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Meet the man  
behind the May  
Ball videos  
pg. 26

Botticelli  
at the Fitz  
pg. 23

Recipe Corner  
Panna cotta with  
raspberry compote  
pg. 20



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The Independent  
Student Newspaper since 1947

# VARSlTY

## ‘Race-realist’ fellow: Uni was ‘aware’ of my ‘controversial interests’ before hiring me

Sam Hudson & Tommy Castellani

“Race-realist” fellow Nathan Cofnas has claimed in a podcast interview that the University was aware of his “controversial interests” before they decided to hire him.

Pressure is mounting against the research fellow, following statements from the Leverhulme Trust, Emmanuel College, and a petition among students.

The University’s pro-vice-chancellor for education has told *Varsity* that he has spoken to a number of students who are “understandably hurt and upset” by Cofnas’ views.

Cofnas told far-right political science researcher Richard Hanania that “getting a job, especially for me, requires a certain amount of miracle.”

“Everybody was aware that I had some controversial interests, this was all disclosed and they were willing to judge me by other things,” he said.

Cofnas’ controversial blog posts sparked outrage after *Varsity* revealed that he argued in favour of a “hereditarian revolution” and the “preservation of racial distinctions”.

Writing on X, former History faculty chair, Nicholas Guyatt, said: “[It is] genuinely jaw-dropping that nineteenth-century race theory is back in town.”

A petition for Cofnas’ employment to be terminated was launched last week and has amassed over 120 signatures.

Cofnas claimed the number of black professors at Harvard would “approach zero” in a meritocracy.

In his interview with Hanania, Cofnas asked: “In America, can you imagine a situation where we actually stop discriminating against whites and Asians in university admissions and major corporations?”

“Blacks would be gone from these places,” he alleged.

He also claimed that “a huge part of the black middle class is sustained by government jobs and affirmative action.”

Cofnas revealed he was “not able to get into a single Philosophy PhD programme in the United States”.

Hanania said it was “unthinkable” that Cofnas would be offered a fellowship in the US “at this point in the history of American University”.

According to his CV, Cofnas has supervised students at St John’s, St Catharine’s and Wolfson Colleges.

The Leverhulme Trust, which awarded Cofnas a grant for his research, have confirmed they have launched an “urgent investigation” into the Philosophy fellow.

The Trust has disavowed Cofnas’s blog, stating that the views he expressed are “in no way those of the Leverhulme Trust” and the trust is “very clear that racism of any and all forms is abhorrent”.

Doug Chalmers, master of Emmanuel College, where Cofnas is a research affiliate, wrote to students: “The College is committed to providing an environment that is free from all discrimination and affirms the right of all members to be treated with dignity and respect.”

Chalmers also acknowledged Cofnas’ “academic right, as enshrined by law, to write about his views” and the College’s “commitment to freedom of thought and expression”.

The Emma JCR released a statement condemning Cofnas’ views, saying they were “horried to learn of Nathan Cofnas’ two-year research associate affiliation with Emmanuel College”.

They affirmed the JCR “will always stand against racist views

Continued on page 9 ►



For the love  
of fashion

Page 24

## University defends oil tycoon cash

Felix Armstrong  
Senior News Editor

Cambridge has defended taking a £20 million donation from Majid Jafar, CEO of the largest private upstream oil and gas company in the Middle East.

The University has been criticised by students and academics, with one member of University Council saying that Cambridge “persistently sidelines ethical considerations in its efforts to secure donations”.

Majid Jafar, a Cambridge alumnus, is the CEO and founder of Crescent Petroleum and the managing director of Dana Gas, the largest non-government-owned natural gas company in the Middle East.

The £20m donation, made by Jafar and his family, was publicised in December last year, and will go towards the development of a Cambridge children’s hospital, and an embedded University research institute.

Majid Jafar has repeatedly backed the development of oil and gas amid the energy transition, saying in 2022: “Somehow, it got misconstrued that we don’t need oil and gas any more. Nobody actually said that.”

After the donation was publicised, Jafar said at COP28 that “blaming the producers of oil and gas for climate change is like blaming farmers for obesity”.

Jafar has made multiple donations to the Conservative party, including £12,500 in March 2019 and £28,000 in in December 2016.

Jason Scott-Warren, an English professor and member of University Council, Cambridge’s executive and policy-making body, told *Varsity* that he fought against the donation when it made its

Continued on page 4 ►



## Editorial

Few things are more obvious upon arriving in Cambridge than the University's commitment to sticking to tradition. Despite the occasional new building or long-awaited reform, Cambridge remains – for good or ill – an unquestionably conservative establishment. From gowns to graces, some things at Cambridge will almost certainly never change. When some welcome improvements on more important issues do take place, University bureaucracy means that to say progress moves at a snail's pace would be optimistic. However, multiple stories in this week's edition of *Varsity* suggest that the University needs to catch up to societal changes that have left Cambridge – a world leader in many respects – lagging behind.

Over the last two weeks, national newspapers have been enraptured by *Varsity*'s exclusive story, which revealed that a Philosophy fellow had argued in a blog post that “in a meritocracy, Harvard faculty would be recruited from the best of the best students, which means the number of black professors would approach 0%”. Nathan Cofnas was slammed by his peers, with one comparing his place at the University to “having a flat earther on the Physics faculty”.

This week, our front page story has exclusively revealed that Cofnas claims the University was “aware” of what he describes as his “controversial interests” when they hired him. Cofnas also stated that he was “not able to get into a single

Philosophy PhD programme in the United States”. This development raises the question as to why the University and the Leverhulme Trust believed Cofnas to be a suitable candidate. The importance of free speech, as enshrined in law, is a key contributing factor explaining how the University has found itself in this difficult position. However, as is a theme in this week's edition, with earlier intervention a clear argument could be made that the University should never have found itself facing the controversy and pressure of the last two weeks.

This is echoed in another story of this week's *Varsity* exclusives. The University has defended taking a £20 million donation from Majid Jafar, the CEO of the largest private oil and gas company in the Middle East. Further news stories this week show that the University is trying to catch up to prevailing public opinion on fossil fuel funding, as they lead a new effort to get banks to cease investments in non-renewable energy. However, news of this donation, and the University's defence of it, shows that there are still considerable breaches in Cambridge's commitment to green investments.

Cambridge's ancient traditions are part of what makes this University so special. However, in some areas of the institution, change and reform is overdue. The University could avoid further embarrassment if it were more in tune to how the world is changing.

Michael Hennessey & Daniel Hilton

Editors-in-chief, Lent 2024

# Students attack Uni 'silence' over China Uyghur rights abuses



▲ FELIX ARMSTRONG

## IN THE PAPER

### News



**'We will not rest'**  
Hundreds call for University to cut ties with Israel (PAGE 6)

### Arts



**Make love, not war**  
Botticelli's *Venus and Mars* arrives at the Fitzwilliam Museum (PAGE 23)

### Features



**Love's labour lost?**  
We explore how *Varsity* has celebrated Valentine's Day through the decades (PAGE 12)

## Comment



### What an awful time to study politics!

People who say it's a 'great time to be studying politics' are missing the point, says Katie Hegg.....Page 14



### I do not consider myself a victim. The boy who stabbed me does

The rhetoric of Labour's plan for tackling knife crime does not match reality, argues Alex Parton-Turner. ....Page 14

Eleanor Mann  
Senior News Editor

Cambridge students have launched a Uyghur Rights Campaign in response to “silence” within the University toward China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims.

Human rights groups allege that China has detained more than one million Uyghurs, mostly in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, with the US, among other countries, having accused the state of committing genocide.

The campaign, backed by Cambridge University Amnesty International, contains two open letters addressed to the Vice Chancellor and the AMES Faculty. The letters call on the University to stop accepting funding and partnerships with companies such as Huawei, which has given over £28 million to the University since 2016 and has close ties to the Chinese state.

Delivered last week, the *Uyghur-Genocide Complicity Letter* and *Faculty Complicity Letters* demand the Faculty stop sending Chinese studies students to Beijing after the year abroad placement was restarted this year for the first time since 2019.

The campaign emerges amid the AMES Faculty's ongoing partnerships with universities such as Peking and Tsinghua, which are both funded by the Ministry of Education in China.

Among other demands, the letters enlist the University to immediately end all ties with Huawei and other Chinese companies and institutions linked with the Uyghur genocide, to issue a public

statement condemning the genocide, and to establish a Genocide-Studies Forum and a Uyghur Research Fund.

One open letter states: “That not one research paper in the history of the Faculty has been produced on Xinjiang or on Uyghurs – barring one paper in 2006 – even after mounting and increasingly detailed reports of Uyghur-targeted mass internment and human rights abuses, warrants significant questioning.”

The campaign began after its co-founder, Nikos Kouthouri-Whittaker, a Chinese studies student, says he found that Faculty members showed “disinterest and disengagement” towards the Uyghur genocide.

Kouthouri-Whittaker reports one encounter with a Professor in Chinese studies, who stated that they were “not aware of any human rights abuses in Xinjiang” explaining this was because they “had never been there”. He told *Varsity* that he was then encouraged to go there to “find out for myself”.

In an email sent to his Professors in AMES about the possibility of a Genocide-Studies Forum, Nikos recalls “receiv[ing] no reply, other than the suggestion that I join a society for the ‘issues I care about’”.

Kouthouri-Whittaker, alongside two Uyghur students, founded the Campaign out of frustration with what they believe is a culture of denial and a refusal to discuss the Uyghur genocide within Cambridge University.

“So-called ‘China experts’ claim they ‘lack authority’ or ‘aren’t qualified’ to talk about the genocide of Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities. ‘Contemporary issues’

aren't their field of expertise,” Kouthouri-Whittaker said.

“At what point in the genocide will academics and academic institutions realise it does not take a specialist to recognise the imminent destruction faced by a group of people, and to the fragile order that seeks to protect human rights around the world?” he added.

An action motion will be submitted to the SU's Student Council on Monday (19/02), which has been seconded by Sam Hutton, Chair of the SU's Ethical Affairs Campaign, and Maroof Rafique, SU BME Officer.

Sam Hutton told *Varsity*: “I think that many students and staff forget the human rights abuses that are currently ongoing in Xinjiang. In a culture that has stoked geopolitical fears towards China, it's important that we are able to clearly outline the specific acts that constitute a genocide.”

“These open letters very clearly show the University's complicity in this genocide, and the concrete steps that the University can take to improve its ethical standing, especially cutting ties with surveillance companies, directly responsible for discrimination against Uyghur peoples,” he said.

As the Ethical Affairs campaign, we strongly believe that by leveraging the University's global reputation, we can make powerful statements through these seemingly small actions, and that by raising these issues within the University, we can emphasise the social responsibility that we all have to oppose

Continued on page 3 ►



Continued from page 2

genocide in all cases,” Hutton continued. The SU’s BME Officer, Maroof Rafique, also pledged his support, stating: “I am disheartened to learn about the culture of ‘denial’ and ‘silence’ that pervades our university regarding the Uyghur genocide.”

“As educators and scholars, we bear the responsibility to foster an environment that encourages critical discourse, awareness, and action on global human rights issues. Silence and indifference only serve to perpetuate injustice,” Rafique added.

The campaign’s launch comes after Varsity reported in January on the University’s ongoing funding ties with Huawei, which had been deemed a “security threat” to the UK government.

A report by UK-China Transparency last September alleged that the University had taken over £2million in funding from a Chinese state-owned military aerospace company, CASC, known for being one of China’s leading manufacturers of military drones.

Campaigners have raised concerns regarding the “influence” of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Sinology, otherwise referred to as Chinese studies.

Sam Dunning, director of UK-China Transparency, told Varsity: “In general, more transparency is needed about self-censorship and CCP interference in the Sinology community in the UK.”

“The CCP has the intent and capacity to interfere in Sinology in the UK and this must not be a taboo topic. This phenomenon has been called out by a dozen human rights and academic freedom organisations such as Index on Censorship, as well as by our democratic representatives. The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament has said that the CCP ‘targets individual academics’ and that its ‘attempts to interfere with, and stifle debate, amongst the academic community in the UK are a significant problem,’” Dunning said.

“It is important to note that the biggest victims of the CCP’s ‘narrative control’ campaign are Chinese people. When Chinese students here in the UK express views on these issues that the CCP dislikes, they are taking a huge risk. If they persist, then they are in effect saying goodbye to their family forever and choosing life as a refugee. Those are the stakes for our friends from China, and we would do well to remember it,” Dunning continued.

The University of Cambridge was contacted for comment.

## Uyghur human rights abuses

Approximately one million Uyghurs are currently imprisoned in detention centres run by the Chinese government, for reasons among practising their religion, having international contacts, or attending a Western university. Uyghur Muslims are being interned in “re-education camps” and forcibly sterilised and separated from the rest of their families in an attempt to break the cultural traditions of the group. China’s treatment of Uyghurs was described as “genocide and crimes against humanity” by the US Secretary of State and a UN report said it could amount to crimes against humanity, while China dismisses all claims as “baseless”.

# Uyghur students launch pressure campaign



▲ FELIX ARMSTRONG

**Eleanor Mann**  
Senior News Editor

For Leili-gul and Anissa, two of the three founders behind the Uyghur Rights Campaign, the cause is personal. Current undergraduates who met through a Cambridge Amnesty event, both have family members who are suffering persecution in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, known to many Uyghurs as East Turkistan.

