technological saviour while others think that the solution is anything

with the word “organic” plastered on it. Our passion is all too easily misdirected, and our gut instinct often overruns our reason. In many cases, the rough stroke of common sense must be refined by careful research and evidence.

Pinning down complex environmental problems is my full-time occupation at the moment; my PhD is all about how our use of land affects greenhouse gas production and consumption. I feel very fortunate to take on a topic which attracts such passionate input from so many of the people I meet. In that vein, the mass mobilisation of climate activism, not least among Cambridge students, over the last few years has been really inspiring.

However, I sometimes worry that my protesting peers do not always direct their praiseworthy passion to the most effective environmental solutions. The climate system is complex and environmental problems entangled. How can we strike the balance between recognising nuances and motivating people, governments and corporations to make necessary changes?

So many of the environmental issues that seem simple at first glance raise deeper questions on further consideration. For example, organic farming produces less food from the same amount



▲ FLOURISH CHART CREATED BY ESMÉ KENNEY

of land; if we switch to environmentally friendly, low-productivity farming practices, we will need to import more food from abroad or convert more wild land to farmland. Electric cars present another complex balance of pros and cons. While the pros are generally accepted to win out, questions remain as to how we can ethically, safely and sustainably produce and recycle the rare metals needed to build their batteries. There are even legitimate, though unpopular, arguments against divestment. Being a shareholder gives you more sway over a corporation than being an outside voice; granted, this approach has failed in the past.

Personally, I am hopeful that “green steel” is close at hand and that new lithium sources (for example, Cornish Lithium) or novel battery technologies will help to mitigate the impact of electric car batteries. I am yet to be convinced by organic farming and a number of other popular environmental talking points. I do not want anyone to lose their passion for protecting our environment and mitigating climate change, but I do hope though that my fervent friends will take the time to consider the best solutions to the multifaceted challenges we face before painting their banners.

One small step for students, one giant leap for STEMkind: Space Flight prepare to launch rocket into space

Shifaa Rashid and Suchir Salhan

Launching rockets into space isn’t necessarily what you’d expect to do on a Sunday afternoon. That kind of stuff is reserved for the Elon Musks of the world, right? Well, there’s a society at the University that allows you to gain experience in building and launching rockets. The goal: launch to an altitude of 150 km – well beyond the Kármán line, where outer space begins. We gave the current co-presidents of CU Spaceflight, Abhi Pandit and Barty Wardell, a chance to prove us wrong about our assumptions.

CU Spaceflight was founded with one main goal: launch a rocket into space. The society accommodates at least 30 students. It achieved a record intake at the Freshers’ Fair with nearly 400 students signing up, resulting

120 to their introductory lecture.

Since its conception in 2006, the society has been responsible for four major projects, each with varying degrees of success. In 2017, CUSF launched Martlet III in Nevada. Unfortunately, the rocket motor – the only off-the-shelf component – exploded, leaving behind only the rocket dart. But, as Barty informs us, failing is “natural and normal and part of the process”. The society fought back, and in 2019 designed the Pulsar engine, the largest nitrous oxide hybrid ever fired in the UK.

The society is generously supported by the Department of Engineering “without too many strings attached” and has a roster of sponsors and donors supporting their work. While the society had originally aimed to launch rockets to space using a budget of only £1000, getting space-rated components can be expensive. Barty remarked that “you

could sell a kidney” for some highly sought-after equipment, like rocket valves. Nowadays, the society has a greater budget at its disposal, thanks to the external support. For many sponsors, supporting CU Spaceflight brings a great deal of publicity and represents a valuable training ground for young engineers to enter the space industry.

Now having scrapped Martlet IV, a rocket planned to reach 20 km, the budding engineers at CU Spaceflight decided to go back to their roots, and seek to achieve their original goal.

Enter Griffin I.

CU Spaceflight was founded with one main goal: launch a rocket into space

This single-stage rocket aspires to reach around 150km, crossing the edge of space in doing so. Barty tells us that the society is making “good progress” with its development, and are provisionally testing its bipropellant engine White Dwarf, running on Nitrous Oxide and IPA (Isopropyl alcohol). This is a scaled-down version of the engine White Giant, which they plan to design and manufacture to fuel Griffin I.

Though the team plans to launch Griffin I in 2024, “integrating the rocket engine into the overall rocket design is a bigger challenge.” Both co-presidents explain to us how there is a back-and-forth design process, and that there are

big possibilities of facing multiple setbacks. But even if Abhi and Barty feel as though they are doing “another degree’s worth of work”, they don’t feel they are representative of society’s hardest workers. “People put their whole lives into this” they say.

Abhi and Barty tell us that the society runs almost entirely self-sufficiently within the student body, compared to other similar initiatives at universities like Imperial. “There is a great understanding” that building a rocket is hard, said Barty, particularly when there are very visible failures from organisations like NASA and SpaceX. However, despite the numerous sponsors, Abhi urges us that the “pressure is more from our side in that we want to achieve as much as we can”.

Alumni of CU Spaceflight go on to achieve great things. Barty commented on two urban myths circulating within the society. After gaining experience from building rockets in CU Spaceflight, students are often dispersed throughout the space agency. One rumour flying around is that 90% of the staff of a company that tests rocket engines consists of Spaceflight alumni. Another tale involves Lars Blackmore’s membership in the society. He subsequently went on to work at SpaceX, and the code from his PhD has enabled the propulsive landing control for FalconX.

Barty and Abhi gave a tour of the equipment and we even got to hold the Aquila rocket. Upon seeing firsthand the tireless dedication the students of CU Spaceflight demonstrate, it wouldn’t be presumptuous to say that as the society continues to hit those milestones, their energies will inevitably launch them to success, and hopefully become the first European student team to reach space.

Quick-fire Round:

Musk, Branson or Bezos?

Abhi: They’d all get you cancelled  
Barty: Can we choose a fourth? Branson by process of elimination

The engineering department canteen has some weird and wonderful food. What is your favourite thing to eat?

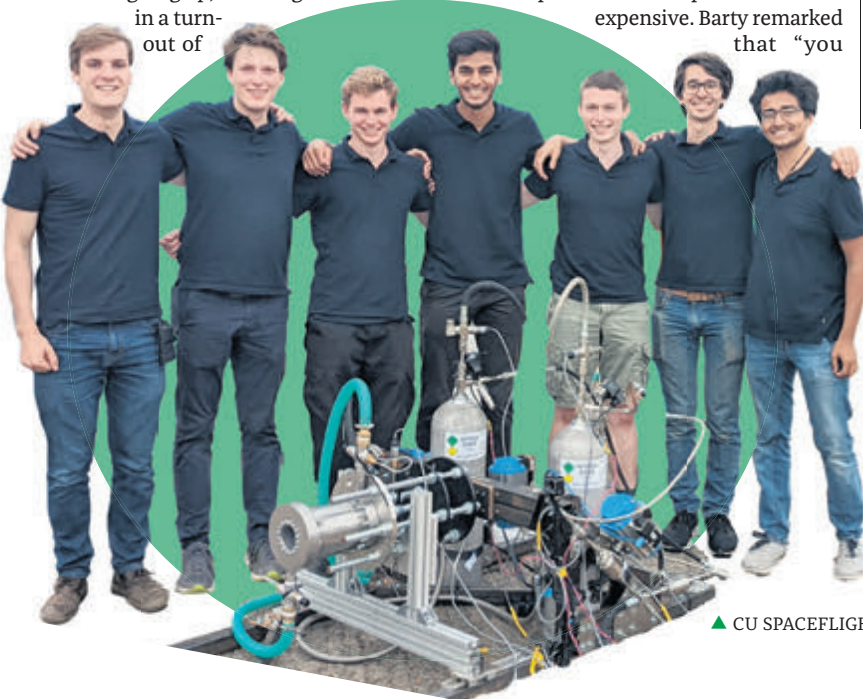
Barty: I can deal with the flapjack  
Abhi: the fruit scone.  
Barty: why? Have you been to the GP? What possessed you?  
Abhi: I had never tried a scone before!

If Elon Musk was a biscuit, what biscuit would he be?

Abhi: Can you imagine a cracker with marmite on it?

Worst engineering stereotype?

Abhi: The worst engineering stereotype is that people don’t know how to socialise... but I also think it is the most true  
Barty: the depths of some engineers’ anti-socialness is shocking



▲ CU SPACEFLIGHT



# vulture.

## ‘My body is not a weapon’: Being trans and a life model

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AUNTIE MADDY TRIES THE UL TEA ROOM • 20

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THE LARGEST STUDENT FILM FESTIVAL • 25

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▲ PHOTOS BY LILY BURGE-THOMAS

Emily Lawson-Todd

Interviewing involves a lot of things: a sharp mind, a knack for asking questions, a keen ear. However, so rarely does it involve helping your interviewee chop up carrots for dinner, which incidentally is what I found myself doing with Lily B-Thomas.

Though Lily is a brilliant chef, cooking us a fantastic vegetarian meal in a student kitchen, she’s best known around Cambridge as a second-year Architecture student by day and a life drawing model by night. She’s been

life modelling since before coming to Cambridge, having been introduced to it by a friend, and now regularly models at various life drawing evenings.

After a few naff questions such as: “Does it get cold?” (apparently it does not; Christ’s College, where sessions take place, has a space heater), we get down to chatting about what it’s like being both an artist and a model, and how the two are linked. Lily is full of praise for her fellow models. “I’m always just admiring,” she says. “It’s not a thing of: ‘Oh wow, this person is ridiculously gorgeous!’ It’s more about the way the shadows are falling, the way their flesh moves, the muscles, the skeleton, and how that’s beautiful.”

I ask about how she finds modelling, and if she thinks her experience of seeing models is the same as how other people see her. “When you’re a queer person, there’s that history of being told that your body is either a vessel for attack on other people or is a fetish, and in a way it’s just really nice to model because you realise that you’re just being admired.” She continues: “It’s weird because you’re being objectified in the most fundamental way, but that whole aspect of being naked falls away. You’re just being viewed as a series of shapes. It’s freeing.”

It’s the neutrality that comes with life drawing that appeals to Lily, especially when looking at the recent onslaught of transphobia on social media and

in the news, and the pressures to conform as a trans woman. She talks about her anxiety regarding passing: “I’m constantly aware of my body and asking: ‘Am I going to be attacked?’ every time I leave the house,” (as well as the general rise in transphobia over the past few years, especially regarding remarks by several influential figures on social media.)

With that in mind, I wonder out loud about what it’s like to model as a trans woman in the midst of all of this. She laughs as she tells me how “everything” is out when you model...

Continued on page 22 ►



# Spilling the tea on the UL Tea Room

Agony Aunt **Maddy Sanderson** takes a break from solving your problems to investigate the UL Tea Room

**H**umanity has come far in the years since civilisation began. A recent win was the widespread success of the Covid vaccine. The moon landing was pretty big too, I guess. But just last week these things were blown out of the water when I got up close and personal with one of the biggest thrills of the modern age. Forget Junction. Forget Glasto. We're taking a trip to

“

Easter may be months away, but it looks like we've already got ourselves one hell of a resurrection

”

the University Library Tea Room, reopened 9th January after its year(s) of rest and relaxation when it was closed during the pandemic. And about time, too – for too long has the secret under-desk sandwich-scarfer had to suffer in (literal) silence. Easter may be months away, but it looks like we've already got ourselves one hell of a resurrection.