Leili, a first-year at King’s College, told Varsity that she was first attracted to the idea of a Cambridge-specific campaign after reading the UK-China Transparency Report (UKCT) (04/09/23). This report made her realise the “depth of the denial” about the Uyghur genocide within UK universities, she said.

“Across the country as a whole, universities are very scared of criticising China,” in part because there are “a lot of Chinese students”.

“If the Chinese government says they have a reputation for being unfriendly, it could massively impact their funding,” Leili explains.

Though Leili references the UKCT Report and seeing an *Unreported* Channel 4 documentary as formative moments, her involvement in the campaign was also

spurred by her experiences in the region. Since 2017, Leili and her close family have had very little contact with their family in East Turkistan.

“There used to be phone calls but we know there were Chinese police present when the calls happened [...] there’s been none since 2017. With our grandmother, it’s unclear whether she has been held in camps or not – a lot of people aren’t given information on that,” Leili states.

She adds: “Every Uyghur you talk to has the same story.”

Leili remembers visiting the region with her parents in July of 2009, when the Urumqi Massacre occurred. 500 Uyghurs were killed in one day, and around 1,000 more were injured or sentenced to death the following week. She says: “I remember my Ddd running out and thinking it was a good idea to go and film. We were in the compound and left very quickly the next day.”

When asked if she would ever go back to the region, Leili responds: “I’d love to go back.”

“As a second generation, I’ve been back three times and I can’t really talk to my family there; I struggled with the language. It’s easy to feel disconnected because there’s an attempt by the government to break our roots with the region,” she explains.

Anissa echoes the same sentiments, explaining how her “parents would go back in a heartbeat” despite the threat to their safety.

Anissa emphasises the complexity of the situation in the region: “It’s more than a genocide though – it’s the general political repression [...] Even if they’ve stopped the mass internment, it doesn’t mean the quality of life will improve massively.”

“It didn’t start in 2016; it’s got a long history,” Anissa says.

Anissa’s “entire extended family is still there,” she tells Varsity. “We also haven’t had contact since 2017. I think that’s what makes it even more important, about cultural representation, because it’s kind of our only link,” she adds.

The importance of the campaign lies in its resistance to the “cultural genocide” in East Turkistan, which they describe as the effort to eradicate the Uyghur language, customs, and traditions.

They are hopeful about the student population’s response to the campaign, although they recognise that some of their demands – including criticising the AMES department’s alleged links with Beijing – might be less popular among some.

“As an individual student, I’d be hesitant to say you’re complicit in this. It’s

the Department’s responsibility to facilitate these kinds of discussions. It’d be unfair to say you should not be able to travel to this part of the world,” Anissa says.

“In China, there’s no academic freedom; you can’t separate the Chinese university from the CCP – you’re engaging directly with them,” Leili says. She qualifies: “If you do go, you need to be very aware of what’s happening in China, and think critically about it.”

Anissa believes “there is denial and there are people who don’t understand what Uyghurs are. But particularly if you’re studying such a subject [as AMES], it’s only fair that you’re aware of the different languages that are there, and the ‘ethnic minorities’.”

On their hopes for the future of the campaign, both Leili and Anissa share a long-term vision. “This isn’t going to be a quick fix, there needs to be a long-term solution,” Anissa states. She adds: “I don’t think our demands are unreasonable; we’re not asking for this one ethnicity to be highlighted in Cambridge.”

Anissa ultimately hopes the campaign will be a celebration of Uyghur culture too, amid all the reports of its deliberate eradication. “All you hear about is the genocide, not the people. In this way, we’re preserving the culture too.”



# News

## Clare dean votes against Church LGBT reforms

**Michael Hennessey**  
Editor-in-chief

The dean of Clare College has consistently opposed proposals supporting LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Church of England, including voting against blessings for same-sex weddings.

In February last year, Reverend Mark Smith voted against a motion that stated that the Church should “lament and repent the failure of the Church to be welcoming to LGBTQ+ people and the harm that LGBTQ+ people have experienced and continue to experience in the life of the Church” at the Church of England’s general synod.

In November 2023, Smith also voted against a motion for the Church to introduce a trial period of giving blessings during same-sex weddings. Both motions passed, despite opposition from over 40% of the bishops, clergy and laity represented on the synod.

Smith also backed a total of 20 amendments that would have changed the extent of the reforms.

The dean teaches at the Divinity Faculty and has a pastoral role for all students at Clare College, as well as working as a tutor and being responsible for the college chapel.

Smith was elected to sit on the Church of England’s governing body in October 2021, representing the constituency of “universities and theological education

institutions”. On his manifesto, Smith stated that his role at Clare, and previously Christ’s College, had “involved sensitive welfare support to those struggling with bereavement, relationship problems, depression, loneliness and anxiety, as well as many wrestling with questions of faith and belief.”

He also noted that he was well-suited to represent universities at the Church as he had “heard first-hand the concerns that many young people have with the Church” and that he “sought to exercise a ministry of kindness, welcome and radical hospitality”.

“If elected, my primary aim for the next five years would be to help build a church that will allow every type of person to engage with God’s love,” his manifesto concluded.

Reacting to the news, a fellow said: “I find it deeply concerning that someone who is supposed to be providing pastoral care to a diverse community like a Cambridge college has so consistently, and apparently covertly, voted against queer liberation and the interests of LGBTQIA people, joining attempts to prevent even watered down blessings for same-sex couples and even opposing an apology by the House of Bishops for the rank queerphobia of the Church of England.”

They continued: “We are not talking about the odd vote here or there, but a clear pattern - this puts the Dean of Clare widely outside of mainstream chaplaincy opinions in Cambridge, and

frankly calls into question his ability to gain and deserve the trust and respect of his students and the wider college community, queer or otherwise.”

Clare student Emma Caroe told *Varsity*: “I am deeply saddened by the slowness of the pace at which the Church of England is moving on the issues of sexuality, gender, and same-sex relationships. Divisions within the Church on this issue are causing a lot of pain. I believe that the Church does not have the right to limit God’s affirmation of love, and am upset to find out that the Dean voted as he did.”

They continued: “But speaking from personal experience as a queer student, I have confidence that Clare chapel is and will always seek to remain a diverse and loving community within which all are welcome. Mark is also widely known to be a great tutor and a recognised friendly face in college. It is definitely hurtful to discover that he has opposed change in the Church of England, but this thankfully does not seem to translate into compromising the more general pastoral and wellbeing support he offers students at Clare, both queer and non-queer alike.”

Among the amendments Smith voted for were motions proposed by Sam Margrave, a lay member of the general synod. In January last year, Margrave was reported to the police for describing Pride events as “the nation’s next Jimmy Savile”.

Debates over the Church’s position on

same-sex relationships have been divisive within the general synod. The vote to support trials for blessings for same-sex marriages, opposed by Smith, came as an amendment to a motion noting the progress made by bishops on issues relating to sexuality. The amendment only passed by one vote.

The change means that gay Christians can hold a special service to bless and celebrate their weddings. Readings and music mean that the services could look very similar to a heterosexual church wedding.

A representative for the Union of Clare Students (UCS) told *Varsity*: “The UCS is concerned about the impact that the implications of this article will have for the well-being of Clare students, and in particular queer students. We understand that there are multiple dimensions to the debates in the Church of England’s General Synod around both doctrine and procedure, and that in his voting the Dean was acting as a representative of a collection of university chaplains nationally.”

They concluded: “The UCS reaffirms our support to queer students and encourages anyone who would welcome support and/or further discussion on this to reach out to the UCS.”

*Reverend Mark Smith and Clare College were contacted for comment.*

### Comment *Should the Church have a pastoral role?*

**Maddy Browne**

If you look up in Cambridge this month, you can find spots of colour in the skyline, as many university and college buildings fly mark LGBTQ history month. In 2020, two students forced Clare College to do the same.

Reverend Mark Smith had a chance to play a similar part in making history last year. History was made in the Church of England, even if the motions codified official marriage inequality. Reverend Smith’s decision to vote against measures to advance the rights of members of the LGBTQ+ community puts into question the role that religious figures play in college pastoral care. Do we need a separation of Church and college?

The role of the pastoral tutor is based on trust, trust which could be eroded for some students in light of Smith’s voting record. College deans use the University’s Christian communities to inspire not only tolerance, but active celebration of diversity — in alignment with the student community that it serves. How can the doors of Clare chapel be open to “every type of person” if only some types of people would be allowed to receive marital blessings in that same chapel? I’m sure the Reverend endeavours to bring a “radical hospitality” to his tutor meetings; but following this news, there’ll be some LGBTQ tutees wondering if this still applies to them.



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# Uni defends £20 million from fossil fuel magnate

Continued from front page

way through University governance.

"I queried the Jafar donation at the University Council meeting in March 2021, since I was surprised that it had been authorised under the new guidelines on funding derived from the sale of fossil fuels," he said.

"It was clear that Crescent Petroleum and Dana Gas were banking on an expansion of fossil fuel demand to 2030 and beyond," Professor Scott-Warren continued.

"This is part of a pattern: the University persistently sidelines ethical considerations in its efforts to secure donations to fund its mission. When large sums of money are offered for projects that enhance our research and teaching, human rights violations and flagrant planet-trashing become distinctly secondary concerns," he said.

Sam Hutton, chair of the SU's Ethical Affairs campaign, told *Varsity*: "Taking a donation from a person so clearly linked to the fossil fuel industry shows their willingness to get the money in while they can. While millions are suffering due to the effects of climate change, the University continues to procrastinate its commitments to stop our complicity in this destruction."

A spokesperson for the University of Cambridge told *Varsity*: "The donation was reviewed and approved by the Com-

mittee on Benefactions and External and Legal Affairs (CBELA). As with all donations and research funding to the University, this gift was accepted following robust due diligence procedures to scrutinise compatibility and alignment with our mission and values. Decisions take into account the University's ethical guidelines, and also, since October 2020, the University's climate change guidelines."

"We are immensely grateful for this personal donation from a Cambridge alumnus and his family, supporting the establishment of Cambridge Children's Hospital and enabling it to carry out groundbreaking research and to improve the lives of children not only locally but also nationally and even internationally," they said.

A spokesperson for Majid Jafar told *Varsity*: "The COP28 declaration in December last year clearly accepted the need for natural gas as a transition fuel to replace dirtier fuels like coal and diesel in developing countries and thereby enable the addition of intermittent renewables when the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow (just as happens in the UK). Majid agrees with this as the fastest way to reduce carbon emissions in developing countries."

Regarding Jafar's political donations, they said: "These past donations are all on the public record but he has not donated for the past five years."

# SU sabb bunked off fair for Morocco holiday

Felix Armstrong  
Senior News Editor

An SU sabbatical officer called in sick from Refresher's Fair while holidaying in Morocco, *Varsity* can reveal.

Maroof Rafique, the SU's BME Officer, was absent for Refresher's Fair, which is held at the beginning of Lent term to re-introduce students to the societies and campaigns on offer at Cambridge, leaving students to run his stall.

Rafique's actions have been described as a "breach of trust".

The fair took place on the 15th of January, and *Varsity* is aware that Rafique called in sick on this day.

The elected officer is seen in multiple photos and videos on the Instagram page of the University travel society taking part in their Morocco trip, which took place from the 10th to the 15th of January.

Various photos on Rafique's Facebook page confirm that he took part in this trip. The advertisement for the holiday includes highlights such as "camel riding", "sandboarding", and "stargazing".

Students ran the BME stall at the fair in Rafique's absence after being told that he was off sick. One BME student present

at the event told *Varsity*: "Maroof was not present at Refreshers' Fair, as far as students at the fair were aware, he was unwell (as was conveyed to everyone by the staff team). BME campaign committee students were left to run the stall."

"However, it seems likely from social media, that he was actually in Morocco at the time. It would be extremely unfair to BME and all students if he left work for his holiday," they said.

An SU insider told *Varsity*: "This is a complete breach of trust, made worse by how egregious it was: did he really think nobody would notice it on social media? He's tried to take students for idiots, I doubt anybody trusts him."

Rafique was voted in as BME Officer in Easter term's by-election, after the role went unfilled in the Lent elections. The former Darwin College Law student's work as a sabbatical officer focuses on decolonisation and BME awareness, according to his profile.

The holiday incident comes after the SU's Disabled Students' Officer resigned last month.

Rafique apologised for the "harm done," and said that he had agreed to meet with Cambridge University Jewish Society to "reflect" and understand

how he can "support Jewish students going forward."

Maroof Rafique told *Varsity*: "Firstly, I must clarify that I was determined to represent the BME Campaign at Refreshers Fair for which I was regrettably prevented from attending due to illness. [...] The decision to miss the Refreshers Fair was not taken lightly, and I deeply regret any inconvenience or disappointment my absence may have caused to students and the BME Campaign members who worked diligently to represent the BME stall in my stead."

"The comments regarding my commitment to the BME Campaign and the implications of my actions are deeply concerning. I understand the importance of trust within our community and am committed to rebuilding any that may have been eroded due to this incident," he said.

"I wish to reiterate that the welfare and representation of BME students are priorities that guide my actions, and I am committed to ensuring that our campaign's objectives continue to be met with the highest level of dedication and integrity," Rafique concluded.

# MOUNTVIEW

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# News

**Felix Armstrong**  
Senior News Editor

Around 300 students gathered at Sidgwick site in support of Palestine, calling for the University to divest from Israel.

The protest, held on Wednesday (14/02) at the University's main teaching site, was organised by the Cambridge University Palestinian Solidarity Society, drawing attention to the Israeli airstrikes on Rafah, a small city in the Gaza Strip.

The protestors called on the University to cut its financial ties with Israel. Harvey Brown, the SU's Welfare Officer, said at the demonstration: "The names on the bombs that are being dropped on Rafah right now are the same as names on the spreadsheets that the University produces at the end of the financial year."

Brown named BAE systems and the US Army, among others, as the military bodies from which the University must withdraw funding.

The hundreds of attendees chanted: "We will not stop we will not rest, Cambridge Uni must divest."

Protestors held Palestinian flags and placards, some of which read "Roses are red, violets are blue, Cambridge University complicit in genocide" and "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free".

Another speaker told students to email their College JCRs and local MPs to encourage boycotts of companies associated with Israel.

"People are talking too much about the Superbowl and not enough about Rafah," another speaker said.

The strikes on Rafah killed at least 67 Palestinians by Monday, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. The city's population has swelled from 250,000 to an estimated 1.5 million people following evacuations of the south of the Gaza Strip.

Humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths has said that the consequences of an invasion of Rafah would be "catastrophic".

Cambridge University was contacted for comment.

# 'We will not stop, we will not rest'

## Hundreds call for University to cut ties with Israel

CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY –  
STOP ACCEPTING  
BLOOD  
MONEY



# 'Backwards' admissions fee will be 'barrier' for disadvantaged applicants, say students

**Daniel Hilton**  
Editor-in-chief

"Backwards" new STEM admissions tests have been condemned by students and SU reps for deterring applicants from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

The compulsory tests will cost £75 for applicants from the UK or Republic of Ireland and £130 for those applying from anywhere else in the world.

The new Engineering and Science Admissions Test (ESAT) will be mandatory for those applying to the Engineering, Natural Sciences, and Veterinary Medicine Triposes from next year onwards.

Students and SU officers have voiced concerns that introducing a cost for these admissions assessments will act as a barrier to entry for prospective students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

While the University claims that a 'bursary voucher' will be available to waive the assessment fees for "UK candidates in financial need", its eligibility criteria is yet to be disclosed.

In previous years, the admissions assessments for Natural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (NSAA) and Engineering (ENGAA) were compulsory, but free to take. However, now these assessments have been replaced by the ESAT, applicants to the same courses will have to pay up to £130.

State-educated applicants will be hit the hardest by these new fees, says Sophie, a third-year Engineering student at Homerton, who told *Varsity*: "I feel like this is one of the worst things to do in terms of outreach."

Sophie commented: "I know a lot of people from state schools applied more on a whim just because you might as well try, and I think having to pay is a huge deterrent."

She continued: "There's a lot less Oxbridge support in state schools and I think if this was the case when I was applying I would have most likely not bothered because I wouldn't have thought I would get in."

Students have also criticised the scope of the 'bursary voucher' that the University intends to implement.

Kate, a third-year Engineering student at Homerton, told *Varsity* that the fee waiver will likely not have a large enough scope. She argues "so far it seems there will be bursary vouchers available for students on free school meals, but £75 is still a lot of money even for students who are not eligible for the scheme."

"One of the biggest concerns for prospective students is the cost associated with coming to Cambridge", commented Kate, and says the introduction of the ESAT will be "off-putting" for applicants.

She continues, saying that the admis-

sions test is "shifting the burden for the cost of assessment from the university to students, without any real justification."

This sentiment is also echoed by Nigar, a second-year Engineering student at Selwyn, who told *Varsity*: "They've said they will implement bursaries for students from lower-income house-

holds, but this almost certainly won't be enough. There are people who don't get free school meals (like myself) who would still struggle to afford it."

She continued, arguing that that the tests "will have a significant impact on diversity within the student body", and that she hopes the University will row back on this issue.

The University has also claimed that overseas applicants will not be eligible to waive the assessment fees using the 'bursary voucher'.

The SU has also criticised the changes, with the Undergraduate officer for Access, Education & Participation Officer, Ceredig ap Tomos, telling *Varsity* it is "disappointing the university felt the need to introduce a fee" for the admissions tests where this was not previously the case.

Ap Tomos continued: "Though the financial pressures the university is under are substantial, it is likely this will present a barrier to students from disadvantaged backgrounds even with the fee waiver" and called for eligibility for the fee waiver to be "as wide as possible".

Paid admissions tests such as the Law National Admissions Test (LNAT), the BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT), and University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT) are used at Cambridge to aid admissions into Law and Medicine, but these tests

are also widely used by other universities.

*Varsity* understands that the new ESAT test will only be used by Cambridge and Imperial College, London and will not be used to other universities.

When approached for comment, Mike Nicholson, Director of Recruitment, Admissions and Participation at the University told *Varsity*: "The University of Cambridge and Imperial College, [...], have given careful thought to all aspects of the test delivery, including the cost of registration."

They continued: "There is no evidence that the current fee waiver arrangements that are used for the TMUA have acted as a deterrent to potential applicants who have limited access to financial assistance, and similar fee waiver models have been used for many years for other tests used for entry to multiple universities without evidence that students from widening participation backgrounds have been deterred from applying (e.g. LNAT for Law, UCAT and BMAT for medicine)."

"The fees will be reviewed annually, and as any profits that are generated will be reinvested in test development and supporting applicants taking the tests, it allows for the opportunity to develop the waiver provision in future cycles.", they concluded.



LOUIS ASHWORTH



## Could you be the next Editor of *Varsity*?

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

You will lead a team producing online content throughout the term after our 19th April 2024 print edition up until the late summer handover to the Michaelmas 2024 team and be responsible for producing our *Varsity Yearbook & Review* – a circa 60 page A4 glossy magazine, which will be published on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

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

Direct questions to the VarSoc President at [president@varsity.co.uk](mailto:president@varsity.co.uk), or the current Editors at [editor@varsity.co.uk](mailto:editor@varsity.co.uk).

The deadline for applications is midday, Friday 1st March 2024. Interviews will take place on the morning of Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024.



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# News

## Journos joust in the Chambers

The Cambridge Union held an emergency debate with the motion "This house prefers *The Tab* to *Varsity*" last Thursday (08/02). Both of *The Tab*'s editors-in-chief gave propositions and were supported by other *Tab* editors dressed in the paper's merchandise. The debate saw *The Tab* slammed for their links to Rupert Murdoch, and *Varsity* criticised for being "boring" and "elitist". Ultimately, *Varsity* came away with a narrow victory in the vote, in spite of the mass mobilisation of *Tab* supporters.

## We go to our war correspondent in Oxford...

The Cambridge Assassins' guild were defeated by Oxford in their annual Varsity match last Saturday (10/02), making it three victories in a row for Oxford. The match included capture the flag and duels. Nerf machine guns, homemade cardboard swords and even a hand-crafted rubber band machine gun were used to spill blood on the battlefield. One Oxford assassin said: "Today's been a pretty standard assassin's *Varsity*, had a couple of duels, and been killed a lot sadly."

## Striking delivery drivers leave customers broken hearted

Around 50 delivery drivers could be seen driving down Hill Road honking their horns as they went on strike on Valentine's Day (14/02). The nationwide strike was planned by grassroots group Delivery Jobs, who organised the strike over pay and conditions. It comes after a supreme court ruling last year declared that Deliveroo drivers were not "workers". Couples looking forward to a takeaway will have to go hungry as the battle for delivery drivers' rights drives on.

## Oily money out

Extinction Rebellion gathered outside Senate House on Wednesday (14/02) in protest of the University's hosting of big oil company, Schlumberger. Leaflets outlined the environmental background of Schlumberger, alleging that they were "the largest fossil fuel services company in the world" and received a £150m government bailout. The protestors also targeted Barclays, who are still currently banking Cambridge University's assets, despite the University announcing they were looking for a new banking partner.



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## University watch

**Patrick Dolan rounds up student news from around the country**

**LGB Alliance supporter appointed at Edinburgh**

Edinburgh University is facing controversy over appointing Simon Fanshawe, co-founder of LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall, as Rector. Fanshawe has previously criticised Stonewall's gender policies, instead supporting LGB Alliance and its contentious transgender ideology. Transgender rights advocates at the university are rallying support to block the appointment, as it "creates a hostile environment for the many trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming students". Fanshawe responded to criticism by offering to meet with those who are unhappy, while the university expressed support for his appointment.

**Glasgow goes old school**

The University of Glasgow's Life Sciences Department has unexpectedly shifted final exams from online to in-person, amid rising concerns about reliability of grades in the face of advancing AI technology. Some students have expressed anger at the decision, reporting that they feel unprepared due to a lack of experience with in-person exams caused by Covid-related disruptions.

**Vandalism hits Leeds Hillel House after professor suggests protest**

A Jewish student centre, Hillel House at the University of Leeds, was vandalised with antisemitic graffiti reading "free Palestine" after a retired professor, James Dickens, suggested a protest in a WhatsApp group. The incident is being treated as a "hate crime", with West Yorkshire Police appealing for witnesses. The Union of Jewish Students has condemned the act, labelling it as "outrageous", while the university expressed deep sadness and cooperation with the police investigation.

**Manchester pro-life society faces dissolution dilemma**

An anonymous petition to dissolve the newly established University of Manchester Pro-Life Society has rapidly amassed over 10,000 signatures within just two days. The petition expresses concerns about the "potential harm" caused by the society, which was officially affiliated on 11/01. Despite complaints and a call for dissolution, the Students' Union asserts its legal inability to dissolve the society purely based on conflicting views with other students, but maintains its commitment to equitable access and safety for all students.



Continued from page 1

held by anyone in the College, or the wider academic community”.

The Emma master and acting senior tutor, Corinna Russell, wrote to students a second time, saying: “Nobody is free to do their best work while false narratives of this kind continue to call into question a scholar’s right to be part of this community.”

They said it was “demonstrably untrue” that “the admission and progression of Black scholars in Cambridge is attributable to an agenda that privileges racialised groups on grounds of ethnicity rather than potential”.

Professor Bhaskar Virra, pro-vice-chancellor for education, told *Varsity*: “Freedom of speech within the law is a right that sits at the heart of the University of Cambridge.”

“While we encourage freedom of speech, it is important to be clear that the voice of one academic does not reflect the views of the whole University community. I’ve spoken with many staff and students across the University over recent days, who all vehemently disagree with and challenge the academic validity of the arguments presented.”

“I have been speaking to a number of our students who are understandably hurt and upset by these views and feel that they undermine their presence at Cambridge. I want to emphasise that everyone at Cambridge has earned their place on merit and no-one at this University should be made to feel like this,” he said.

Nathan Cofnas told *Varsity*: “There is widespread discrimination in academia against people with conservative or right-wing views. In this environment, it ‘requires a certain amount of miracle’ for me to get a job.”

“I said that, when I applied to Cambridge, people were ‘aware that I had some controversial interests’ and ‘judge[d] me by other things’. You interpret this as meaning that they were ‘sympathetic to [my] views’. I did not say they were ‘sympathetic’ to my views on this topic,” he said.

“Speaking about America (which is different from the UK), affirmative action means discrimination against whites and Asians. It is an empirical fact that, at some US institutions, many underrepresented minorities would not have been selected under a colourblind system,” he continued.

“University policy protects lawful speech. The views I expressed have nothing to do with my work in the faculty of Philosophy or Emmanuel College, or with the Leverhulme Trust,” Cofnas concluded.

Emmanuel College told *Varsity*: “The College appoints up to 100 College Research Associates. They are post-doc researchers who have been academically selected by, and are already employed in, departments, faculties and research centres within the University.”

“College Research Associates are not employed by the College and are not Fellows or students of the College. The College provides no financial support towards their research and does not administer their research or provide any research facilities. Our aim is to offer a social and extra-curricular connection to the College,” the College said.

“No College Research Associate is employed by the College. The academic appointment held by a College Research associate within the University is a matter for the relevant faculty and research funder,” they concluded.

# ‘Out of touch’ May Ball release video causes row at Churchill

Daniel Hilton  
Editor-in-chief

The Churchill May Ball committee is under fire after a “tone deaf” video depicting violence, explosions, and rubble was used to announce this year’s theme of ‘Aftermath’.

The theme reveal video has been described as “glamorising war and death and violence” and was shown during a formal on Sunday (11/02), leading to student outrage.

The formal saw Churchill’s hall decorated with tinfoil and banners that had the word “AI” on them while diners were supplied with 3D glasses and blue cocktails.

The controversial video was shown during the formal, with one anonymous student telling *Varsity* that it displayed footage of robots fighting humanity and that the video ended with footage of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The student continued, telling *Varsity* that the initial reaction of students at the formal was to laugh, but this was quickly followed by discussions of how the theme was inappropriate.

Many students took to anonymous college confessions page “ChurchFest” to

voice their shock and disapproval, with many asserting that the video was insensitive in the context of ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the Middle East.

One such confession stated: “How out of tune does an entire committee have to be for the may ball’s theme to include bombs, drone strikes and rubble?!”

They continued, critiquing the serious nature of the theme: “for what is meant to be a forget-all-your-worries night of celebration it is astounding that war could be included in, never mind central to, the theme.”

Another anonymous post said: “how out of touch do you have to be to deliberately choose a theme that glamorises war and death and violence, especially considering the current climate... especially when it is incredibly likely that some people in college will have been directly impacted by what’s going on in palestine/israel (or even ukraine/russia).”

“I appreciate that being on committee is hard work and you guys wanna put on a good time for us, but honestly come on get it together”, they continued

In response to the backlash, the May Ball committee held an emergency meeting and addressed the situation, publishing a response to the criticisms.