I'd ploughed through a bumper bag of Sainsbury's own-brand multi-pack crisps about 15 minutes before volunteering to trot over to

the UL, and while I'm no stranger to a second/third/fourth lunch, I thought that, for safety's sake, I might need to call for back-up. So naturally, I flew in the special forces (enter: Lily and Joe). I'm also vegan, so thought it might be wise to bring in someone not quite as gastronomically challenged as myself to cover the tea room in all its blazing glory. Things got off to a rocky start when I was immediately deemed a security threat upon entry to the library, caught red-handed with my hefty black tote bag swinging on my shoulder like I was still strutting up and down Sidgwick Site without a care in the world. Rookie mistake. Come on, this isn't the bleeding ARC Cafe – this is the University Library Tea Room! And to add insult to injury, to my great surprise I found no shining ribbon for me to cut waiting at its entrance. Still, after turning the corner, all was immediately forgiven. Picture a scene of light cascading in through high rectangular windows, illuminating the canteen below and bathing its patrons, perched attentively over a book or a thick wedge of cake, in rays of golden January sun. The sounds of soft clinks of glass and porcelain and the low, rumbling roast of the coffee machine float like sweet arias up to its high ceiling, drawing me in and towards the counter.

The food situation seems to be predominantly self-service – aside from hot food, and I presume the soup of the day (intrusive thoughts did, admittedly, beckon me towards the great vat, goading me to plunge my bare hands into the boiling slop) – which, if like me, you're



terminally uncoordinated, can at first appear more than a little daunting. But have no fear: there's a team of more-than-amiable staff on hand should you stumble in your efforts to nab the fateful last scone, and who, when they're not whipping up some premium cooked delights, also make a pretty good coffee. Lily bought a red velvet cookie and Joe a sausage roll, which came with free salad and crisps. For myself, I nabbed a Jammy Dodger blondie. And of course, all of us bought a coffee. I was set back £6.20, which, in this economy, did make me wince just a little. But let's face it: there's a cost of living crisis; with the rest of the country struggling to keep its head above water – why would a random tea room in Cambridgeshire be shown any extra mercy? You'd spend more money on a Wednesday Revs ticket on average, and at least the UL Tea Room won't leave you with a raging hangover, burst eardrums and a renewed sense of self-loathing you didn't think was quite possible this early on in the term.

As Joe's sausage roll is ready to be taken out of the oven, the machine begins to beep in a cadence not too dissimilar to that of the oven we had when I worked in my local Subway, inducing a series of unpleasant flashbacks that momentarily distracted me from the big angry “DECLINED” plastered across the screen after I tap the card machine. As expected, the venue was bursting when we arrived, so, financial difficulties (temporarily) resolved, our merry band had to briefly hover around one of the larger tables like eager vultures. But our patience soon paid off. The Jammy Dodger blondie, although so dense it would put most neutron stars to shame, was so soft, warm and jammy that it (almost) made me believe in love again, and with Lily happily working her way through the cookie and Joe through his fragrant, herby sausage roll – which, in his opinion, had the perfect pastry to sausage ratio, an extremely rare occurrence



▲ HANNAH GILLOTT

and pleasantly surprising – it's safe to say that the food in the tea room gets a mega thumbs up. I noticed Joe's crisps looked a little small. “Bottom of the bag”, he suspected. Still, it was hardly a

“

A space where work and play can, and should, collide

”

bother. We did arrive pretty late, and what utter madman would open a whole new bag of crisps 20 minutes from closing?

It's difficult for me to imagine going on a date here (Any takers? Please? Please?), but a cute coffee hang with friends? Sure thing. Just be wary of the occasional pass-agg tutting from fellow cafe-dwellers should the conversation reach over ten decibels. Nonetheless, the atmosphere is far from dismal. In fact, Joe described the ambience as a “general murmur”, which, for a library tea room – a space in which both work and play can, and should, collide – is about the best you can hope for. There's also a water cooler and a bookshelf at the back, near the intense plush comfort of the sofa square (if not a tad socially awkward, should you make eye contact with the person opposite), so you can spend all day chillin' in the tea room to your heart's content. I can't promise you'll get any more work done in here than in the austere hush of the main reading rooms, or the desolate emptiness of the upstairs stacks (literally the Cambridge University backrooms), but when you're mid essay crisis and looking for a place to drown/gorge your sorrows away, there'll always be a place at the table for you.



## Hot takes on hot drinks

### The UL Tea Room

The UL Tea Room allows you to take a deep breath in the middle of a long, tiring day without even leaving the library. Two minutes from Sidgwick and zero minutes from the University Library, it is a pocket of sound within the silence, a bubble of good vibes amidst the oppressive silence of the stacks. Not as expensive as you might expect, and well worth it for a much needed break.

Esther Arthurson, Lifestyle Editor

### Harvey's Coffee House

I don't know who Harvey is, but I do know where he came from: he slipped on a cloud in heaven, landed at the foot of Caius freshers' accommodation, and blessed us with his coffee house. When I first set foot in his godsend of a cafe one rainy day, it felt like coming home. When the waitress offered to heat up my pastry, I think I ascended. There's nothing quite like drudging down a muddy path to the blanketed armchairs of Harvey's. I just wish there was more space.

Hannah Gillott, Vulture Editor

### Sidgwick Buttery

After a whole year of gaslighting myself into believing that ARC coffee is even remotely ingestible, imagine my delight when I heard there was a new place to get my caffeine fix! Au contraire, dear reader. It turns out that Sidgwick buttery coffee is simultaneously strong enough to give you shakes all day, rendering writing an essay impossible and yet not strong enough to stop me from falling asleep in my lectures. And it's extortionate!

Emily Lawson-Todd, Arts Editor

### The ARC

You know what I love? Shit coffee. You know what I love even more than shit coffee? Stained seating. So imagine how happy my fresher self was to waddle into the ARC Cafe and see my wildest dreams come true! Brimming with Sidge girlies (recently profiled in a *Varsity* photoshoot) and démodé dudes like myself, all looking for the sweet nectar of life, it never fails to disappoint with its mud splash it deceptively names 'coffee'.

Daniel Hilton, Vulture Editor





# Know Thyself: Are personality tests enough?

**Sarah Adegbite** discusses the age-old urge to know ourselves

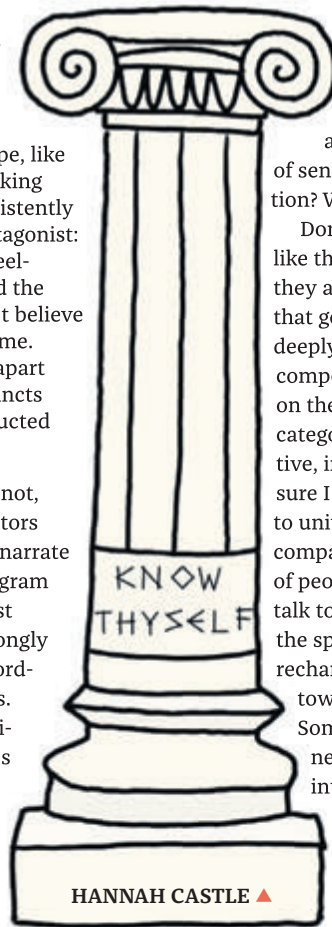
If you travel towards the heart of central Greece, wading your way through the ruins and rumbles of history, you might find yourself atop the grand Mount Parnassus. There, you can see the remains of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, where it was said the Pythian oracle dwelt. It seems that, from our knowledge of ancient texts, carved onto a column outside the front façade of the temple were three inscriptions, recording aphorisms devised by the Seven Sages. But for the purposes of this article, I am mainly interested in one: "know thyself."

It seems that now, more than ever, we are obsessed with the art of knowing ourselves. People pay for in-depth psychoanalytic tests that determine how best they should approach everything from careers to relationships. Others avoid relationships altogether if 'the stars haven't aligned' and their horoscopes don't match. Whole Instagram accounts are dedicated to enneagram types and the common problems they'll encounter. We assess and categorise; we divide and label. Perhaps this is the human instinct to find patterns and groups at work on a personal and collective level. In many ways, though, the Delphic injunction to "know thyself", written so many years ago, reminds us that this pursuit of personality isn't something unique to our day and age.

Confession: I myself am guilty of relying a bit too heavily on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) test to tell me what I should know about myself. It assesses an individual across four key

'type indicators': extraverted or introverted? Intuitive or sensing? Thinking or feeling? Judging or perceiving? According to the combination of your letters, you might be assigned a character type, like 'Mediator', or 'Defender'. Since taking the test in 2018, I have been consistently characterised as a Turbulent Protagonist: ENFJ-T – extraverted, intuitive, feeling and judging. When I first read the personality description, I couldn't believe how accurately it had described me. It was like someone was prying apart my brain and putting all my instincts and intuitions into neatly constructed sentences.

But it seems, more often than not, these personality tests are indicators not of who you are but who you narrate yourself to be. Look at the enneagram test, for instance, where you must rank yourself on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree in accordance with a variety of statements. One such reads: "I am more sensitive than most people; sometimes the world just seems too harsh." A fairly reflective person could make a pretty good stab at a self-assessment, but at a deeper level that little phrase – "than



most people" – requires you not only to know yourself, but to know the general spectrum of human personality to which you are comparing yourself. What level of sensitivity is 'average' in our generation? Who on earth knows that?

Don't get me wrong, I don't think tests like these are bad. In fact, the questions they ask are exactly the kind of probes that get you to think just that bit more deeply about your emotional, social composition, about the impact you have on the world. The problem is when the categories that result become prescriptive, instead of descriptive. I was pretty sure I was an introvert until coming to university. I really enjoyed people's company, liked speaking to big groups of people, and didn't mind making small talk too much. But I was so aware of the space and time I needed to reboot, recharge. Then I arrived among these towering spires and cobbled streets. Something about starting afresh in a new place seemed to suppress that introversion. All of a sudden, I was drawing energy from social events, taking pride in a chock-a-block calendar, defining myself as an extravert to the world, and myself.

And those tests didn't help. But coming into a new term, I've found myself again treasuring alone time. Burrowing away at the corner of the AMES library, or tucked up in bed with a bowl of grapes and a Zadie Smith novel. It was the continual definition of myself as an extravert that had perhaps precluded me even realising that I would appreciate more alone time than I was getting.

What I'm trying to say, I think, is something that has already been said thousands of years before. We should know ourselves, but that doesn't mean zipping ourselves up into the binary of introvert or extravert, or allowing what a test says to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. To know yourself is to know that you change, that you're a contradiction, that perhaps Whitman was unusually astute in declaring that: "I contain multitudes". The best way we can know ourselves is to grasp that we, as loved, created beings, are ourselves known. It seems St Paul had it right in his first letter to the Corinthians: "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." Perhaps, then, to "know thyself" is not so important as to be "fully known", but can we ever plumb the depths of that knowledge on this side of eternity? Who knows? We might just have to wait and see.