The committee admitted that the

reveal video “misconstrued” the true nature of the theme, which was to focus on the aftermath of an AI revolution against humanity, with decorations being inspired by robots and futuristic technology.

In the days following the reveal, the tide of opinion shifted, with students largely being appeased and impressed by how quickly and aptly the committee responded to the backlash.

One student, who spoke to *Varsity* on the condition of anonymity, commented: “After the formal, there was definitely a general feeling of confusion and upset about the video, but I think everyone is really happy with the way that the committee has taken on board the feedback and acted on it immediately.”

“The committee put a statement on Churchfess and sent an email to the whole college mailing list. It’s nice to see how seriously they’ve taken it, because, in the end, it is our college May Ball, and I think everyone just wants to enjoy the post-exam celebrations”, they concluded.

This sentiment was echoed by recent posts on Churchfess, with one saying: “as someone who wrote one of the original comments about the MB theme being inappropriate, i’d like to thank the MB

committee for dealing with it in what seems to be a genuine and responsive manner - your hard work and openness to feedback is appreciated!”

Yesterday (15/02), an email was then sent to all students in Churchill, where the committee again admitted that the video was a “mistake” and apologised for the controversy.

Further, they committed to changing the name of the theme, writing: “We are taking the decision to revise the theme name to one which makes the nature of the event clearer, and one we hope you can all get behind.”

When approached for comment, the Churchill May Ball committee told *Varsity*: “The theme of Aftermath arose as the Ball takes place as a celebration in the aftermath of exams, and we wanted a futuristic, technology-focused theme. At the launch, a video was shown which misconstrued those intentions and which we recognise was ill-judged. We have apologised to the members of our community who have been distressed and we’re working hard to take lessons on board and move forward with the event constructively.”

# Cambridge calls for green banks



Ella Howard  
News Correspondent

The University of Cambridge is leading a new effort to avoid banking partners that “do not contribute to the financing of fossil fuel expansions,” in collaboration with 60 other UK universities and trusts.

Yesterday, the group of higher education institutions sent a formal request to banks and fund managers to cease their investments in non-renewable energy.

The coalition includes, among others, Oxford, UCL, LSE, Edinburgh and Leeds,

and possesses a collective wealth of over £5 billion.

The Request for Proposals (RfP) sets out the coalition’s commitment to the “avoidance of financing fossil fuel expansion”, asking banks to create more environmentally friendly products.

The statement marks an effort to “direct funding” towards renewable energy and away from fossil fuels, particularly in low-income countries, Cambridge has said.

Antony Odgers, the University’s chief financial officer, expressed his goal to avoid the financing of “new coal and gas-fired plants” that would “lock in

demand for decades”.

Heather Davis, Cambridge’s Head of Group Treasury, said: “The University treasurers in this group all share a common goal, which is to manage money in a way that doesn’t contribute to the financing of fossil fuel expansion and to find something that aligns with the IEA Net Zero Emissions Scenario, and that is lacking in the cash space at present.”

The announcement comes after Cambridge informed banks and asset managers in December that it is looking for a banking partner that does not “finance fossil fuel expansion”.

The move put the University’s centu-

ries-long ties with Barclays under threat, as the bank faces increasing pressure from institutions and campaigners alike.

Last month, student campaigners occupied Cambridge’s St Andrew’s Street Barclays branch, calling for the bank to cut ties with the fossil fuel industry and Israel.

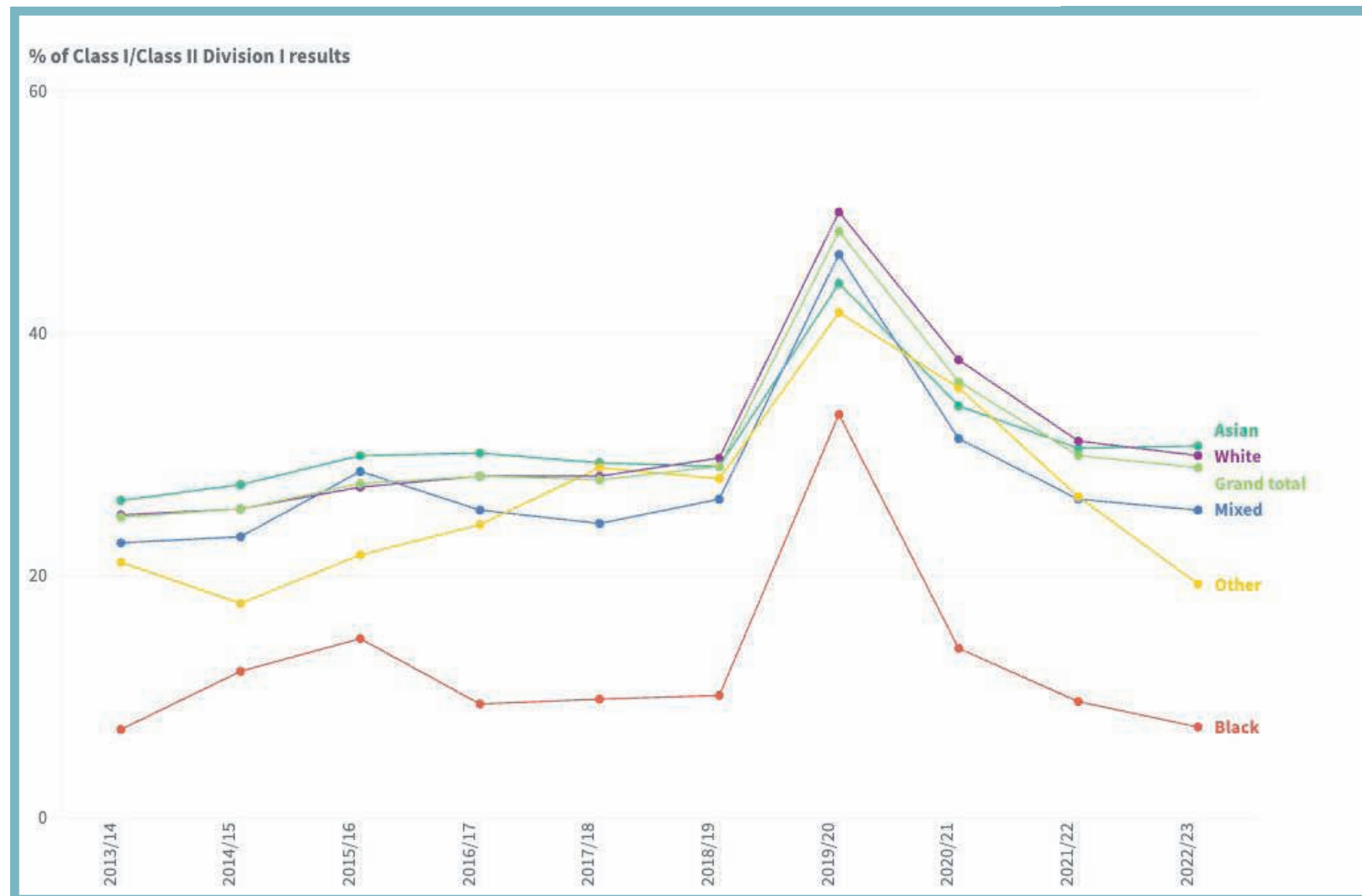
Jenny, an organiser with Cambridge Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, told *Varsity* that the two campaigns are interlinked: “We see our demands as being interconnected because the oppression of many people around the world, generally not of rich western countries, is tied up with climate change.”



## Features

# Why are Black students four times less likely to be awarded a First?

**Ella Hawes** investigates Cambridge's awarding gap problem and what is being done to close the divide



**The proportion of Black students awarded Firsts is now at its lowest in nearly a decade**

APP PAR. Rather than being subjects of the research, the students would carry it out themselves, using their own lived experience as Black students at Cambridge to inform their proposals.

The APP PAR runs in yearlong cycles with a fresh intake of student researchers each cycle. One of the first projects carried out was the founding of the Black Advisory Hub, which reaches over a hundred Black students during each year's induction events, while also running research projects and providing networking opportunities throughout the year. Last year the Hub collaborated with APP PAR again, running the Black Awarding Gaps & Decolonisation Forum, which united students and staff in a series of workshops and panel discussions. They put forward a series of recommendations in their student-led workshops which were endorsed by everyone in attendance, but the difficulty remains in bringing these recommendations to realisation.

Walker remembers that when many universities were told to begin these projects, they all thought that "if we put this investment of time and resources into it, we will solve the problem", but it quickly became clear that the issue is "much more complex and nuanced than many universities actually appreciated, including Cambridge."

The compilation of hundreds of students' insights over the last five years only confirms the multifaceted nature of the situation, and that, ultimately, "there is not going to be a silver bullet to solve the awarding gap whether that's race, disability or gender." Currently, the APP PAR is focused on implementing smaller-scale projects, with the hope that a gradual and piecemeal approach will lead to real change.

What it comes down to now is time and money: progress on anything at this university is slow. It is likely that the students who have worked on these projects will not see their work come to fruition before their graduation because this work is "beyond the life cycle of any individual student" and so is carried out to "make a difference for future students and not just for themselves."

Despite the efforts of the students and staff who are working hard to remedy the awarding gap, the numbers remain painfully clear. Cambridge's issues with inequality go far beyond admissions, and the limitations on Black students' education will likely continue for years to come.

PHOTOS BY LOUIS ASHWORTH,  
DATA VISUALISATION BY FLOURISH

The University of Cambridge has historically struggled with racial inequity in admissions, but gradual progress has led to record intakes of Black students almost every year for the past decade. But this movement towards equality obscures the disparities in education within the University itself, and the chance for Black students to leave with a top grade.

In last year's results, Black students were nearly four times less likely to be awarded a First than their White or Asian peers across all Tripos examinations. According to data seen by *Varsity*, while around 30% of White and Asian students were given the top grade, only 7.5% of Black students gained a First. Although the gap is most pronounced in the awarding of Firsts, there is also an 18-percentage point gap in the awarding of "Good Honours" (either a 2:1 or a First), potentially placing a serious impediment on the chance of future study or employment after graduation.

All students are admitted to the University with similar predicted outcomes, with top grades from school and the expectation of success at Cambridge, so what is going wrong? Although these figures are some of the worst in recent years, awarding gaps are not a new issue.

Back in 2018, the Office for Students (OfS) tasked all universities with studying inequities in the national student body over a five-year period, and found two groups to have unexplained awarding gaps: Black students, and students with mental health conditions. They asked universities to implement an Access and Participation Plan (APP) to analyse data relating to these demographic groups, with the aim of removing the awarding gaps altogether. The Centre for Teaching & Learning at Cam-

bridge set up its APP in 2019 and the project is now in its penultimate year, making this an ideal time for reflection on the progress so far.

The awarding gap for students with mental health conditions has stabilised over the last few years, and there is now only a minimal gap in performance across all students declaring disabilities, with a 5 percent awarding gap between students declaring mental health conditions and those without any declared disabilities. Pressure has been mounting in recent years over the mental health crisis at Cambridge, and it is likely that the increased provisions for support and exam adjustments have had a knock-on effect on academic outcomes. However, the University's statistics fail to account for those students who develop mental health difficulties during their studies, potentially skewing the available figures.

While the awarding gap for students with mental health conditions shows improvement, the proportion of Black students awarded Firsts is now at its lowest in nearly a decade, while top results for White and Asian students continue to climb. The APP set out a key objective to "eliminate the unexplained gap [...] between White and Black students by 2024-25," but it seems that ambition is years away from being realised.

So, why does the awarding gap continue to

grow? Why does the issue persist, despite improved access and support? More importantly, what is being done to fix it?

When the APP was initiated, it was a project purely designed to analyse the awarding gaps - rather than fix them. And so the Access and Participation Plan

Participatory Research Project (APP PAR) was born. This sister project develops methods of remedying the inequalities within the institution, rather than simply studying them. If the University data is about what is going on, and the APP is about why, the APP PAR is all about how we can fix it.

Although many universities were carrying out their own research, Cambridge took a different tack, hiring students as "paid researchers to do targeted projects as opposed to using them as data sources," says Dr Ruth Walker, part of the Centre for Teaching & Learning and the project lead of the





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## Features

# Is love's labour lost? A history of Valentine's through Varsity

Isabella Steinmeyer ditches the dating apps, and explores how Varsity has celebrated Valentine's Day through the decades



▲ PHOTOS FROM VARSITY ARCHIVES

Before there was Hinge, there was Varsity; the student paper has played cupid for 1950s suitors and noughties singletons alike. In honour of Valentine's Day, I delved into the archives to see how the Cambridge dating scene has changed over the past 70 years.

In 1953, a Newnham fresher moaned in 'Veronica Varley's vice Column' "this term only five men have asked me out." Worse, none of her dates had proposed. Though Veronica's suggestion "if your friend was born under Taurus, it might account for your relationship taking this course" resonates with 21st-century horoscope girlies, it's hard to imagine how this student would have survived the Cambridge of today. Nowadays, proposals for exclusivity have replaced proposals for marriage, and you're lucky if you manage to match with five different men on Tinder.

Fast forward to the 1980s, and Varsity was Cantabs' wingman of choice. Charging 10p per word, the paper offered singles like Tarquin a forum to ask: "WHY does nobody send me Valentines?" Meanwhile, loverboy Mike felt a Varsity issue was the perfect place to beg Lynne to "start again", the equivalent of asking to get back with your ex via Crushbridge. Not everyone was as lucky as 'P' who professed he loves 'H' "twice as much as cornflakes", and John of "B20 Cripps, St. John's" didn't mince his words when he advertised "VACANCY for a girlfriend. Apply." Hardly Austen, but John's directness would be a welcome respite from the world of Instagram story-liking and Snapchat half-swiping.