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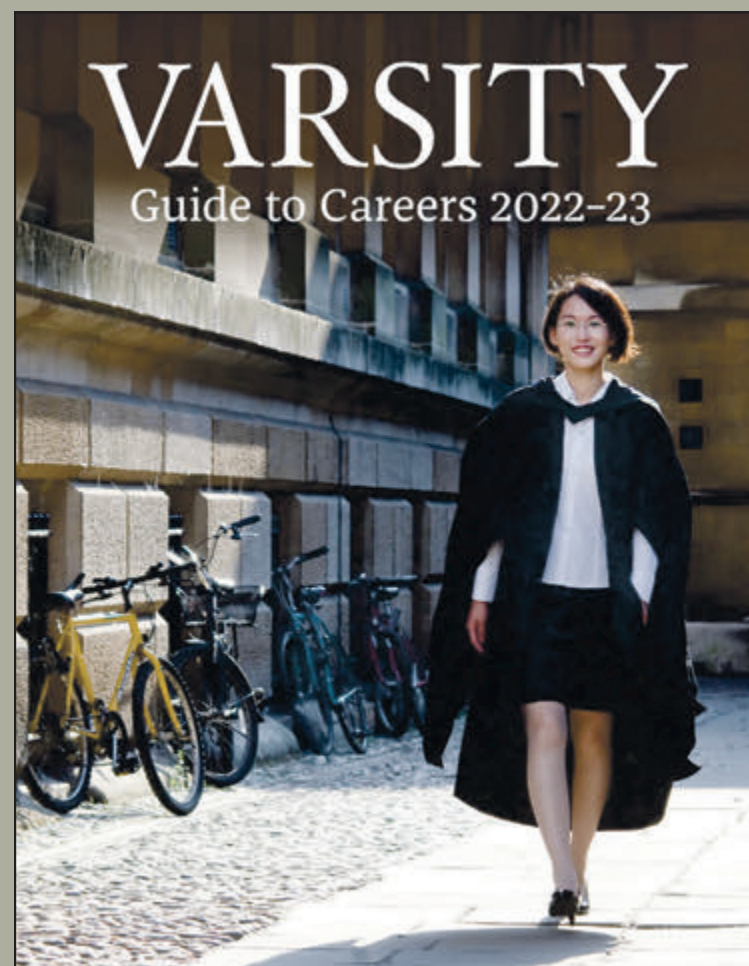
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**Arts**

# In defence of the Sidgwick sights

Arts writer (and Sidgwick apologist) **Anna Wythe** examines the site's Brutalist beauty and concrete quirks

One of the very few things I miss about being a teenager is drinking in the park after dark. It's not the cheap wine or the inevitable disappointment; it's the strange shadowy silhouettes of a playground suddenly decontextualised. When no one thinks to play on them, the climbing frames and seesaws become as quasi-artistic and lonely as the teenagers drinking in their shadows.

A walk through Sidgwick Site late in the evening recently reminded me of that atmosphere. Stripped of schedules and Cambridge glitterati, it becomes mere shapes and lines. Especially in the rain, it's a wonderful place: not comforting but beautiful in a cold, geometrical way.

I realise I'm wading against the tide of public opinion when I describe Sidgwick as beautiful.

“  
Sidgwick is perhaps a harsh visual environment, but it's not an inhuman one  
”

So often the physical space is decried as ugly, industrial and hellish, but I won't contradict anyone's 'vibes'. The beauty of it is for me at 3am, not public discourse.

I do think, though, that the architecture of Sidgwick is more interesting and more fit-for-purpose than it is sometimes given credit for. The only caveat for this claim is that everything I know about architecture comes from Wikipedia and BBC documentaries.

My true love on Sidgwick is the raised MMLL faculty building. It is, for want of better words,



wacky as hell. Part of the original 1950s Sidgwick, the Raised Faculty Building is the work of the Casson Conder company, masterminds of the Northern half of the site, including the Economics Faculty and Lady Margaret Hall. Casson Conder brought a distinctly Brutalist approach to these early constructions. The reinforced concrete pilotis are straight out of the Le Corbusier play-book, which is to say, they refer back to the early purist vision for Brutalism. The strange corridor spaces beneath the building have the sense of a tunnel even in daylight. It's Fritz Lang meets Joy Division. It's cool.

I find it curious that people manage to describe Brutalist architecture as both “inhuman”



▲The cold geometry of Sidgwick  
(ALL PHOTOS BY NATHAN WESTHEAD)

and “unnatural.” Perhaps the UFO conspiracies about ancient monuments made their way into the twentieth century. There certainly seems to be a sense that giant man-made structures are somehow uncanny and disturbing. But what causes this discomfort?

At the heart of Brutalism, there is the idea of truth. It aims to take away the decoration, the ornament. It shows honestly the materials used in construction (famously, reinforced concrete) and

“  
You look at the concrete and it looks right back at you  
”

the mechanisms of design (like the pilotis). It isn't necessarily, however, the faceless architecture of anonymous apartment buildings. As Jonathan Meades informed me via YouTube, truly brutalist buildings are made by pouring concrete moulds on-site, a technique which gives architects more freedom to create new and different shapes. It is



an architecture unique through its nakedness, not its clothes: architecture sans skinny scarf, sans trench coat.

Although the Raised Faculty Building is a restrained example of Brutalism, it still holds that suggestion of nakedness. It is the opposite of domestic space. The scale precludes intimacy. The exposed design precludes privacy. Perhaps this is what disturbs us. Perhaps it is the lack of escapism in this kind of architecture. You look at the

“  
Beautiful in a cold, geometrical way  
”

concrete and it looks right back at you. So too, there is none of the overwhelming harmony you might find in the King's College Chapel ceiling or the Wren Library. Brutalism doesn't promise a coherent ordering of the universe. If there's a spiritualism to it, it comes from what a human mind will do staring at a blank wall.

Personally, I wouldn't object if the whole of Sidgwick Site was poured from a single concrete mould. Nevertheless, the south side breaks open into something very different. The buildings are more postmodern, or at least more open to reference and representation. They include the spiral staircase to heaven (the Divinity Faculty), the corporate cathedral (the Law Faculty), and most famously, the History Faculty designed by James Stirling.



In breaking with the austerity of Brutalism, Stirling also broke with its functionality. Leaks and temperature problems have plagued the History Faculty building since the 60s. Indeed, I can testify that it remains to this day unable to keep its occupants warm in the winter. As Wikipedia so aptly observes, “Although the building was admired by students of architecture, it is less well regarded by those who have to work in it.”

Whatever the joys of critiquing Sidgwick south side, it reveals a fascinating fragmentation of design in a very compact space. If modern architecture is often criticised for monotony, the buildings on Sidgwick retain particularity. I like the mishmash that results. Academia is no longer one nation under God, and there's no point in giving it an artificial harmony through architecture. Sidgwick is perhaps a harsh visual environment, but it's not an inhuman one. It makes us uncomfortable in all the right ways and it's beautiful at 3am.

## Cont. from cover

...with “50 pairs of eyes watching you and drawing”. Yet it is in these moments that Lily finds joy. “To find myself in a room with people, showing my entire body, and yet just being drawn, I have this realisation that my body is not a weapon,” she says. “It's in that moment when you're standing there, you realise that the stuff people write in *The Daily Mail* isn't what most people think. When I'm there, all that hate and internalised self-hatred fades away.”

However, it wasn't always so easy. We discuss growing up queer, and she tells me that when she started modelling she was “quite tense and stressed”, holding poses that were painful for extended periods of time. “I had this quite self-deprecating stance towards myself that came from a history of exploring who I am.” But her recent creative works, from life modelling to working on *52 Monologues for Young Transsexuals*, have been celebratory. “Throughout all of it,” she says, smiling, “it's been an exploration of what my body is and what my body does.” It's clear to see that now this exploration is far more positive.

Her favourite part of the life drawing sessions, Lily tells me, is when it finishes. Not because you get to leave the pose you've been holding for 20 minutes, but because you get to “take pictures of all of the work and go to your friends and be like: ‘Oh my god, look how flattering this drawing is!’” When I probe about whether she has any particularly outrageous stories, she laughs and tells me about a time where she'd come into a session without getting time to clean. “I was posing and I was just thinking: ‘What if I haven't wiped properly?’ and obviously I couldn't go move and check and be like: ‘Sorry guys, have I wiped?’ It's something I am constantly paranoid about!”

I ask her whether she's got any up-and-coming projects in the works. She tells me about an upcoming installation that I am “sworn to secrecy” about, as well as her recent brainwave of starting a trans-safe swim space. And of course, she's still life modelling at ArcSoc, which I vow to come to as we finish up the rest of our meal. As for now? She's continuing to “celebrate trans voices”.

LILY BURGE-THOMAS ▶





# The lowdown on the zine scene

Arts Editor **Emily Lawson-Todd** rounds up the zines currently accepting submissions

## Cambridge Girl Talk

**Social Media:** @cambridgegirltalk

**Next Issue:** N/A - Continuous

**Deadline:** N/A - Continuous

If feminism is your thing but deadlines aren't, then Girl Talk is perfect for you! Watch out for their weekly commissions on a variety of topics, from topical issues to more personal reflective pieces. They also have regular socials, which are a fantastic way to meet like minded creatives and share ideas.

## Catharine Zine

**Social Media:** @catharinezine

**Next Issue:** "Reflections"

**Deadline:** 12 February

Fresh off the success of their first issue, "Power", which saw a variety of contributions, from interviews to multimedia artwork, this feminist zine, founded in St Catharine's College, is back with their second issue, "Reflections". Stuck for contribution ideas? Rock up to one of their "candlelit creatives" for atmospheric brainstorming sessions. If the sound of writing by candlelight while looking at old tarot cards and listening to Taylor Swift appeals to you, then this is the perfect zine.

## Typewriter Zine

**Social Media:** @typewriterzine

**Next Issue:** "Characters"

**Deadline:** 15 February

Its name both a reference to the infamous accommodation building and the fact that a real typewriter is involved in publication, this Christ's-based zine is one of Cambridge's newest offerings to the scene. Check them out for quirky and intriguing prompt ideas, ranging from Aristotle quotes and Japanese Noh masks to David Bowie and Virginia Woolf. Watch this space for their first ever issue.

## CANVAS Zine

**Social Media:** @canvaszinecambridge

**Next Issue:** "CANVAS IV"

**Deadline:** 18 February

If themes and prompts are less your thing, CANVAS is the zine to let your imagination really run wild. Created in 2020 as a "blank canvas" for student art and writing, it thrives on its lack of theme. Its last issue featured, among many other things, erotic pottery, a cut-up poem, an essay on Prince and gender, and a Gulliver's Travels-inspired short story about Jeff Bezos and an ant.

To zine or not to zine?

**Emily:** Starting a zine is to humanities girls what starting a podcast is to finance bros. Maybe this slightly scathing remark is based on my own bitter and fruitless experience as a first year student attempting to set up a zine on my own with very little idea about A: what a zine actually is, and B: how to publish, edit, or even select a theme. Alas, it was doomed from the start, left to be a pile of half-written ramblings and some "edgy" vmagazine cutouts. However, unlike the finance bro podcast venture, the humble zine takes (as seen from my own poor attempt) some real determination and effort, is much, much more visually appealing, and usually is not trying to get you to invest in crypto or to embrace the sigma male grindset by only eating raw beef.

Vs

**Anna:** Zines are the home of creatures that would otherwise have spent their lives in shoeboxes and Word docs. How strange to see the little clump of words that was so carefully hidden suddenly displayed on glossy pages! There are many names for making art: procrastinating, moping, insomnia. Zines are kind enough to remind us that our scribbles might be a cultural endeavour that links us to other human beings. When you find something you love in a Cambridge zine, there's the shock of knowing that its maker isn't buried in a distant land, but across the room from you at the launch party, or at least somewhere in this murky old town.

# Weighing up the pros and cons of kilo sales

**Isabel Dempsey** decides whether this second-hand shopping sensation is really worth the hype

I feel like I can't go on Facebook these days for a painful scroll down Camfess without seeing at least one kilo sale ad peer-pressuring me into announcing to all my friends that I am in fact "interested". Where there was once just one brand promising weight-based bargains, its existence has spawned an endless amount of copy varieties. So why has this phenomenon grown so popular?

For anybody who's been living under a synthetic, mass-produced rock for the past few years, a kilo sale is a second-hand shopping experience where the price of your clothes is determined by their weight. Once you've spent the good part of an otherwise productive afternoon rummaging through ratty Adidas T-shirts and questionably patterned blouses in your local church or town hall, you then weigh your final haul to find out its cost.

Taking a step back, it seems rather a strange system. Although the idea of more clothes costing more makes sense, clothes obviously weigh varying amounts based on item, regardless of quality. You can practically get ten lightweight blouses for the same price as one leather jacket. However, it's also fair to say that heavier items such as jeans, jackets, and jumpers do tend to be more expensive than things like T-shirts in non-weight-based shops anyway. But I'm sure there are a fair few people who have either been massively robbed or who have made an immense bargain from this concept. At the end of the day, it's up to the consumer to be smart.

Talking to some students at one Cambridge kilo sale, one of them said they come to these

sales "for the brands. Because it's done by weight – a T-shirt like Ralph Lauren in a charity shop might be marked up, but at a kilo sale it won't matter." Obviously, like all second-hand shopping, there is an element of luck. Sometimes there's just a good offering, and sometimes there's not. A pro tip is to get there as early as possible, but my *top tip* is to pick the right kilo sale brand. The first kilo sale I went to in Cambridge was amazing. I got a slip dress, a maxi skirt, a jumper – everything slotted perfectly into my Sidge girly wardrobe. I'm not going to name any names, but my second experience with a different brand left me surrounded by stained 80s grandma blouses and sports T-shirts that looked like they'd been fished straight out of a ten-year-old boy's laundry basket.

“  
At least you're not spending £2 on the feeling of wasted time alone  
”

I did end up buying a turtleneck though. Did I really need it? No. Did I feel the need to buy it because I'd already paid a fee to get through the door? Yes. Many kilo sales insist on having a standard entry price to cover the basic cost of hosting the event. But that's not how the rest

of the commercial world operates. Surely you make money from your product, not from giving people the opportunity to purchase it. In making people pay entry, it makes you feel like you're paying for the experience itself – something to romanticise into an "event" with your friends (despite their often dingy underwhelming-ness). There's a reason you're coming here instead of getting caught in an eBay bidding war.

Although I understand where the organisers are coming from, entry fees also take away some of their accountability. They could fill the hall with the ugliest clothes in existence but they're still going to take in cash. Sure, they might not make a profit this way, but it just seems a bit unfair that you can spend money at a sale and still walk out with nothing. Which is another twist in this tactic. Despite how illogical it is, something about spending money to get into the sale pressures you into at least buying something. Yeah, you're now spending £6 instead of just the £2 entry fee for a £4 dress, but at least you're not just spending £2 on the feeling of disappointment and wasted time. The students I spoke to said although this entry fee is "annoying", ultimately "it's not too bad." Despite the fact they don't "prefer kilo sales to

charity shops" it is "a day out" they can enjoy with their friends.

In all honesty, I've found myself disappointed by most of the kilo sales I've attended. And I really don't think they're worth it unless you ensure you're going to the good ones. The lack of changing rooms, the overwhelming amount of stuff, and the entry fee just make the whole thing a hassle. Yes, the right brand on the right day at the right time can sometimes provide you with hidden gems and a great time, but more often than not you're better off just hitting up your local charity shops.

▼ It's giving grandma-core (ISABEL DEMPSEY)





# Fashion

## A definitive ranking of the Grafton charity shops

If you're looking for sustainable pieces that won't break the bank, **Eden Keily-Thurstain** has you covered



**M**any of us, from those who fancy themselves expert bargain-finders, to those simply looking for a cheap costume to wear to ARC-SOC, have ventured down to Burleigh Street at some point, home to the coveted “Grafton charity shops”. More dedicated shoppers may traipse around every shop that Grafton has to offer, but Cambridge students are busy and your supervision essay on Foucault isn’t going to write itself. For the more time-starved among us, the Varsity Fashion team have visited and (very scientifically) ranked every Grafton charity shop so you don’t have to waste your precious time flicking through too many Aztec-print leggings.

### British Heart Foundation

At the top of the Grafton food chain stands the small but mighty British Heart Foundation. BHF is the first shop you arrive at if you’re walking from the Grafton Centre so is absolutely a necessary stop. A quite frankly impressive volume of clothes is stuffed into quite a small space. While this can feel a little overwhelming, it does mean your odds of scoring a gem are increased. The lack of an operational changing room and mediocre men’s section lets BHF down a little, but the sheer range and style means it trumps the rest.

**Score = 4.5 / 5**

### Scope

Chances are if you’ve made the pilgrimage to Grafton you’ve visited the explosion of colour that is Scope. The density of platform heels is probably among

the highest in Cambridge and it is another strong contender due to its excellent range and incredibly groovy style. Some things here are somewhat on the pricier side, which



can feel like a poor deal if the clothing is from fast fashion brands such as ASOS. Scope isn’t the place where you will score the vintage coat of your dreams, but the contemporary range still has many high quality pieces on offer, making it well worth a look.

**Score = 4 / 5**

### Oxfam

On our afternoon of rigorous charity shop research, Oxfam was closed by the time we arrived at the incredibly early time of 4pm, docking it down from second place. This shop is a bit of an elusive beast in terms of opening hours, but when it is open you can expect to be met by two floors of secondhand delights, beautifully organised by colour. There’s a large

home section upstairs that is worth a visit, and the prices generally aren’t too bad for Cambridge.

**Score = 4 / 5**

### RSPCA

On paper RSPCA is certainly not one of the strongest candidates in Grafton. The range of clothing is fairly poor and ill-organised, and the combination of the incredibly shiny floor and white lighting makes you feel like you’re at the dentist (phobics beware). However, there is something inexplicably *vibey* about the RSPCA. Maybe it’s the very chatty staff or disproportionate amount of dog memorabilia. Or maybe it’s the galaxy mermaid themed window display. Regardless, the atmosphere is excellent and I refuse to elaborate further.

**Score = 3.5 / 5**



### Mind

The proximity of spelling of Mind to “mid” feels quite fitting in this context. But don’t be fooled, mid does not necessarily mean bad. Mind is an average, but solid all-rounder that embodies all that you would expect from your local trusty charity shop. The racks could have been fuller, but contained some great vintage high street pieces that have at least 20 years of wear left in them. The pricing is also fairly respectable for Cambridge and I managed to secure some pink linen trousers for £3.50. A job well done.

**Score = 3 / 5**

### Arthur Rank, Cancer Research, and Sense

I’ve chosen to lump these shops together as they all share one thing in common: they are distinctly forgettable. Arthur Rank loses points for the apparent desire to recreate the “Lush experience” by having the most potent fruity air freshener to ever grace a charity shop. They also had an activewear section for any “new year new me” sentiments you might be harbouring. Sense does have some reasonable pricing, but all of the shops had quite a limited range, meaning it was hard to unearth any great finds.

**Score = 2 / 5**

### British Red Cross

Honestly, don’t bother. As a charity-shopper with a long and dedicated career, I am yet to find anything even remotely nice in this shop.

The range is very sparse, and is a no-go for those wanting to find masculine pieces.

The 1940s music did add a certain *je ne sais quois*, but not one that anyone was

asking for. I also came across a Zara shirt for £30, which was a little confusing.

There’s a complementary furniture shop across the street which sells exclusively bed frames, Adam Sandler DVDs, and

“Prosecco o’clock” wall art. A fun visit, but avoid if your time is limited.

**Score = 1 / 5**



▲PHOTOS BY EDEN KEILY-THURSTAIN





# Watersprite Film Festival is an unmissable student-led effort

**Inês Goes-Marlière** sits down with this year's Watersprite festival director and head of communications to discuss what makes the festival so special

“I didn't actually know anything about Watersprite in my first and second year”, Charlotte Matheson, the festival's director confesses, when I sit down with her and head of communications Zeb Goriely in Harvey's Coffee House. “Even though for a long time it's been the biggest international screen festival in the UK, and I'm interested in film. Even now, I speak to my friends, and they don't know it happens in Cambridge every year”.

This year, the Watersprite Film Festival will run between the 3rd and 5th of March. It includes everything from the screening of 27 nominated student films from around the world, to screenwriting workshops, industry talks and more. All events are organised by committees of student volunteers from Anglia Ruskin and Cambridge, and aim to give people aged 16-30 an opportunity to engage collaboratively with film, both in person and online.

This hybrid format, maintained by the festival post-pandemic, has significantly boosted its global profile; “although it makes it more difficult to run, because all of our events need to be live-streamed, it hugely increases the reach of the festival”. Zeb informs me that it's probably here to stay, because the festival's “main charitable goal is in part to widen access on how to break into the film industry. Before the hybridi-



▲PHOTO BY WATERSPRITE PHOTOGRAPHER

sation, we were mainly reaching people local to Cambridge, whereas now people can watch it all over the world”.

Expansion has seen the festival receive a record-breaking number of entries, from 106 countries, including a 40% increase from the

African continent, after their summer outreach programme. Charlotte explains that it consisted of “every head of department consulting the submissions map from the year before, and seeing which areas we weren't getting submissions from. Then, we would research ten film institutions from those areas, and find the email addresses of people that worked there so we could email them all individually. It worked; being attentive and personal with people goes a long way”.

At a local level, this outreach effort saw attention paid to strengthening the links between Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin, since Watersprite is an organisation uniquely formed of the two. Zeb tells me: “Most ARU students have never set foot in a Cambridge University building, and vice-versa. I was talking to someone from Footlights, and they were complaining about how they can never get anyone to film their shows when there's a whole university next door with a whole film department. Get in touch with them!”