By the early 2000s, Varsity's match-making had reached new heights. The 'Date of the Week' section, advertised as "Your chance to date Cambridge's most eligible singletons", was the University's answer to *Take Me Out*. Each week, the paper published a profile on a student looking for love, asking them their favourite song, to describe themselves in three words and how best to "pull them". If you were enticed by Sara from Caius, a multifaceted lover of both Plato and 'Milkshake by Kelis', you would simply email in your answers to the same questions, and Sara would choose her date. In this case, Phil was the chosen one, and he reflected on their date in La Raza in the following Varsity issue. He said: "Sara was a top girl", adding "I love Brummy birds!" I like to think that Phil and Sara are now happily married, and still make time for the monthly La Raza Funk Jam.

But the paper was not just an outlet for Cantabs looking for love. Since the 1950s, Varsity has published articles on the importance of self-love and the joys of singlehood. In 1959, Cecile Sullivan poked fun at the archaic courting conventions of her time. In her "symposium" of what men want in a woman, she chastised English girls for being "appallingly dressed and [having] no idea about makeup" and advised that they should "learn how to scrub floors" to better their chances of marrying a duke. Another issue from the 1950s denounced the commercialisation of Valentine's Day, arguing that the history and essence of the holiday have been lost.

In the 2004 Valentine's issue, Ellen Jones contrasted Varsity's "top tips on

romantic rhymes" and exposé on "Cambridge's racy side: getting hot under the gown", with a call to "Adopt rampant self-love as your default mode of interaction." Ellen advises her fellow students to "wake up in the morning [and] decide you're bloody great" in an uplifting article on finding happiness from within. Though her suggestion to walk into a room and convince yourself that "everyone in that room is desperate to sleep with you" could complicate supervisions, her general message - that

a touch of delusion never hurt anyone - rings true.

So, from lovesick students to defences of singledom, Varsity has guided students through the perils of dating in Cambridge for decades. Though Hinge has replaced 'The Date of the Week', love messages have moved to Crushbridge, and we now only look for college spouses, the archives provide comfort for students today. If this Valentine's isn't as romantic as you'd hoped, you have 70 years' worth of Cantab-company.

### Veronica Varley's vice Column

#### Abandoned Kingsman

I am a fresher at Newnham, and the most popular girl in Mr. Barne's lectures. Last term I took great trouble to acquire 26 boy friends, but this term only five men have asked me out and none of them has made a proposal! What is wrong with me?

I cannot say without seeing you, but I suspect that these men have been philandering with you. They were willing to take your loyalty and affection, but not to fulfil your natural destiny of motherhood and marriage. Start life afresh in a new faculty.

Your letter shows a certain inexperience of women. Send me 25s. 9d. and I will post you a book which will tell you more than you need to know.

#### Unlucky

I wonder if you were born under Capricorn? Because if your friend was born under Taurus, it might account for your relationship taking this course. If you were born at some other time, of course, there would be a different explanation.

## Crushbridge: then vs. now



WINSLOW HOMER / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

**OLD:** Happy Valentine's Day to 3 scarlet men. Can we burn the midnight banana every Sunday? From the ladies in white.

**NEW:** Crushbridge to the angels singing songs from Wonka tonight you all sounded heavenly and made my day

**OLD:** Astrologers rule, OK?

**NEW:** I just want to find someone to stargaze with on college grounds this Summer

**OLD:** Much love to all the hunky men at Stop Press

**NEW:** Crushbridge to the tall blonde sax player at Hidden Rooms jazz night!

**OLD:** The roses have wilted, but the memory lingers on

**NEW:** I miss u, I wish u liked me as much as I like u

**OLD:** Why does nobody send me Valentines?

**NEW:** Anyone up for a last-min date? <3 - A first year engineer, once again alone on Valentine's

**OLD:**  
Don't pass me by.  
Don't make me cry,  
Don't make me blue  
Because Gillian  
I love only you

**NEW:**  
I was smiling all night,  
I'm glad I swiped right.  
I finally found you  
I love you  
Happy Valentine's Day!



# Five centuries of dining at Cambridge

**Ayushman Mukherjee** takes a look back at what we've been eating for the past half millennium

**F**rench onion soup. Chicken supreme. Bread pudding. If you're lucky, tea and a cheeseboard. While no doubt a great meal, you've probably forked out some £20 for this, and you're not even half full. As you embark on the walk of shame to Taco Bell (still in your gown, to let the townies know that this isn't your only dinner), you can't help but wonder: was Newton also ordering a Volcano Burrito Box on a Thursday morning?

You probably weren't wondering that, but the answer is no. Student diets, like those of the country at large,

cent global trade, most ingredients were locally sourced from farmers and markets. Many of the colleges, for instance, sourced their fish and spices from the annual Stourbridge Fair (which was, at one point, Europe's largest market fair), held in Stourbridge Common in the north of Cambridge from the 12th through to the early 20th centuries.

Such fairs and local distribution networks brought fish as exotic as dogfish, turbot, and stingray to student dinner plates – alongside spices such as saffron, cloves, and mace (a disappointment given that our spice usage now seems

been calf's foot jelly, somewhat far removed from a pumpkin spice latte).

The coffeehouses would grow so popular as to become a serious concern for the University's administrators. As one writer in 1742 lamented: "The scholars are so greedy after News (which is none of their business) that they neglect all for it... for who can apply close to a subject with his head full of the din of a Coffee House?" Professors, too, were ensnared – with one German visitor in 1710 finding all the "chief professors and doctors" reading "papers over a cup of coffee and a pipe of tobacco" and "conversing on all subjects". The University's hand was forced – and a series of regulations between 1664 and 1750 severely curtailed student patronage of the coffeehouses. Now, if only they could get around to finally regulating Spoons.

By the 19th century, as the University's intake began to broaden, a stark divide emerged between its haves and



▲ ARCHIVE CENTRE OF KING'S COLLEGE



**For who can apply close to a subject with his head full of the din of a Coffee House?**

have-nots. Tuition fees at the time were ostensibly progressive. In 1808, noblemen were to pay £10 per term (approximately £26,000/year today, adjusted for the average income), pensioners – referring to a class of students from privilege – were to pay £2 10s per term (£6,500/year today). And sizars – those who would typically finance their fees by undertaking College duties – were to pay 15s per term (£2,000/year today).

However, as Dr Payne notes, those students from privilege often "expected to be offered a higher standard of living," on account of their greater financial con-

sizars. This was a matter of particular irony, as the words from Psalm 133 "Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum fratres habitare in unum (Behold how good and how joyful it is for brothers to live together in unity)" are incised in the very same room. Nonetheless, the college acquiesced to this *Mean Girls*-esque request, and would even establish a special "Hall Fund" to supply the table with linen, crockery, and plates. At least they were generous enough, as Dr Christopher Stray of Swansea University describes, to "let the poor students eat the leftovers of their meals."

World War II would ultimately prove decisive in ending many of these culinary inequities, principally by bringing everyone to the same lowly level that we have now grown accustomed to. St John's has produced a particularly detailed account of wartime rationing, but I thought this could be best illustrated through the familiar language of formal menus. These menus have been sourced from the records of an old Cambridge

exists: the most recent records appear to date from 2001). In any case, their records – which can be found in the University Library – are a treasure trove of menus dating back to the middle of the 19th century.



**At least they were generous enough to 'let the poor students eat the leftovers of their meals'**

The consequences of wartime rationing for the historically privileged fellows are clear when one compares a menu from 1939 (left) to a menu from 1941 (right). As a proudly monolingual economist, I would've certainly struggled to decode the former. But, armed with Google Translate, it appears as though asparagus soup was used to substitute for kangaroo tail soup, boiled salmon for fillet of sole, roast chicken for pheasant andouillettes, and cheese soufflé for Rothschild Soufflé. While rationing ended in Britain in 1954, clearly Hall never got the memo. Menus from the following decades are equally austere, and I could quite easily have mistaken the 1941 menu for one today. If instead I had received the 1939 menu, I would have immediately checked my bank account to make sure I hadn't accidentally spent £400 on a dining ticket to John's May Ball (I have).

Does food at Cambridge mirror (as all things seemingly do, according to my 80 year old supervisor) Britain's decline? It is perhaps a bit more nuanced than that. Yes, you won't find kangaroo tail on the menu anymore. But neither are our fellow students left eating our scraps, and that is something we all ought to be glad about.



▲ W.S. STACEY / PUBLIC DOMAIN

have changed dramatically over the years – and their history is one marked with both imperial opulence and readily accepted inequity.



**Was Newton also ordering a Volcano Burrito Box on a Thursday morning?**

In the 15th and 16th centuries, college halls were still quasi-monastic. As Dr. Rob Payne, archivist at Jesus College, notes that meals began with Grace and Bible readings, and all ensuing conversation was to be strictly conducted in Latin. Food costs were provisioned at 14d a week for Masters and Fellows (approximately £52 today, adjusted for inflation), and 8d a week for students (£30 today). These budgets certainly weren't shoestring. But in an era of nas-

to have regressed to salt and pepper). Meat was less common, though it was consumed on occasion. According to Dr. Francois Soyer, an early modern historian at the University of New England, the fellows at King's spent 40d on swan (£153 today) on the Feast of St Nicholas in 1447. Fish and meats were also typically supplemented with bread and ale, which in 1447 constituted some 35% of the college's food budget. Count me in.

In the medieval era, dining in Hall had been compulsory for all. But by the 17th century, this was no longer the case. This change occurred just as a new eastern import was starting to take the town by storm: coffee. By 1660, Cambridge had spawned its first independent cafe – Kirk's. And in the 18th century, many more were to follow. These establishments were frequented by fellows and undergraduates alike. They offered chocolate, tea, and sherbet alongside an assortment of newspapers and periodicals. One such establishment, Clapham's, was described by academics as the 18th-century equivalent of Starbucks (though their house specialty appears to have

MENU			
<i>Geisler</i> <i>Soufflé 1933</i>	Huitres au naturel	Friday	25 April 1941
<i>Das Cortado</i>	Potage Queue de Kangourou		
<i>Niersteiner</i> <i>Kranzberg 1925</i>	Filet de Sole Cecilia		Asparagus Soup
	Andouillettes de Faisan		Boiled Salmon
<i>King Private</i> <i>Château 1928</i>	Filet de Bœuf Clairemont		Roast Chicken
	Pommes Château Haricots Verts		Cheese Soufflé
	Soufflé glacé Rothschild		
<i>Taylor 1912</i> <i>Château Lafite 1924</i>	Olives Alsacienne	Merienda	Chambertin 1923
	Dessert	Gockburn 1908	Cos d'Estournel 1929

▲ UL ARCHIVES

tributions. One particularly illustrative example is that of the "pensioners' table" in Jesus College. In 1830, pensioners at Jesus petitioned the college to establish exclusive use of some of the tables in Hall – separated from those of the

dining club called "The Family". While it is not known precisely when the club was founded, it was comprised principally of fellows united by Jacobite sympathies – and was certainly active by 1786 (I am unsure as to whether it still



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Alex Parton-Turner  
is a first-year HSPS  
student at Clare  
College

## I don't consider myself a victim. The boy who stabbed me does.

The blade I was stabbed with on my first day of Year 13 was not a 'zombie knife'. It came from someone's kitchen. I know this because I see the same knife in the cupboards of my friends. It is made of a single piece of stainless steel about the length of a ruler, and has a perforated handle to make it easier to grip.

The scar still aches as I write this. It was a strange, blunt experience; it didn't hurt as much as I thought it would. I can still picture a sharp feeling of pressure followed by an electric numbness that spread across my body, my mind completely blank as my teeth bit the pavement. Most of all, I remember the fear. This is the fear that will stay with me forever, and it is this fear that has made youth violence the defining crisis of our decaying urban centres.

Labour claims to have a bold plan to fix this. It wants to ban zombie knives, which are already illegal in the UK but can still be bought and sold through legal loopholes, and implement tougher sentences for those found carrying them. These are not attempts to fix the problem, but rather to make grand political statements by focusing on a highly visible issue while avoiding the structural causes. Depressingly, beneath the scaremongering, Labour has

a genuinely workable policy. It is an indictment of a political climate that has become so poisoned by a Thatcherite conflation of harsh punishment with justice that it cannot be proud of it. I was stabbed during the classic London robbery – the 'g-check' in a local park. My attackers, carrying away my school bag and my partner's phone, made a getaway on Boris bikes. Thanks to the miracle of the NHS, I was sped to the nearest major trauma centre and spent the night in King College Hospital's Resuscitation Unit. Several tubes, IVs, injections, X-rays, and stitches later, I was limping home. The boys who could have killed me remained at large, and I had to suck it up.

For a lot of young men, the circle of violence starts here. The knife crime charity Redthread aims to reach young men the day they enter hospital; to use the shock of an attack as the jolt needed to push them out of gangs and into rehabilitation. The Labour Party mutely understands this. It will put youth workers in A&E units, custody centres and pupil referral units. Beneath the red rag of "tough on crime" rhetoric is a real, workable policy that seems like it could really make a difference. Its plan for youth mental health support in every school will make a genuine difference

for many young people, regardless of their proximity to knives.