Indeed, the collaborative nature of the festival is what makes it so special. Charlotte admits: “at points, I've asked myself, ‘why am I doing this? This is so huge and I'm in my final year. I should be focusing. I don't want to say something like it's run on passion. But I think I know that this festival is so pure – not only in its showcasing of

student films untainted by the film industry – but also it's not run on money, but on people caring about film, and things like our awards team sending out personal letters to the nominees around the world”. There is a generous, independent spirit; “something inherently good about it that's nice to channel your energy into”.

“With student films there's no oversight, no guidelines; people just make what they want”

In Zeb's words: “It's raw creativity. With student films there's no oversight, no guidelines; people just make what they want”; this is what makes student films especially exciting. Charlotte adds: “The fact that it's run by students, that's incredible. When you speak to people at other professional festivals (in paid positions), they're always astounded at the number of films we get through and judge fairly. It's like, ‘how could these students do that?’”.



## Vulture Reviews: A character study of cosmic proportions in Todd Field's *TÁR*

Cate Blanchett commands the screen in Todd Field's skin-crawling directorial comeback, writes **Isaac Jackson**

*Tár* starts by – as it intends to continue with – offering its audience a challenge. My screening was met with confused murmurs, laughter and even grunts of annoyance at the prolonged crawl of opening credits, acknowledging first those usually relegated to the very end of the end credits, the catering staff, production units and assistant editors. Some might call it pretentious, but it strikes me as a thematically trenchant act of subterfuge from writer-director Todd Field. A pointed refusal to be branded as an all-conceiving, all-creating ‘auteur’. After all, to make and distribute art is, almost unavoidably, to collaborate. More often than not, the cults of personality that build around so-called individual ‘geniuses’ can lead to the subsuming, and even exploitation, of those at the bottom of the creative hierarchy.

The ‘genius’ in question here is the eponymous Lydia Tár, brought to life by Cate Blanchett. She is the esteemed maestro of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra who stands at the crowning point of a career that has seen her showered in accolades and afforded an illustrious reputation. Fittingly for a conductor, *Tár* navigates both her professional and personal life to an unwavering, precise tempo. That is, however, until scandal and rumours of sexual misconduct threaten to unravel her

seemingly perfect world.

*Tár* is a proudly difficult film, dialogue-heavy and stubbornly reluctant to talk down to its audience. The unassuming viewer might become weary of long dinner table conversations about the intricacies of classical music, were it not for Blanchett's utterly captivating turn in the lead role, which anchors the entire project. It's a performance at once grandiose and painstakingly detailed, a blend of imperious hauteur and quiet vulnerability that arrests our gaze with the mere flick of a conductor's baton. The film is handsomely crafted, from Florian Hoffmeister's stately cinematography, to the wonderful sound design that finds as much music in the banal as in Beethoven. But it's all in service of Blanchett, and Field ensures that she is given the space she needs to shine.

Reliably audacious across the course of its almost three-hour runtime, *Tár* seems tailor-made to polarise. Lydia's calls for a young student of colour to “sublimate” their identity in the face of an overwhelmingly white, male classical music canon has seen it lauded by right-wing ideologues on Twitter as a retort against ‘wokeness’. On the other hand, real-life conductor Marin Alsop has criticised the film for apparently demonising the achievements of women in music, particularly those who identify as lesbian. Both risk simplifying *Tár*; Lydia's femininity, sexuality

and even occupation are almost incidental – she stands in for any and all figures of authority who exploit their positions for selfish gain. “Sublimate yourself” to the music, she might command – but the irony is not lost on us that what *Tár* really desires is for everyone in her life, be it her pupils or her wife (an excellent Nina Hoss), to sublimate to her as well.

When it comes to so-called ‘cancel culture’, the film is level-headed but never equivocating. In latching onto condemnation of easily visible, individual acts of wrongdoing, do we risk ignoring systemic injustices that are harder to see, let alone call out? Does the invisibility that results from ‘cancellation’ impede true accountability? *Tár* is interested in all these questions and more, yet never pretends that their answers are easy. Watching Field's film is to be constantly torn between different points of view, and to have your assumptions and sympathies challenged.

As the film draws to a close, we still don't really know how to feel about our central character. The final scene is not one to be spoiled, but is a biting turn of the screw that is bound to provoke a laugh – but, for better or for worse, might also bring with it pangs of bittersweet pity.

Love or loathe Lydia Tár – but when Blanchett steps up onto that conducting podium, piercing the faces of her players and the camera with that icy gaze, I challenge you to look away.

## How to attend



The Festival's events and screenings are also completely free! Anyone in this area, from the keen thespians and film buffs interested in screen acting classes, to the rest of the general student population, has a huge opportunity to get some real insights into the film industry through talks, masterclasses, workshops, Q&As and the chance to watch great student films that have undergone a rigorous judging process.

The events will be held at the Old Divinity School in St John's. Friday 3rd will be a day exclusively aimed at sixth formers, in partnership with BBC Three, so invite all the moody year 12 and 13 students you know! It will be strutted around three workshops: “How to Fund a Film”, “How to Make a Film” and “How to Distribute a Film”. Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th will be open to everyone. Get involved and take yourself to a screening, spot some celebrities, and try out some workshops – you never know, you just might become the next Sam Mendes.

In the words of Charlotte, “it's all free, why wouldn't you?”

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
HANNAH GILLOTT





# ‘No thank you,’ or yes please?

**Jacob Tucker** returns with a searing review of Little Simz's new album

**N**O THANK YOU, the fifth studio album from UK rapper Little Simz, is a mixed bag. The highly acclaimed *Sometimes I Might Be Introvert*, released just over a year ago, now stands as an even clearer creative peak at this point in the artist's career, having been favourably compared in structure and inventiveness to Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly*. This latest album feels far more casual than its predecessor. Pejoratives such as 'throwaway' or 'unnecessary' may seem a little heartless, but after the thematic urgency of *Sometimes*, *NO THANK YOU* feels like a needless step back.

It has neither the conceptual strengths of *Sometimes*, nor the raw edge of 2019's *Grey Area*, and does not bring anything new to the table. This does not mean that the album is bad; it is, in fact, one of the better hip-hop albums of the past year. In relation to the body of work created so far by Little Simz, however, it falls short. It has a relatively short runtime of 49:56, spread out over ten tracks; most of these tracks rely heavily on sampling—largely from soul; forgivably the most overt reference Simz makes to her inspiration from Kanye. Simz modifies these samples, modernising them, in effect, and sculpts her verses around them.

The stuttering sample on "Angel" starts the album off fairly well; it repeats throughout the song, forming a reliable blanket of sound around which Simz can write verses. Some more variation in instrumentation would have

been welcomed, especially considering that the lyrics here are rather weak: "They don't care if your mental is on the brink of somethin' dark / As long as you're cutting somebody's payslip / And sendin' their kids to private school in a spaceship". The delivery is often flawed across the album; Simz enjoys employing a fairly restrained delivery which, on her other albums, was usually used to great effect, but here often comes across as unintentionally monotonous, even bordering on lazy.

Some bars also feel as though they could have done with a second take (listen closely to the line "What did I expect from those livin' the corporate life?", for instance), and the general implementation of rhyme is often obvious and forced enough to ruin the relevance of the words themselves.

"Gorilla" again has a great instrumental. The lyrics, however, often distract from this; the reference to Mac Miller, while no doubt well-intended, comes across as a little disingenuous. "X" is perhaps the best track on the album: finally, the samples, flow, and lyricism complement each other almost perfectly. "Heart On Fire", however, is the first track on which the instrumental feels somewhat lacking; it almost feels cheap. Perhaps this is an intentional choice, and a tacit reference to Simz's past practices of creating music using MacBook plugins, but, as with the Mac Miller reference, intention can only carry the track so far.

The final two minutes of the track could

have been cut: they form a fairly inconsequential outro which, though pretty, largely begs to be skipped. "Sideways" and "Control" both feel largely unnecessary, primarily relying on their instrumentals, but not contributing much to the album in their own right.

The results are often impressive, but the formula is transparent. The album also lacks the thematic cohesion of previous works: it tries to be "about" too many different issues and, as a result, fails to say anything memorable at all. *NO THANK YOU*, generally speaking, is a good album; perhaps even a great one; but it is not a great Little Simz album.

PAUL HUDSON ▼



## This Charmless Term

BY MATTHEW HIPKIN



It's Lent. If one sought an antidote to the wave of new-term optimism, they need look no further than the miserabilists-in-chief: The Smiths. Coincidentally, a Smiths' tribute band is set to play at MASH (of all places) at the end of term.

This May will mark 40 years since The Smiths' debut single, "Hand in Glove". "Woe is me!", Morrissey crooned with tongue firmly in cheek, lamenting the impending loss of his illusory sweetheart. Composed impromptu on a "crappy old acoustic guitar", Stretford-bound down the M56, the riff dovetails elegantly with Morrissey's trill.

Tracks like "Rubber Ring" and "How Soon Is Now?" warn against romanticising the future – a chronic folly of the average Cambridge student. To live in the now, after all, is to face the spectre of the Week One essay. The latter's title seems to tease the would-be Lent term resolution maker. How soon will that *Varsity* article be written or May Ball committee joined?

As is tradition, I must state that I regret what he has become, lest my name be forever preserved in print as a vassal of House Morrissey. After all, praise of the song is not praise of the songwriter.

**C&G**

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# Is it better down where it's wetter?

**Georgie Atkinson** asks the Cambridge University Yacht Club what tracks keep their heart rate up



▲ PHOTO BY JULIJA MALDUTYTE

Having got to know Julija Maldutyte through our shared passion for the Electronic DJ, Mall Grab, I couldn't help but be intrigued by the role dance music played in another one of Julija's pastimes: yacht racing. I sat down with the Commodore, Callum Henderson, and Julija Maldutyte, previously the Social and Welfare Officer, of the Cambridge University Yacht Club, to talk about the connection between the nautical and the musical.

Attempting to come up with a novel way to interview Julija and Callum, I thought what better place to begin than with them reviewing nautical themed music lyrics to see how accurate they potentially were.

In response to TLC's, "Don't go chasing waterfalls, please stick to the rivers and lakes that you're used to", Julija noted that sailors do tend to prefer the open water and that the words of TLC were not particularly inspirational when it came to sailing. Callum echoed this and rather tongue-in-cheek noted that TLC may have been more inspired by canoeists than Yacht sailors.

Alex Turner in the Arctic Monkeys' track, "One Point Perspective", gave the world the remarkably niche lyric, "I swim with the economists". Callum and Julija both noted that, whilst they have not necessarily swum with any economists, sailing does seem to attract more venture capitalists than economists.

Finally, I couldn't not ask the duo about, as Sebastian in The Little Mermaid sings, whether it is indeed better, "down where it is wetter". Happily, Julija took my childish questioning in good faith and highlighted that, "the whole point of sailing is to stay in the boat; rather than a man overboard". Callum agreed, stating without irony that, "a man overboard is one of the worst things that could happen".

Moving swiftly beyond the painful round of questioning, Julija commented that similar to the nature of the sea, the music played on the boat would completely change based on the elements around the boat. During Varsity racing, she noted that "Pump Up The Jam" naturally was played to get the racing crew "pumped up" accordingly. Whereas, when sailing blissfully around the Balearics in the summer, Balearic beats, Funk and Disco were far more appropriate. Callum confirmed that the nature of the music he played was completely dependent on the journey itself, expressed by his penchant for listening to Buena Vista Social Club whilst sailing around the tip of Italy. If you needed a University Club to provide an idyllic playlist, CUYC would be my first port of call.

Callumis a Part I architect and, unsurprisingly

“  
TLC may have been  
more inspired by  
canoeists than Yacht  
sailors  
”

given the nature of ARCSOC, noted a personal interest in traditional techno artists and producers. However, Callum went on to demonstrate an impressive knowledge when discussing the DJs Len Faki and Richie Hawtin. I couldn't help but notice the intensity of the BPM of Hawtin's tracks — a BPM that perhaps matches the intensity of one's heart rate when fixing the failed engine of a yacht at 4am (a task Callum has previously

undertaken).

When the topic of sea shanties were broached, Callum noted that, on a recent voyage, a passenger had requested a sea shanty be played each day. However, he rather aptly noted that, if the passenger wanted a sea shanty played, they would have to sing it themselves. This perhaps rather aptly demonstrates that the taste of the CUYC is far more tasteful and vibrant than tracks such as AWO-LINATION's "Sail" would suggest.



PHOTO BY ANNA-MARIA WOODROW ►

## Video killed the radio star

**Aaron Syposz** chats to Cam FM

Anna-Maria Woodrow, head of music at Cambridge's student radio station Cam FM, admits that she didn't listen to a huge amount of radio growing up. In an age of millions of songs ready to stream at the drop of a hat, that's perhaps not much of a surprise — when there's so much choice, it's perhaps hard for the old-fashioned airwaves to compete. But what Anna-Maria has found in her time as head of music is that radio has something to offer that streaming can't — and that curating a playlist as a job can really be rather hard.

"There's a spontaneous, ephemeral quality to radio," she tells me. It's a spontaneity which she finds strangely comforting: "when I'm looking over all my albums in Spotify, I can get a sense of fatigue. The radio, you can just turn it on and it's there". I get what she means — there's something refreshing about being able to turn on Cam FM any time of the day and be met with curated music or some friendly voices. What's more, there's so much more character to a radio station than some random playlist, as custom-made stings and jingles break up the music as listeners go about their day. But what is it that a head of music actually does? Well, it turns out it can be quite a lot of work.

It's Anna-Maria's responsibility to manage the "playlist". This is the playlist that goes round by default when someone isn't doing a live show on Cam FM from the studio. On one hand, the challenges are the same ones you would have if you were wanting to make a really long playlist. The playlist can sometimes play for hours at a time between live shows, Anna-Maria needs to have hours upon hours' worth of songs in her playlist. "I noticed at one point that the songs were looping after about two hours and that wasn't good," she confesses. Some considerations, though, are rather more unique to radio. Anna-Maria notes that the playlist shapes the "background vibe" of the whole radio station — she has to make sure that this is appealing enough to keep people coming back for more.

Sticking to a musical vibe is familiar ground for Anna-Maria; on her own radio show, *Cellar Tapes* (Mondays at 11pm), she often sticks to a self-imposed theme such as "animals" or "the sea". Indeed, one of the great strengths of Cam FM, she points out, is its huge array of specially themed music shows. She's particularly enthusiastic about *Barn Dance*, a show which ran last term specialising in country music, and *Siphonophonic*, which has a focus on ambient jazz as well as presiding over all the weird and wonderful music across the airwaves.

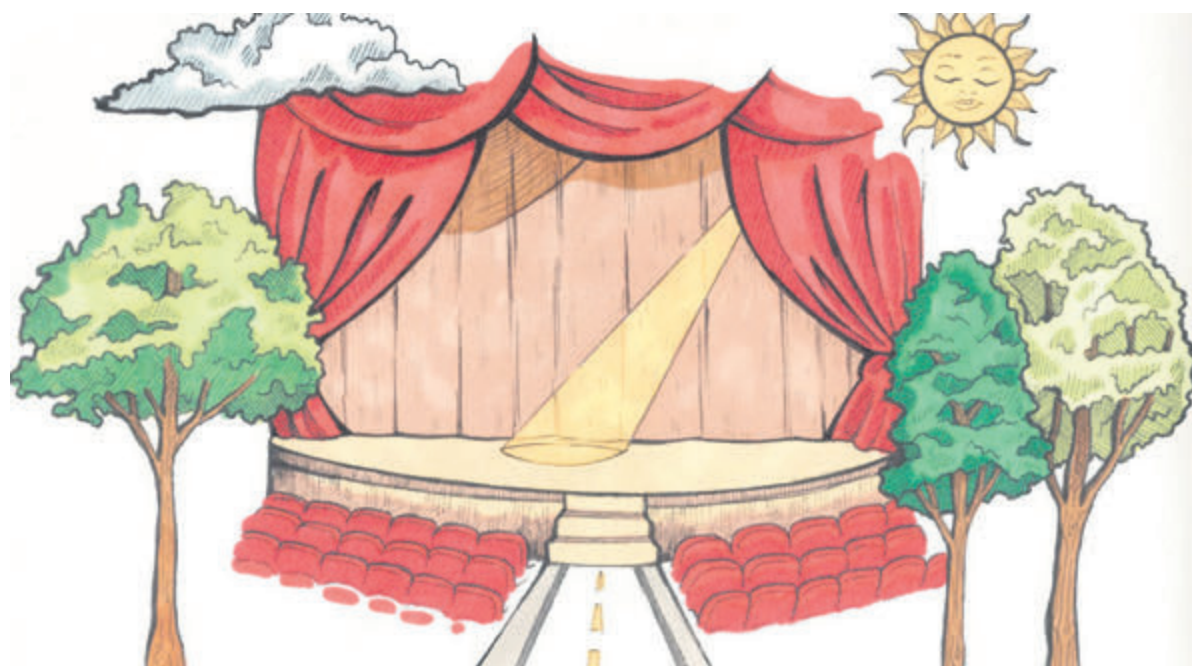
Anna-Maria encourages everyone to get involved, saying a music show is an easy gateway into the world of radio. In an age of streaming, is there still a point to tuning onto the FM airwaves to find music? The folks at Cam FM, Cambridge's student radio station, certainly think there is.



# Theatre

## Communities, not careers, are at the heart of amateur theatre

**Jude Crawley** finds the Cambridge theatre world is dominated by the desire to become a professional, diminishing the value of “amdram”



Cambridge is often proclaimed as one of the best drama schools in the country, despite not actually offering a course in drama. While partly a reflection on the huge names that the Cambridge theatre scene has produced, this should also be credited to the professional approach that students take towards their work. Many get stuck in with the theatre scene in Cambridge with this constant thought in the back of their minds: “Could I just do this for a living?”

This will not be a shock to anyone who has been involved in a production or has had the misfortune of becoming an emotional support crutch to an overly stressed thesp. Scenes are rehearsed, sets built, lighting designed, music composed, and dresses run all in the space of a handful of weeks. Those who are regulars in the Cambridge theatre world typically have made peace with their degree being managed around the margins of an intense theatre schedule.

As such, the world of Cambridge theatre is one that favours the would-be professionals; those who constantly have a show in the works and are willing to go that extra mile for each production they are involved in. They are the last to leave the ADC Bar, chatting to their friends of differing year groups and colleges. Friendships formed in the furnace of whatever strange college room rehearsals take them to.

However, the drive of the Cambridge thesp to get that part, work on that show – epitomised by incredible opportunities like the Marlowe showcase – leads to them overlooking a crucial part of amateur theatre. For many, Cambridge theatre doesn’t have to be a pipeline to future greatness and they never wish it to be. Amateur theatre holds so much of its own value in communities throughout this country – especially nowadays.

With cost of living rising, and theatres struggling to recover from Covid, the escalating cost of professional theatre is making the formalised dramatic arts less accessible. Meanwhile in village halls, scout huts and cricket pavilions across the nation this Christmas, diasporas of amdram lovers engaged in one of the greatest of British traditions; the Community Pantomime. To those

who have not attended one of these occasions, you are missing out. My own village’s panto was essentially a compulsory part of the educational curriculum. Going back this year, I was reminded of the power of this tradition in community building.

These productions are team-building exercises that would thrill any corporate HR team. Children, parents, pensioners alike spend months stitching costumes, painting scenery and writing bad knock-knock jokes to delight the toddlers. These are carefully balanced against overcooked attempts at political satire to please the centrist dad (I’m sure Liz Truss got plenty of shoutouts this year). It’s amateur drama for its own sake; produced by the community for the community.

This same attitude can be reflected in Cambridge theatre, when student drama is at its best. People brought together with a shared project that they are trying to pull off, in what often seems like the most ridiculous of timeframes, for their enjoyment and for the pleasure of the Cambridge student community. But too often, this value is lost in the aspiring professionalism of university theatre. Obsessive focus on labels such as “footlight” or “Marlowe performer” seem to be rooted in a desperation to be part of that Cambridge-industry pipeline. In this mentality, student amateur drama becomes nothing more than a stepping stone to bigger and better things after university.

I have nothing but admiration for those thesp; committed enough to their art to decide at this age that it will be the defining part of their university experience, with the hope it will be their working life after university. But by framing the Cambridge theatre primarily as something reserved to be the “stomping ground” for the next generation of Phil Wangs and Tom Hiddlestons, the essence of amateur drama can be lost.

Amateur drama, especially at Cambridge, opens up so many opportunities beyond university, so by all means shoot for the stars. But remember: your bigger and better things might well be your own community pantomime, and what a privilege that would be.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
ALEX PARNHAM-COPE ▲



## Behind the Curtain: Robinson's Pasek & Paul

Isabel Dempsey

Simultaneously one of the best and worst things about Cambridge is its overwhelming population of talented people – people such as dynamic theatre writing duo, Max Mason and Ben Cole. Both second-years at Robinson College, they’ve recently made waves in the Cambridge theatre scene with their joint threats of performing, directing, composing, and – most impressively – making musicals. Although the pair have now joined musical theatre forces, they started their journeys from very different places. English student Max grew up doing theatre. His love of literature led to a love of writing and, coming into Cambridge, he knew he “wanted to make a mark”.

On the other hand, while music student and organ scholar Ben “used to do quite a lot of theatre”, when it came to the question of what he wanted to do with his life, he “had to sacrifice it for music.” But, strangely enough it is this love of music that brought him back, as he started frequently accompanying people who sing musical theatre at university. He tells me that it was actually a conversation with his director of music from school that brought him back to the theatre world and “planted the idea of writing a musical”. That very seed grew into last term’s Cambridge University Musical Theatre Society’s freshers’ musical: *Field of Folk*.

Coincidentally, while Robinson College Music Society president Ben was being pulled in the direction of theatre, Max was being pulled towards music after directing the opera *Semele* last term. He described the project as a “big step out of my comfort zone”. However, his background also helped him “treat it like a work of theatre rather than a work of music” and he worked hard to move it away from the inaccessible pretentiousness usually associated with the opera world. Combining theatre and music, the pair joke that through this genre their “different worlds have collided”.