Speaking to other young men who have been stabbed, or who have felt the need to carry knives for their own safety, one inevitably ends up on the same topics: the decimation of our youth clubs under Tory austerity; the slow degradation of community feeling in our cities as the cooperative kitchen is replaced with the humiliation of the foodbank; gangs sucking in children as young as 11 with promises of money and belonging, to turn them into county line drug mules; the ever-present racism in the police service, turning the force that is supposed to protect us into an enemy. A mixed-race co-worker described being slashed in the face by a mentally ill white man. When officers arrived, he was held as a suspect, being questioned as if it was gang related. He had no doubt that if the races were reversed the situation would have gone differently.

Hidden in Labour's six-point action plan are ways to tackle these issues. It will create a "national network of youth hubs" to support teenagers. It will bring in community leaders, faith leaders, families of victims of knife violence and young people into a "Coalition to End Knife Crime". It will create a new offence of child criminal exploitation. It wants

"Beneath the red rag of "tough on crime" rhetoric is a real, workable policy"

to raise the confidence in police forces by overhauling misconduct and vetting procedures and introducing compulsory anti-racism training. These are promises that will be hard to keep and easy to forget. If Labour can stick to them, however, it will be a start on tackling the root causes of knife crime that have been ignored by successive Conservative governments for far too long.

Three months after I was stabbed, I sat in a council-run restorative justice program across from one of the three boys who had attacked me. He had been caught stealing a motorbike with my Zipcard in his pocket. He was small, young, and miserable. He told me about the impact of his arrest on his mother, and how he had just been in the wrong place at the wrong time. I pitied him, and had to force myself to remember that (as the lovely ward nurse had muttered) if the knife had gone any deeper, I would have bled out from a burst artery. The boy spoke as if it wasn't his fault, and I believe him. He was not a violent criminal, but someone with no hope for his future. Labour's policy plan is a step in the right direction, but its rhetoric does not match reality. I do not consider myself a victim. The boy who stabbed me does.



Katie Heggs is a  
third-year History  
and Politics student  
at Churchill College

## What an awful time to study politics!

Last week, Churchill College hosted the ex-Conservative leader William Hague for its annual Antcliffe lecture. The lecture was good and Hague was a formidably impressive speaker. However, this overall positive impression was tainted for me by a cliché uttered by Hague in his closing remarks, a sequence of words that will strike fear into the heart of any HSPSer or HSPol: 'What a time to be studying politics!'

It's a sentence that makes me shudder. It crops up after every political scandal, disaster or disgrace, and in awkward conversations with family friends where you try and justify your choice of subject. I admit, it's a good filler if you don't really know what to say to a weedy 19 year old who now thinks they understand 'game theory' in international relations, but if we take a step back, the statement itself raises some interesting questions about political reality versus political 'academia'.

The ironic thing is that 'politics' as a subject at Cambridge affords its undergraduates a grounding in broad ideological concepts and political thought before allowing its students to tackle "Modern British Politics" (the cooler, more sophisticated older brother of A-level Government and Politics) in their third and final year. The nature of political study at Cambridge means that,

"Nasty, brutish and short could easily describe Rishi Sunak"

sometimes, 'politics' as an academic subject can feel distant, hypothetical and broad (Nietzsche is hardly 'pub talk'). In reality, stating "what a time to be studying politics!" after our Prime Minister makes a bet with Piers Morgan for £10,000 that he will (illegally) deport vulnerable migrants to Rwanda before the next general election, does not even really make sense.

I remain curious as to whether the serious adults who ask this question genuinely believe that for politically minded students, living amid political turmoil is a net positive thing. Even if the comment is meant in jest, it's a low-hanging fruit that finds its home alongside 'I'd vote for you as PM', or the less complimentary, 'What are you going to do with that then?'. A quick browse of the BBC News website informs readers that in the past several days alone, Rishi Sunak is facing pressure to apologise after making transphobic comments in our legislative chamber, Keir Starmer has (predictably) U-turned (again) on green energy, and Donald Trump is most probably going to be the Republican candidate for the next US

presidential election. It's all a bit too much to stomach, even if you happen to enjoy studying the mechanisms that make it all 'tick'.

The reality of politics for students makes the comment 'What a time to be studying politics' darkly comic. A series of unfortunate events over the past decade (Brexit, Covid, Tuition fees, to name just a few) means current undergraduates have grown up suffering through years of austerity and policy-based whiplash. Many students will have chosen to study politics because they want to make a difference, but amid a cost of living crisis, huge amounts of rising debt and the impossibility of owning a home in the foreseeable future, it is easy to be cynical. It's a good time to study politics if you are lucky enough

to have the socioeconomic status to sit comfortably in the 'hypothetical'. But it's not if, like the majority of the electorate, you are vulnerable to the consistently poor decisions of politicians of every party persuasion.

The only tenuous link between

the current cost of living crisis and my copy of Hobbes' *Leviathan* is that 'nasty, brutish and short' could easily describe Rishi Sunak. Much of the political study of Cambridge's students is bigger and broader than the peculiarities of the British political system. So, whilst it's all well and good that I have interesting, accurate and up to date examples to pad out the supervision essays of 25% of my final year essays, this is slightly redundant if the reckless choices of the politicians I'm studying mean I can barely afford to buy a block of cheese. So yes, for the final year students studying 'Modern British Politics', there is a lot for us to write about. But that's beside the point. Is it all very interesting? Yes. But is it also extremely dire? Affirmative.

I don't think it is a 'good time to study politics'. This is because it is simply not a good time to be a student in general. If I hear the phrase one more time, I might just use my copy of *Leviathan* to give the speaker a concussion. The nature of political study at Cambridge, when pitted against the poor choices of politicians affecting our daily life, means that sometimes I'd much rather 'hide out' in the POL8s and SOC10s of the world, in the abstract nature of purely theoretical political ideology. At least, in that world, I don't have to set up a 'Help to buy' ISA.



KATIE HEGGS

Alex Parton-Turner

Katie Heggs





Omar Burhanuddin is a first-year History student at Corpus Christi College

# People love to hate on college choirs. Here's why you shouldn't

“College chapel choirs offer a great public service”

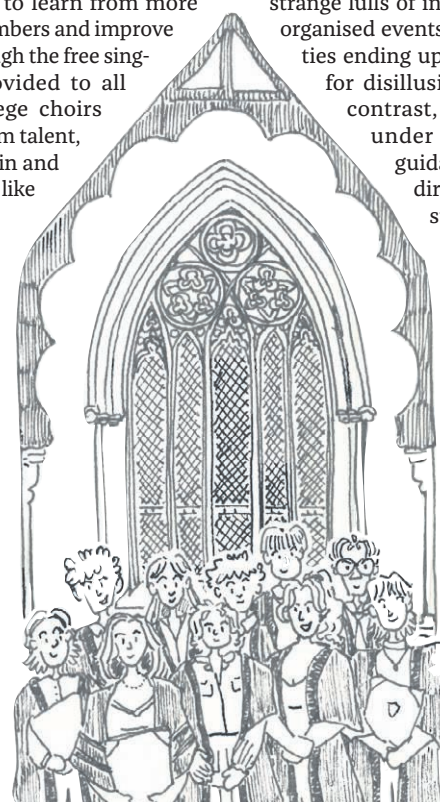
How often do you listen to your college's choir? If, like most students, you rarely set foot into your college chapel, the answer will be never. This isn't particularly surprising: it is fairly easy to be cynical about the topic. Their service schedules are typically unnecessarily packed, and so rows of empty pews are, regrettably, to be expected. Religiosity is on the decline in Cambridge, and as our student body pleasingly diversifies to represent a greater number of nationalities and faiths, college choirs might seem to have lost their place in the ranking of Oxbridge institutions.

Admittedly, it is also easy to feel intimidated by them. College choirs openly perpetuate a lot of the stereotypes associated with Cambridge. While most people will wear their gowns a few times a term for formals, choir members are demanded to don their robes several times a week. The services themselves, with painstakingly choreographed rituals and recitations of unintelligible Latin, often feel overwhelmingly grandiose, even by the standards of this city.

What, then, should we make of college choirs? Are they simply a hopeless anachronism, harking back to an era when colleges were founded, as mine was, for the pursuit not merely of 'education, research and learning', but also 'religion'? What do they have to offer, beyond praying and preaching primarily to themselves, swanning about in their own self-satisfaction? Actually a number of things, I would argue. Although I am irreligious, I believe that college chapel choirs offer a great public service, not merely to the University but to the people of Cambridge more widely.

College choirs are wonderfully inclusive, participatory groups. Though some choirs are restricted to choral scholars alone, many others are open to all students. Before coming to Cambridge, I had never sung before, neither solo nor in a choir (I was that edgy kid who mouthed the words during hymns in school assemblies). But despite my inexperience, I was accepted as a bass into my college choir with nothing more than a friendly, casual audition. I've since had the chance to learn from more experienced members and improve technically through the free singing lessons provided to all members. College choirs naturally platform talent, but they also train and develop newbies like me.

Beyond perfecting your vocal abilities, joining your college choir is also a richly rewarding, communal experience. Sponsoring choral activities is one of the many ways colleges support their students, with benefits ranging from free formals to heavily subsidised tours, both nationally and internationally.



▲ IONA BOYER

All of this fosters a great sense of community across subject and year group divisions. That cohesion is something I think should not be taken for granted in Cambridge student life. Societies, whether college- or university-wide, are often run on a shoestring. With most being entirely student-run on rapidly rotating committees, it is difficult for experience and expertise to transfer. Consequently there is a lot of inefficiency and lethargy involved (think slow communications, strange lulls of inactivity, and poorly organised events), with many societies ending up as revolving doors for disillusioned students.

By contrast, choirs – typically under the professional guidance of a dedicated director of music, and supported financially by their college – are well-oiled machines primed for the long run, practically guaranteeing you a positive, engaging experience.

Finally, it is worth taking a step back, and reflecting on what a stunning privilege it is to have the chance to access such amazing music for free. Being able to listen to the King's Voices – truly the Led Zeppelin of cho-

ral music – in the sublime acoustics of King's college's chapel is a globally unparalleled opportunity. Meanwhile, no less a reviewer than *the New York Times* has rhapsodised on the sonically "heavenly" experience of attending a concert performed by Trinity College's choir. All choral (and other!) concerts are listed on this glorious website, allowing you to easily plan time off to see your favourite performers. Other universities – including, for example, wealthy Ivy League schools – will often only subsidise student access to the arts. Even in Cambridge, for most orchestral, dramatic and sporting performances, spectatorship comes at a premium. But in the religious setting of a chapel choir service, where the music is intended as a public and spiritual benefit, everything is open access. The fact that Cambridge choral singers are not paid, despite spending inordinate amounts of time on private practice, rehearsals and services, only heightens the privilege of listening to them. A privilege provided not only to members of our university, but to all inhabitants of this city.

Students habitually moan about things. This is frequently justified. This can mean, however, that we overlook many of the truly unique privileges that Cambridge affords us at no extra cost. Appreciating your college chapel choir – recognising the services they provide, and revelling in the joys they bring – is one small way of regaining perspective. Even if singing really isn't your thing, consider showing up to a service sometime. Although you may not understand the Latin bits (and most of us singers don't either), you might just enjoy it.



Ruby Cline is a third-year HSPS student at Murray Edwards College

# Cambridge ruins our love languages

“Your partner has very little time to consider cheating”

Do you want to go for a drink next week? In most cases, this question teaches you one thing: they want to go for a drink with you. At Cambridge, you learn an extra thing: they want to go for a drink with you enough to trade a potential library evening for your company. This is big. I remember being doubly flattered by a proposition when I found out they had an essay due the day after. You're willing to spend time with little old me even if it means shuffling around your whole work schedule for the privilege?

The five love languages were outlined in a 1992 book by Baptist minister Gary Chapman. To be clear, the book isn't exactly filled with scientific rigour, but it's a fun opportunity to understand a bit more about the ways you offer and recognise fondness for those around you. He claims that

there are five love languages: words of affirmation; quality time; gifts; acts of service; and physical touch. There are tests online which claim to help you work out your love languages if you're curious.

I was never one for rest in secondary school. I liked action, running between classes, jobs, and whatever social event someone had texted about the day before. "Quality time" wasn't really on my radar. You'd see me when I was free, and I'd really enjoy that time, but there was no reason to carve it out. There was nothing special about time, after all.

There's just so much of it. I preferred acts of service or words of affirmation. If you care about me, you could easily show it by saying it. It's much simpler and quicker that way. Or, if you really care, do my washing up. (You're still absolutely welcome to do my washing



▲ SALICYNA / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

up, reader.)

It was only when I got to university that quality time started to feel important. If you go for a coffee with a student here, you know that they could be doing work. Instead, they're choosing to spend that time with you. Quality time started to feel like an act of service in itself. Other expressions of fondness become equated with acts of service when they become an inconvenience, too – it's a real sign of commitment to suffer through sleeping over in a single bed, but the physical touch in such a space feels necessary rather than loving.

On the other hand, words of affirmation felt a bit polluted. I read friends' shining comments on LinkedIn posts about how great and successful everyone they knew were, knowing that these compliments were simply an easy way to get impressive people on their feeds. And Cambridge students love to talk the talk without walking the walk, bigging themselves up with very little evidence to point to. Sometimes I don't believe the confidence some students have in themselves, let alone the confidence they have in me. Compliments feel less impactful when you know that someone has a general philosophy of saying a lot and doing very little.