With their paths of music and theatre now firmly crossed, Max gives me an insight into the pair’s creative process. He says they’ll usually “plot out a narrative and number of scenes and then I will sit and write the text of a song or scene and send it to Ben” to compose the music. However, before they could fully throw themselves into *Field of Folk* it had to be “put on the slow burner” for Max to direct *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* – their Easter term passion project. With Ben writing the music for the show, Max says: “*Midsummer* was a way of us learning to find our feet in terms of creative collaboration.”

By the time they came to *Field of Folk*, this collaboration was certainly perfected. For those of you unfortunate enough to have missed the show, the musical is an “adaptation of the Medieval dream vision”, loosely inspired by the 14th-century poem ‘*Piers Plowman*’ by William Langland. Max tells me: “It’s a genre with huge imaginative capacity – there’s no limits to a dream”. They were excited to bring it to a modern audience and give it a contemporary twist. Ben explains: “It’s a bit meta in that way. We have a dream to tell a story about a man who dreams”. And this dream certainly surpassed my wildest expectations. The soundtrack to this spectacular musical is now available on Spotify for anybody who wants to give Ben’s beautiful bops a listen.

When I ask about their future plans, Ben tells me that on the night of the get-out of *Field of Folk*, Max mentioned that he “had great idea for a musical about Martin Luther and the ’95 theses,” which promises to be “an hour of funny.” Max calls Martin Luther “the celebrity star of the Reformation” and the pair “wanted to do a satire of religion à la Mormon”. Ben says “a lot of good ideas immediately sprouted from that...but that would be a spoiler. Come and see it when it’s actually written”.

Looking even further in the future I ask the two second-years if this is something they’re interested in pursuing as a career, to which Ben interrupts with an immediate “yes”. Max tells me they see themselves “as individuals going into the field, and as a pair we suit well as well”, as they start joking about the possibilities of “Mason, Cole and co”. Max describes how “a lesson can be drawn out of the way we work which is just ‘talk to your friends, and there’s chances that your friends will have shared interests’”. He refers to “creative collaborations” such as his and Ben’s as a “very precious thing”. And after having watched this talented pair spark off each other for almost an hour, it would be hard to disagree.

PHOTO BY ISABEL DEMPSEY ►





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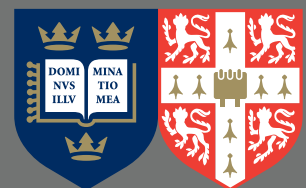
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# Theatre

## Week 1 Review Roundup

Curiosity piqued? Read the full reviews at [www.varsity.co.uk/theatre](http://www.varsity.co.uk/theatre)

Varsity's **theatre writers** give you the low-down on the first shows of Lent term

### Addenbrooke's Panto

★★★★★

The 30th Addenbrooke's Charity Pantomime, *Frozenmide: The I.C.E Queen*, was another roaring success this year! A heartwarming insight into the bonds of community that form in the intense crucible of Medicine at Cambridge, and proof medics really **can do it all**.

### CUMTS 24 Hour Musical

★★★★★

Results of a pressure cooker of creativity are a splendid watch in CUMTS' *24 Hour Musical* – funny lyrics, catchy melodies, and lovely singing make for a giddy 50 minutes of alcohol-fuelled fun.

### Hamlet

★★★★★

Unconventional casting uncovers new nuances in the European Thea-

tre Group's unforgettable production of *Hamlet*, full of disturbing representations of madness and grief, strong performances, and gorgeous design work.

### Scratch Me

○ Unreviewed

The wildly experimental two-woman team behind *52 Monologues for Young Transsexuals* dig their nails into *Scratch Me*, a brilliant cabaret of comedy, dance, spoken word, and titillating provocation from Cambridge's most daring dramatic duo.

### Parlour Song

★★★★★

After the unforgettable success of *Enron* last Easter, Director Neve Kennedy proves her reputation for excellence with *Parlour Song*: a modern day *Othello*, complete with production value worthy of the West End and a performance by Bella Ridgwell as demolition expert Ned that, literally, brought the house down.

### Cow

○ Unreviewed

In her tour-de-force confessional one-woman show, *Cow*, Evie Chandler covers a broad range of topics from her unique perspective: family, love, sex, therapy, Grindr, trans-ness, and much more are all addressed in this portrait of an artist emerging from her chrysalis.

### Jailtime

★★★★★

Bringing together some of Cambridge's funniest comedians, *Jailtime: An Unlawful Sketch Show* is packed full of brilliantly original sketch ideas. Unfortunately, it is a little overpacked...

### Your Call

★★★

From the writer of *Medea The Musical* comes an original play *Your Call*, where deeply human messages and strong performances struggle to

shine in an ambitious and daring production.

### The Last Five Years

★★★★★

Ben Mulley and Juliette Ball stun both vocally and emotionally in this production of *The Last Five Years*: unraveling both sides of a couple's journey from courtship to divorce through song and lovely staging.



### Our favourite: A Midsummer Night's Dream

★★★★★

The Marlowe Society's distinctly modern production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* shimmers in its incandescent glow: a mosaic of colorful lights, eclectic choreography and a soundtrack of bangers takes this interpretation of Shakespeare's classic comedy to new heights.

So too do its bold performances – bravura turns in unconventional dual-roles by Joe Harrington (Theseus/Titania) and Temitope Idowu (Hippolyta/Oberon) anchor the production, with excellent chemistry amongst the rest of the cast buttressing its success – Kitty Ford's brilliant chewing of scenery as Bottom adds buckets of laughs.

▲PHOTO BY THEA MELTON

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What's On?
 by Daniel Hilton

3rd February

17th February

Music

Nights out

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**04 February**  
 From Darkness to Light - CUCC, Collegium Musicum John's Chapel, 8:00pm  
  
**12 February**  
 Temor + DJTRIO Clare Cellars, 8:30pm  
  
**13 February**  
 Fitz Swing Valentines Concert Fitzwilliam, 7:30pm  
  
**17 February**  
 Cheap Date + Manilla Times The Portland Arms, 7:30pm

**03 February**  
 Cambridge Charity Fashion Show Launch Party Hidden Rooms, 8:30pm  
  
**03 February**  
 Transmission Electro Night 2648 Cambridge, 9:00pm  
  
**04 February**  
 Dot Cotton Club Rainbow Party The Orator, 9:00pm  
  
**11 February**  
 JAMnesty The Portland Arms, 8:00pm

**03 February**  
 Painting & Prosecco Station Tavern, 7:30pm  
  
**08 February**  
 JazzSoc x Blackbirds Poetry Jam / Jazz Slam Hidden Rooms, 8:00pm  
  
**11 February**  
 Cambridge's Craft & Flea St Paul's Church, 11:00am - 5:00pm  
  
**15 February**  
 Glasshouse Adventure - at night! Cambridge University Botanic Gardens, 4:30 - 8:00pm

**07 - 11 February**  
 Sunday in the Park with George ADC Theatre, 7:45pm  
  
**07 - 11 February**  
 My Mother Said I Never Should Corpus Playroom, 7pm  
  
**08 - 11 February**  
 Playing Pretend Corpus Playroom, 9:30pm  
  
**14 - 18 February**  
 The Hollow ADC Theatre, 7:45pm

PCCH state Cuppers credentials with hardfought win

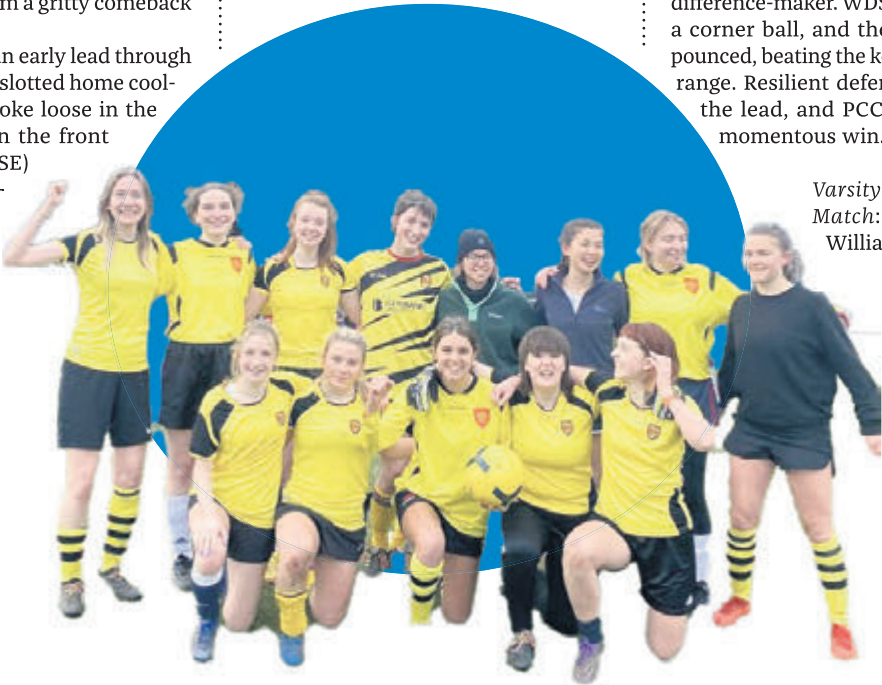
Jonny Coffey

A hat-trick from Faye Lynch-Williams powered Peterhouse/Clare/Clare Hall (PCCH) to a 3-2 victory over Wolfson/Darwin/St Edmund's (WDSE) this Saturday. Having gone 1-0 down, PCCH clawed their way back to secure a semi-final spot in the womens and non-binary football cuppers.  
 The Yellows (PCCH) were deserved winners, recovering from a slow start to impose themselves on the game. Confronted by a gritty WDSE defence, the inventive attacking play of Lynch-Williams and Louisa Henry proved decisive. Ahead of a semifinal clash with reigning champions Jesus, PCCH will take confidence from a gritty comeback victory.  
 WDSE claimed an early lead through Mia Hassoun, who slotted home coolly after the ball broke loose in the box. Remaining on the front foot, the Reds (WDSE) threatened to double their lead, firing narrowly over and wide

from two good chances.  
 With the game slipping away, PCCH kicked into gear. Showcasing their undying commitment to gegenpressing, the Yellows forced WDSE back, and began to dominate the ball, with Henry providing tempo from midfield.  
 Despite strong team play, it was individual ingenuity that brought the equaliser. Lynch-Williams cut inside from the right wing, evading the challenges of two defenders before firing into the top right-hand corner.  
 Parity was almost short-lived, as WDSE threatened the PCCH goal once more. A counter-attack sent the Reds' striker through on goal, only to be denied by an outstanding save from Lily

Sear.  
 With the scores level at the break, it was all to play for in the second half. PCCH capitalised on a strong start, racing into a 2-1 lead. Latching onto an inch-perfect Henry through ball, Lynch-Williams claimed her second with a neat finish into the bottom-right corner.  
 A resurgent WDSE found an equaliser through an outstanding team goal. Having worked the ball through midfield, the Reds found space out wide. A teasing ball into the box found Mia Hassoun, who guided the ball into the bottom-right corner.  
 In a cagey conclusion to the game, Lynch-Williams was once again the difference-maker. WDSE failed to clear a corner ball, and the PCCH winger pounced, beating the keeper from close range. Resilient defence maintained the lead, and PCCH celebrated a momentous win.

Varsity Player of the Match: Faye Lynch-Williams



►PHOTO BY THEA MELTON

Weekly round up

Abbie Hastie recaps football, rugby union, and netball

The women and non-binary football Cuppers reached the quarter-final stage this weekend, and the growing depth of quality at college level was evident in some very close matches. On Saturday afternoon, Jesus came back from 2-0 down to beat the unfortunate Gedwards (Girton/Murray Edwards) 3-2, while PCCH (Peterhouse/Clare/Clare Hall) beat WDSE (Wolfson/Darwin/St Edmund's) by the same scoreline. Elsewhere Newbroke (a combination of Newnham and Pembroke) picked off the dangerous John's/King's by 2 goals to nil, and Fitz/Corpus were awarded a walkover versus Trinity/Selwyn/Robinson. The semifinals will see Jesus play PCCH and Fitz/Corpus play John's/King's.  
 The weekend also saw the first rugby union Cuppers fixtures of the new term. Jesus were victorious again, to the delight of their hardy crowd of supporters, as they beat the mature and graduate colleges' All Greys 28-21 to progress to the second round. In an early second round fixture, Pirton (Pembroke/Girton) thrashed a beleaguered, understrength and tiring Queens' side 34-5 to send a message to their competitors.  
 There was joy for CUAFC in the league and the cup as both the

women's Blues and men's Falcons (2nds) won on Wednesday afternoon. The Falcons, despite the absence of their captain Joe Helm, beat Leicester 5-0 to keep the pressure on at the top of the table. Meanwhile, the women's Blues made the long trip to Southampton to face Solent in the BUCS National Cup second round. They dominated the game, but individual lapses of concentration meant that Solent were able to take the lead and then respond to two beautifully worked Lucy Fell goals. Penalties ensued, and the Blues attempted to lay to rest the ghosts of last year's gut-wrenching Varsity defeat. All five Cambridge penalty-takers scored, which meant an early save from goalkeeper Emilia Keavney was enough for victory and the quarterfinals.  
 CULNC were also in action at the Sports Centre on Wednesday afternoon. The Jays (2nds) also laid a marker down for their upcoming Varsity match by beating Lincoln 1s by 50-28. Their win showed resilience, as they saw off a slight resurgence from Lincoln in the last quarter, prompted in part by the substitution of many of their senior players. Victory should help them stave off relegation, as they battle to avoid the drop in a tough season.



# Sport

PCCH march on to  
Cuppers semis

Rugby Union  
cuppers kicks off

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## ‘Feeling Blue’: The downsides of Cambridge’s sporting scene

Jacob Tucker

In trying to get a place at a reputable university after A-levels, students find themselves trying to collect UCAS points. Five A\*s equals 280 points; three Es are only 48. As a purely academic measurement this seems fair: get higher grades, take a risk and opt in for more courses, and it might pay off. However, this system becomes quite exploitative when extracurricular activities are also taken into account. Playing an instrument can land you up to 30 more points – more than an additional AS-level. A qualification in horse riding is considered equivalent to a C. Even volunteering can be used for points.

It’s all rather cynical. A lot of teenagers up and down the country have no doubt taken on skills they don’t care about for the sake of collecting a few more imaginary points. A pessimist might say that even something as cherished as DofE has been reduced to some sort of greedy ruse to keep Go Outdoors in business. Personal statements are yet another quantifiable template in a sea of judgement by which the “objective” value of a teenager can be scored.

But, if Cambridge doesn’t care about

UCAS, and is thinking of scrapping personal statements, then what relevance could these systems hold here? What on earth does this have to do with sport?

The Cambridge Blues system for sports has a far longer history than something as pithy as UCAS. The first game between Cambridge and Oxford, the rivalry which ultimately led to the Blue and Half-Blue becoming tangible achievements, was organised by Wordsworth’s nephew in 1829. It’s traditional, some might say. It’s beyond rebuke. To an extent, this is true. As a tradition, the system is interesting and iconic, and it is a valuable achievement, too. To have both a degree and a full-Blue from Cambridge is a pretty remarkable achievement. You’re well-rounded. You’re probably more interesting than the average person. You can make jokes about it and visit special clubhouses.

The problem with this system is not a result of tradition or iconography. These are the benefits. The issues arise when achieving an award in sport becomes yet another mark of differentiation.

Academic inflation is a more pressing issue than most students like to admit. More and more people are attaining degrees, which therefore decrease in social

value. So, more people go on to do a master’s. The same thing happens. And then again with PhDs. Nowadays, we specialise in order to stand out, not out of necessity, or because of a genuine love for our field. You get a place at Cambridge. Well done, but you’re not quite special enough yet. The marketplace for your subject is likely extremely competitive: the “Cambridge” brand name will help, but it might not be enough. You’re on track for a First. Still might not be enough. So, where can you turn?

This is the problem with the system of Blues. They do represent something important. They’re a piece of history.

They’re something for anyone with a genuine interest in sport to strive for. However, to think of this prestigious award as simply

another collectible accomplishment is disingenuous. We’re all grownups here. We shouldn’t need to rack up imaginary points to satiate our egos.

Don’t play tennis, run, or play football for the sake of your future employer. If that’s really something a law firm or publishing company or tech corporation feels strongly about, they’re likely faking it just as much as you are.

Get involved with sport because you love it. There’s no better reason.



## Jesus resurrection sends them to Cuppers heaven

Abbie Hastie



Jesus scored a last minute winner to beat Girton/Medwards (“Gedwards”) 3-2 in the quarter-finals of the Women’s and Non-Binary Cuppers Football on Saturday afternoon.

Last year’s champions Jesus started the match on top, largely due to excellent midfield play by Anna Herr, who supplied striker Kaya Hardie with aplomb. They couldn’t make this pressure tell though, and it was lowly Gedwards who struck the first blow. Blues winger Tasha Thornton-Clark incisively found her CUAFC teammate Tessa Doubleday who kept the ball alive, laying it off to nascent-midfielder Megan Clarke.

She was almost immediately called into defensive action, clearing a Jesus corner before sending her team upfield. Thornton-Clark turned the Jesus left-back inside-out, before crossing to Doubleday again, who finished astutely to double Gedwards’ lead.

This goal roused the Jesus supporters who, unused to their team staring down the barrel of defeat, encouraged them to make their strength count in midfield and behind Gedwards’ backline. There were signs of increasing Jesus penetration, despite Clarke’s commitment to covering every blade of grass. Herr found Hardie with a well-weighted through ball just before half time, and she converted to raise Jesus’ hopes of a comeback. Unsubstantiated rumours that the goal was “miles off” did little to raise Gedwards’ morale.

In the second half, Jesus continued to have the bulk of possession and rode out multiple Gedwards attacks down both wings. Nevertheless, Gedwards’ defence was resolute, repudiating attack after Jesus attack. Eventually the pressure told, and seven minutes from the end Jesus equalised through Hardie, who latched onto a Beattie Green through ball after a slip by the Gedwards centre-back.

Jesus’ victory was not preordained though. Both Thornton-Clarke and Doubleday had chances to win the match for Gedwards, but were denied by the keeper and the ultimate cruelty of a scuffed shot. This left the way open for Anna Herr to pop up at the death and sweep home into the far corner from the edge of the box.

Varsity POTM: Megan Clarke (Gedwards)

## Hillsborough: Football, class and the authorities

As the police finally apologise for their role in the Hillsborough disaster, Emily Lawson-Todd asks why it took so long

Emily Lawson-Todd

If you follow the tram tracks in Hillsborough, near where I live in Sheffield, you’ll find yourself standing by a memorial. It’s small, blink-and-you’ll-miss-it against the towering backdrop of the Hillsborough Stadium where Sheffield Wednesday regularly play (and lose), but it’s in perfect condition, well-kept and always covered in flowers. Sheffield still bears the scars of the tragedy all these years on, even though the primary victims of the disaster were from Liverpool and Merseyside. In some ways, it makes sense that we still carry this guilt. It happened on our turf and it was our police force that let it happen.

The recent news that the police have released an official apology to the 97 victims of the disaster and their

families, promising “cultural change”, comes 34 years too late. For the past 34 years, countless communities, families and individuals have been embroiled in torment, consistently denied justice at the hands of several inquiries and prosecutions that went nowhere, while the perpetrators and instigators of the tragedy walked free aside from a mild slap on the wrist. In fact, the length of time that it has taken the police to apologise is almost double that of Steven Gerrard’s professional career, which was inspired by the death of his cousin in the disaster.

While it could be fair enough to just stay here and express shock and anger at how offensively overdue this apology is, the question arises: why did it take so long to say sorry?

The tragedy that occurred on 15 April 1989 was overwhelmingly due to police negligence. From the officers’ lack of acquaintance with the grounds of Hillsborough Stadium, to the poor marshalling of 24,256 Liverpool supporters dependent upon them for their safety, there was a failure to adhere to safety standards at every level. Gate C on Leppings Lane, the site of the disaster, was

opened prematurely, causing a lethal bottleneck. Though the opening of the gate was revealed to be the decision of former South Yorkshire police chief superintendent David Duckenfield, this was only admitted in 2015 during a trial concerning the events. Previously, Duckenfield had instead adopted the lie that the gates were forced open by rowdy and intoxicated fans. In reality, the bins outside the stadium were not so much filled with cans of beer as they were with Vimto and Coke.

The fact that Duckenfield’s lie was allowed to flourish largely unchallenged, casting the blame for a tragedy as unspeakably horrific as Hillsborough onto the victims and their families, exposes an uneasy relationship between class, sport, and the authorities. The police were all too ready to fall on old tropes of “football hooliganism” in order to protect their necks and wash their hands of blood because they knew that it would work; that the public would be ready to accept that the fans were simply mindlessly violent and unruly. While the term “hooligan” gets volleyed at most sports fans, it seems to find itself most commonly attached to sports that draw in more working-class fans such as football. While I am not trying to diminish the fact that football fans can behave violently or

disrespectfully, it seems strange that only football fans seem to get flak over their actions. Nobody ever talks about the “hooligan” actions at the races, despite them being boozy, often raucous events. The same goes for rugby union. As a Cambridge student, I have been an unfortunate witness to drinking-society-wearing, rugby-union-playing private school lads’ actions in my college bar which have been on par with, if not worse, than the aftermath of any Sheffield Wednesday loss. Unfortunately, it appears that unruly behaviour in spectator sports is yet another example of “one rule for us, another for them” that ultimately allows for the blame to be shifted away from the authorities onto the people they have a duty to protect.

The fact remains that this was an avoidable tragedy that should never have happened. The fans killed that day were not just a faceless mob, a homogenous entity, or even the fictional stock image of the football “hooligan”. They were brothers, sisters, parents, children, friends and co-workers. Yet, more importantly, they were people who deserved more than they got. In life and in death they were denied dignity and let down by the very systems meant to keep them safe.



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