Perhaps it's not a bad thing that our love languages adapt to the environment

we're in. Love will of course change when the environment changes, and even if the crammed terms here aren't hugely enjoyable, I'm glad I've learned to appreciate the limited snatches of quality time available throughout them. Some romantic standards here are very sweet. Who doesn't want to be hard-launched while dressed to the nines for formal, or to be introduced to their partner's college children? At the very least, be reassured that your partner has very little time to consider cheating.

Nonetheless, I do think Cambridge students must go about their love lives aware that the structures of this university mean that romance can be plagued by inconveniences and stresses unlike life in other environments. Take care not to let your standards drop to accepting a 15-minute lunch date between supervisions, or to expect your partner to woo you with flowers if you won't write a card because your hand has seized up from a practice exam. And never compare your grades to anyone you're romantically involved with. Cambridge is set up to mess with your love languages – don't let it infiltrate the relationships you really care about. And make sure you're always looking on the bright side. After all, there are few people in the world who can say that their hot date cycled off before sunrise to write an essay.

Ruby Cline



## Interviews

# Andrew Mitchell MP on the next election and Cameron's return

Isabella Dowden talks international development with the history alumnus

First entering the House of Commons in 1987 when current Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was just seven years old, Andrew Mitchell is a veteran politician. During his tenure, he has sat in the House of Commons with nine prime ministers, held five different ministerial and shadow ministerial positions, and been in and out of government three times.

I meet Mitchell during his visit to Jesus College, where he studied History as an undergraduate, and he tells me that returning to his alma mater has him reminiscing over his “wonderful” student days. Starting university is a time of considerable change for anyone, but for Mitchell, who had been on active duty in the army right up to the start of Freshers' Week, even more so: “I'd been in the United Nations forces in Cyprus, and I left Cyprus on the Friday and arrived here on the Sunday.” While he admits he “didn't trouble the exam scores too much” during his time at Cambridge, he had “three really fabulous years”, a highlight being “making an enormous number of friends”.

It was at Cambridge that the future MP for Sutton Coldfield got his start in politics, chairing the Conservative Association (CUCA) in 1977, before being elected president of the Union the following year. He recalls that it was during his Union presidency that he decided: “If politics would have me, I would very much like to have the chance.” Reflecting on the Union today, to my surprise he remarks: “I heard that there's been some chicanery recently in the Union

in terms of elections,” alluding to last year's election-rigging scandal involving Max Ghose. Mitchell is keen to condemn the impropriety, stressing that it is “very, very much to be regretted”, but, as he recalls, it is certainly not the first election scandal to rock student politics at Cambridge. “Just before I came to Cambridge, I remember someone actually stole the ballot box and had it thrown off Magdalene Bridge into the Cam!”

Despite being heavily involved in politics at university, Mitchell did not enter into a political career directly after graduating, instead working for the investment bank Lazard. Gaining experience in other sectors is Mitchell's key piece of advice for anyone interested in a career in politics: “You need to do something different before you go [into politics], otherwise you're not going to add very much to the House of Commons,” he says.

Mitchell has held positions in government across social security, economic affairs, home affairs, and the party whip, but has spent the most time in the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, working in international development. In 2022, after being on the backbenches for a decade, Mitchell was brought back into the cabinet by Rishi Sunak as minister for development and Africa – a position he previously held under Cameron. He tells me that balancing his cabinet duties with the day-to-day job of serving his constituents produces a unique set of responsibilities, but is incredibly rewarding. “My day is certainly spent looking after

my constituents, but also in the Foreign Office, trying to ensure that we [Britain] make a contribution to one of the critical issues of the time, which is doing something about these huge discrepancies of opportunity and wealth which disfigure our world.”

“  
If we don't hang together, we will certainly hang separately

Decades of experience in the sector have afforded Mitchell a ringside seat on how global challenges have evolved and he presents a grave assessment of the situation today: “The challenges are the greatest that I've seen, I think in my lifetime,” he says. “Between 1990 and 2020, the world made quite extraordinary progress in tackling the extremes of poverty and human misery than at any other time in history. But since 2020, we've had the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the events in Sudan and in the Sahel, we've had the events in Gaza. The challenges feel much greater now than they did in my earlier time in government.”

Mitchell gained an additional responsibility in government in November 2023, with the shock return of David Cameron to government as foreign secretary. Because he re-entered parlia-

ment via the House of Lords, Lord Cameron cannot address MPs in the House of Commons, which raised questions about how he would be scrutinised and held to account. As “Cameron's number two”, this job falls to Mitchell, who now fields questions in the Commons on his behalf, and is keen to stress his commitment to transparency. “When David Cameron and I last worked together, we worked very strongly on an agenda in terms of international development of transparency, openness and scrutiny. And so I think it's in both of our instincts and DNA to deliver that fully for the House of Commons.”

Cameron and Mitchell previously worked together in opposition between 2005 and 2010, and then in government from 2010 to 2012. One of their core focuses was committing Britain to the UN target of spending 0.7% of GNI on foreign aid, but this target was cut to 0.5% under Boris Johnson. Mitchell

led the rebellion against the cuts and sought to overturn them but was unsuccessful. I ask if Cameron's return to government could signal a potential window for that rebellion to be reignited, but Mitchell says he has now reconciled with the decision: “The

deal is that it will return to 0.7% when the fiscal tests are satisfied, and although both the foreign secretary and I opposed the cut, we both completely accept that deal.”

While Mitchell is “really pleased to be working for him once again” on a personal level, he also views Sunak's decision to bring Cameron back as an “absolute masterstroke” in terms of election strategy. “I think the prime minister now has the cabinet with which he wants to fight and win the next election, and I very much hope that this is the right team to secure victory.”

The latest opinion polls show Labour to have an 8-point lead over the Conservatives, but Mitchell expresses total confidence: “I'm sure my party will win the next election, but the whole parliamentary party must give Rishi Sunak every possible support, because if we don't hang together, we will certainly hang separately.”

In the last century, no party has won five elections in a row. With official campaign launches growing ever closer following the prime minister's confirmation that “2024 will be an election year”, we won't be waiting long to find out if Mitchell's confidence will be brought into fruition, or if his party will be “hung” out to dry.



◀ ANDREW MITCHELL

# Tommy Blaize's glittering career

Naima Clarvis speaks to the Strictly singer ahead of his UK solo tour

I'm going to throw you back to 1970s Liverpool. You're at a Labour club, it's a Friday night and you're ready for some good entertainment. You take a long draw of your cigarette, ruefully recall your dire luck in the bingo round you've spectacularly failed at, but you're eager to hear the next act: the Blaize Brothers. It's a group of singers, brothers apparently, your friend tells you. Here they are! You strain as you can't quite see them over the heads in front – odd as you had a good view before. You lift your gaze just a little higher, and, wait, how old are they!? They



TOMMY BLAIZE ▶

open their mouths and begin a joyful tune. Nine, eight and six, your friend informs you. Nine, eight and six ...

And leading that trio of brothers was singer, musician and *Strictly* star Tommy Blaize. He began his music career before he'd even reached a decade, his and his brothers' talent spotted as they sang to their neighbours around the streets of Liverpool. Quickly, their local renown grew, as they joined a well known north-west roadshow run by Hilda Fallon. Blaize remembers their first gig from the other side, that of the stage: we “walked into this room, filled with smoke – a proper labour club, and I remember seeing this red electric guitar and thinking, this is the world I want to be in.” Thrown onto the scene, they would perform in between oth-

er sets – bingo, music, dancing – a whirlwind of entertainment that nonetheless made a lot of professional work after seem “really easy in comparison”: the smoke-free air and pre-4am hours were welcome bonuses after this beginning.

The more Blaize performed, the more he got into it. “We would be in social clubs and one night, it would be a fantastic piano player, but the next the players might be terrible and I'd be upset.” He wanted to know how it all worked, the ins and outs of the band, how to read music, compose and write, so he went to Mabel Fletcher music college in Liverpool, completing a practical undergrad and then a Jazz master's. Able to delve into the world of the genre, this passion continued – he's “fascinated by Jazz. It doesn't have many rules and there's always windows you haven't opened.” However, he does admit that “deep down in my soul, I'm a soul singer.”

But of course, on *Strictly Come Dancing* for four months of the year, Blaize

is tested on all kinds of styles. He “likes the challenge” because “you don't know what you're going to get: they throw a tune at you and you see if you can handle it.” Alongside three other talented singers, they cover a lot of ground – “we've all got three or four different hats.” And each hat is certainly used. Blaize explains that you might go from country western (which must be a cowboy hat) to jazz (black fedora?) to musicals (top hat) all in succession, not only requiring mental agility, but being rather knacker for a vocalist. The musicians also record the results show after singing all day in the main show – you're “praying your main song doesn't come back!” The most challenging part for Tommy remains when “the BBC bravely trust a Scouser to tackle songs in different languages”. So far, there have been no viewer complaints, but Ed Balls' decision to do Gangnam Style was certainly one of the higher hurdles he's encountered.

I ask Blaize what his most surprising moment has been: “I never expected to be on stage with Aretha Franklin and Stevie Wonder singing happy birthday to Nelson Mandela.” With the incredible position of being part of the house band for Mandela's 90th at Hyde Park, Blaize learned a range of songs from different artists, ending with the unforgettable moment of singing to the head of state face-to-face. He's often reminded of this by the “letter we all got, thanking us from Nelson”. Like all the best things, he keeps it in his bathroom.

And before Blaize returns to our screens and graces our ears this September on *Strictly*, he's doing his first UK solo tour. Bringing together his array of skills – piano, guitar and vocals – he's performing at 51 different spots in the UK until late summer. It's a packed calendar, but Blaize is not worried about his voice getting tired. His fool proof trick for a tickle? You can't go wrong with pineapple.



# Looking for love? So is the animal kingdom

**Rachel Duke** goes on a Valentine's date with the animal kingdom's most eligible bachelors

It's that time of year again. February (scientifically proven to be the worst month of the year) rolls around, the air starts to smell like spring, and the shops start stocking teddy bears and heart-shaped Jellycats. Love it or loathe it, Valentine's Day is here to stay. But just how much do scientists understand about the biology underlying this feeling the poets call love? Is falling in love a sensation unique to humans, or are there other members of the animal kingdom that can be struck by Cupid's arrow?

Although the heart has long been the organ of choice for those designing Valentine's Day cards, the brain is the real *love machine*. You might recognise love when you feel it, and the arts have understood love for centuries, entertaining us with tales of star-crossed lovers, kindred spirits, and twin flames. In a twist no one saw coming, scientists have a much more practical view of what draws two individuals together and, because of this, defining love is difficult.

Love is usually split into three distinct, though not mutually exclusive, categories: lust, attraction, and attachment. Each is associated with a specific hormone profile. Lust is defined by raised testosterone and oestrogen (the 'sex hormones') and is thought to be the driving force behind the physi-

cal act of sex. Attraction is defined by raised dopamine and noradrenaline, and reduced serotonin. Dopamine is important in the brain's reward pathways and noradrenaline is known to signal excitement (like adrenaline) explaining the excitement of a crush or the 'honeymoon period' of a relationship. However, dopamine signalling is also known to play a role in addiction and, interestingly, reduced serotonin has been linked with obsession - OCD is also thought to be associated with reduced serotonin. Furthermore, arousal has been linked to reduced activity in the prefrontal cortex (involved in critical thinking). Attachment is found in platonic, as well as romantic, relationships and is defined by increased oxytocin and ADH production. Popular science defines oxytocin as the 'love hormone' and, while it is not this simple, it is known to be important in building a bond; it is released when mothers breastfeed and when cuddling. With so many hormones turning your body into a chemical cocktail, it is no wonder love is so all-consuming.

How much do we know about love in animals? One only has to watch an episode or two of a David Attenborough documentary before it becomes clear

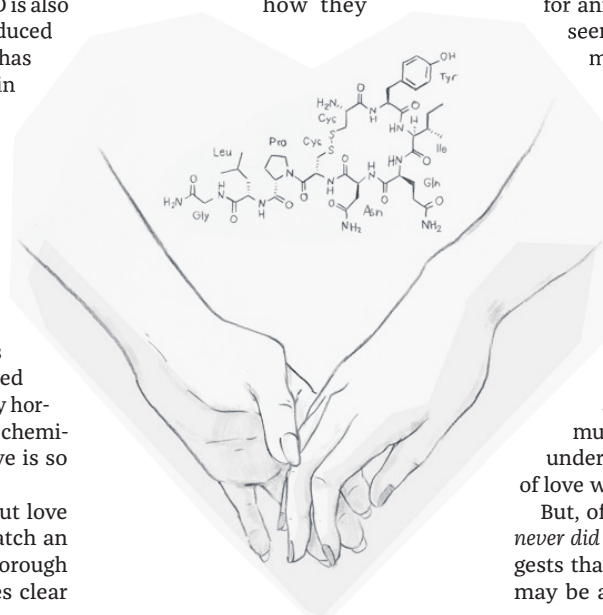
that some animals deeply care for one another. Elephants experience grief, otters hold hands as they sleep so they do not drift apart as they sleep, albatrosses return to the same mate for their entire life, and many pet owners swear their pet loves them back. However, we cannot simply provide an animal with a questionnaire about its feelings towards its partner. We must analyse brain activity or hormonal changes and infer how they

feel. Using an MRI machine, scientists have seen that when pair-bonded animals think about their partner, there is increased activity in the amygdala (the brain's emotional centre). Similarly, oxytocin is increased when dogs cuddle their owners, though the jury is still out as to what extent this is 'cupboard love' by association. We might expect that many animals experience lust as, from an evolutionary point of view, it is beneficial for animals to want to mate. It also seems plausible to me that some monogamous pair-bonding animals do feel a deeper love for one another. It is evolutionarily advantageous for the pair to stay together to care for their young and love might help with this. But, does it matter if animals fall in love? From a conservation point of view, it matters greatly. Putting two animals of opposite sexes in the same room is no guarantee that they will mate. They must want to do so, and perhaps understanding more about the role of love will aid conservation.

But, of course, *the course of true love never did run smooth* and evidence suggests that love in the animal kingdom may be as complex and multifaceted

as love in our own society. We should be wary of applying human-specific terms to animals but it can be useful for illustrative purposes in this context. Same-sex intercourse, cohabitation, and co-parenting are more common than you might think. Up to 90% of sex between two giraffes is between two males; 10% of rams refuse to mate with ewes but will mate with other rams and the pair-bonding in albatrosses can occur between two females that go on to co-parent a chick. Culture and homophobia have constrained conversations surrounding sexuality in animals. When same-sex behaviour was first identified in penguins it was considered too shocking for the public and, when made available to scientists, was written partly in Greek. While this behaviour may seem confusing on the surface, if we learn that animals can fall in love, this would provide the beginnings of an explanation for same-sex bonds in the animal kingdom. So, if you're looking for love this February, take comfort in the fact that the entire animal kingdom is with you on that one. And, if the thought of going to one of the many speed dating events that various societies are hosting across Cambridge sends shivers down your spine, go give your dog a hug; the evidence suggests they might just love you back.

◀ ELSA PAULSON / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



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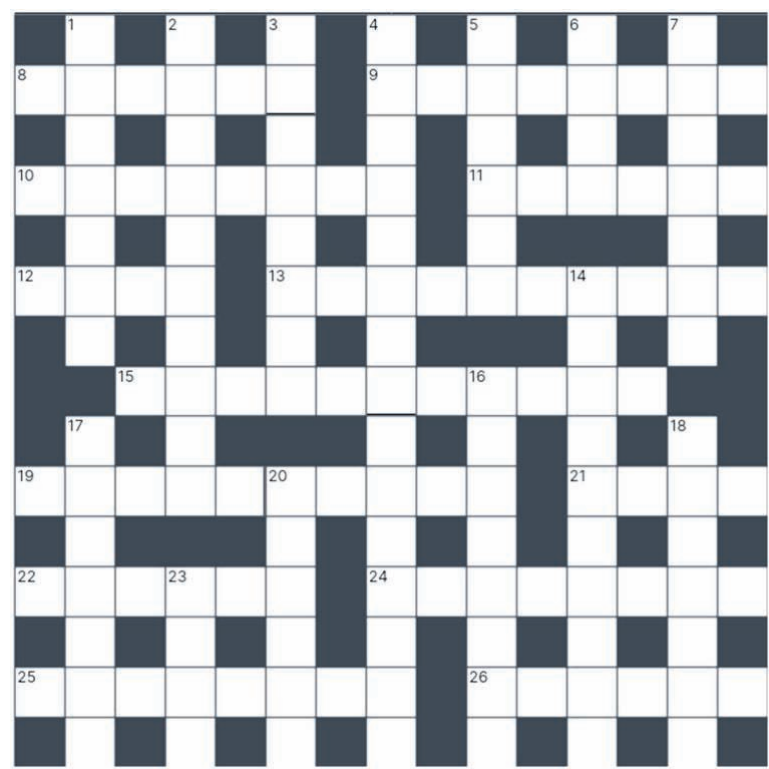
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# The Smoking Area

## Varsity Crossword



## Quick by Bombe

- Across**  
8 Historically 1/86400 of a day, now 9192631770 oscillations of Caesium (6)  
9 The Stars and Stripes (4,4)  
10 2023 Ridley Scott film, or a French dictator (8)  
11 Surf the web (6)  
12 Like Homer's Iliad for example (4)  
13 Landlords (10)  
15 2023 Christopher Nolan film, or a Christ's College ex-student (11)  
19 Treaty signed by Eastern Bloc in 1955, in Poland (6,4)  
21 Realise or something from a tree (4)  
22 Hotter than a two dollar \_\_\_\_\_ (6)  
24 Poem that might begin: There once was a man from Nantucket... (8)  
25 2023 Emerald Fennell film, or a pain from NaCl (8)  
26 Plant that might be a prickly pear, barrel or old man (6)
- Down**  
1 Does up (7)  
2 Astrological predictions (10)  
3 Glue (8)  
4 Text printed at the top of every page of a book/newspaper (7,8)  
5 2023 Greta Gerwig film, or a BBQ in Aussie slang (6)  
6 A hairstyle (4)  
7 2023 Bradley Cooper film, or an expert (7)  
14 Caribbean Island with capital San Juan (6,4)  
16 What I, as a mathmo, am terrified of (8)  
17 Associated with political views and policies of extreme change (7)  
18 Having a thick consistency (7)  
20 Large Arctic mammal in the Beatles lyric "I am the Eggman, I am the \_\_\_\_" (6)  
23 The name of four UK art galleries (4)

## Cryptic by Sophocles

- Across**  
8 A degree is a helpful thing for an ape (6)  
9 Imitated bird like an true expert - duck, initially (8)  
10 Force to join ship's crew in Chinese port (8)  
11 Leaderless African country becoming European peninsula (6)  
12 Importunately hiding fish (4)  
13 Man after crooked riches gets old currency (10)  
15 Supreme power agitates nervy egoist (11)  
19 Clean motor goes around F1 circuit (5,5)  
21 Report contained in excitement (4)  
22 Dad with extremes of chastity gets Pope's office (6)  
24 Bury overturned French king inside (8)  
25 Alarming, anarchic, and not very important (8)  
26 Dig up the body of former philosopher (6)
- Down**  
1 Brutalist architecture undeniably has a use somewhere, primarily for art school (7)  
2 Indirect way of confusing outbound artist (10)  
3 Agitatedly reaching to be in control (2,6)  
4 The precise thing (8,7)  
5 Norwegian artist taking in one German city (6)  
6 Dance endlessly for point (4)  
7 Wickedness found in dry spells (7)  
14 Charity arm-wrestle for women in power (10)  
16 Gunge on extremities leads to caves (8)  
17 Satan upset after note from instrumental work (7)  
18 Law changes concerning models (7)  
20 Lamenting being pregnant after a Romeo disappears (6)  
23 Gargoyles in possession of Jason's ship (4)

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Do YOU WANT TO SET A CROSSWORD, NUMBER PUZZLE, OR SOMETHING ELSE? EMAIL MJU29@CAM.AC.UK TO GET INVOLVED.



## Girl of the week revisited

By Molly O'Neill

“Bilingual, pleasant, shy”: the epitome of success as a woman at Cambridge in 1954. Indeed, the traits were desirable enough to get Kari dubbed as *Varsity* Girl of the Week on 22nd October.

I find myself asking, 70 years on, whether the column was (as Kari believed it to be) really just “a joke.” Because while it propounds an image of womanhood that is self-consciously dated, the journalistic choices it makes are not neutral; they take on fresh life in their contemporary climate. “Tall and blonde” (naturally!), and fond of “the open-air,” Kari’s feature might be being used dryly to comment on traditional criteria for feminine value, but she still fulfils the brief. Can a woman that appears so perfectly ‘woman’ in 1954 really

be used to deconstruct the gender norms that she so effectively fulfils? I would suggest that she can’t, and while I’m sure that Kari was a total catch and a brilliant student, perhaps the inclusion of ‘*Varsity* Girl of the Week’ in October’s paper fails to make fun of traditional womanhood and actually reinforces it. Not that this will necessarily pose a problem for all; traditional femininity is not definitionally bad, and for some it might be the perfect choice. But not for all: it should be challenged rather than blindly accepted as the expectation or norm.

And what if we ran the column today? ‘*Varsity* woman/man/person of the week’? Would we succeed at satirising the behaviours that we actually reluctantly cherish?

‘Kari consistently spends her Sunday nights in Lola-Los, pretending that she doesn’t love VKs. She tells her friends at home that lacrosse isn’t even that posh - “everyone at uni tries it!” - and has learnt to cut corners ahead of all her supervisions. She hates that she missed general release for Emmanuel’s May Ball, and congratulates her friends for landing summer internships but immediately gets online to apply. She cares where she placed in Tripos.’

As much as our 2024 Kari might hate to admit it, she has become the spitting image of the stereotype that she so feared. Cambridge, not just womanhood, now has her in its clutches.

So maybe *Varsity* isn’t ready for the comeback of this column. Or maybe it is. I’m open to discussion. In the meantime, I think we can look at 1954 with a comical sort of fondness. At least the paper was trying. As for Kari, I hope that she is still taking summers in Scandinavia, breathing in the cool, clean air above the fiords despite her age. Who knows, she might even have got promoted from secretary.

## Easy Sudoku

5				1	2	9	8	7
7		9	5	6	3	1	2	
4	2				8			5
	7		6	5		2	1	3
3	1	2	9			5		
	4	5	3	2				9
	9	7	2		6	3		
1	5		8		9	4	6	
	6		1	3	5	7		

## Hard Sudoku

					7	3	1	5
5				6	4		8	
9	8			5	3			
2		1	5	3	6			
3	5						4	2
8		9	4	2			5	3
	9	8	3		2	5		4
4			9			2		1
	3		6	4	5	8		7

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# Lifestyle

## How to become an alpha male

**Felix Armstrong** tries to live up to his name and embrace the alpha male grindset

### Monday

6:00am. I lock eyes with my screaming Yoda alarm clock: "Alpha, you are," he tells me. Fueled by this intergalactic affirmation, I roll out of bed, assemble the closest thing to sportswear my wardrobe can muster (inches-too-short joggers and a Chelsea football shirt), and stumble onto the pitch-black streets of Cambridge. With the help of my Spotify-curated running playlist (I wonder if Andrew Tate likes Self Esteem and Fontaines DC?), I manage a respectable stretch of running before stopping to retch outside of a shuttered Greene King. By 6:50 I'm back from a run just long enough not to be embarrassing, and catch a glimpse of the real alphas as I slope past my college gym. Following a cold shower that didn't bring me as close to cardiac arrest as I'd expected, I change into an outfit that will later be mocked by all of my friends who know of my alpha ambitions: baggy jeans, ambiguously seasonal knit, and guinea pig socks (some of them are wearing bowties, some tophats). Next, I plug in my laptop and brainwash myself with alpha energy. The first ten-minute alpha affirmation video to pop up on YouTube gives me a wild ride, with a smooth American tone set over Minecraft-style ambient music hypnotising me with some common-sense mantras ("I express how I feel in every situation"), and others which are actively concerning given the video's 600,000 views: "being with me is the best possible choice any woman could make" or "having what I want is my undeniable birth-right". After a quick check of the stock markets, I realise the single healthy item I have in my food cupboard is a bag of Tesco easy peelers, so I take in a filling fry-up at the buttery (a breakfast endorsed by Eddie Hall) and begin my Monday hustle.

### Tuesday

Having woken up before my alarms, I stay in bed until 6:20 am. But I spend this time visualising myself driving through the streets of LA in a Mercedes G-Wagon. Important work was being done. With registration to my college gym still pending, I hop back into my running trainers (read: suede sneakers) and brave the negative temperature. Looking for inspiration, I search 'Alpha male playlist' on Spotify and am greeted by a photo of Taylor Swift clutching a bag of weed, accompanied by a mixtape full of Bjork, Fiona Apple, and Phoebe Bridgers. Alphas run in silence, anyway. I make it to the Greene King without retching, brave another cold shower, and by 7:20am I'm sat at my desk, yearning for some affirmations. Having only made it to 9am yesterday before taking a beta nap, I decide to up the ante this time: a meditation video titled 'How to become your own James Bond' seems to be just the ticket. After eight sleep-inducing minutes, during which the phrase "I know how to handle my weapon" was said far too many times, I decide to journal instead

to create my own affirmations. With a diss deadline impending, I complete a pageful of scrawlings reminiscent of Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*. Having forgotten to do an alpha grocery shop yesterday, I opt for one - fuck it, two - easy peelers, and start the grind.

### Wednesday

I wake up at 7:00am. This is bad: every single alpha male has been hustling for a whole hour before me. Having been told by my friends that the excruciating pain in my shins is in fact not normal, being caused by the "clown" shoes I'd been running in, I hastily prepare for an alpha male gym session. As I approach the college gym, however, I spot one too many alphas inside, and I become seized by a beta fear which drives me out of the college gates and back on another painful run. Finding myself without yesterday's concealing 6am darkness, I

duck down residential streets and alleys to avoid my *Bambi*-like sprint being mocked by early-rising school children. Back at college, cold-showered, I try to whip myself into shape with some more masculine affirmations, and stumble across a video titled 'How not to give a f\*ck affirmations'.

Thinking this will give my waning alpha energy a well needed boost, the still image of Savage era Johnny Depp the video faces me with, alongside the greeting "Morning, these affirmations are for grown-ups who are sick of other people's garbage," makes me run a mile. My kitchen isn't a mile away, but I end up there, attempting to make up for my poor alpha breakfasts so far with a vegan take on bacon and eggs.

### Thursday

I spring out of bed at 6:00am - back on track for a superior mindset, huge muscles, and stock market success. Listening to the pained screams of my hamstrings, I decide to hit the gym and, luckily for me, my early start means that none of the bigger boys have arrived by the time I get there. Bewildered by the big machines and my reflection in

the mirror, I do some pushing and some pulling and imagine I'm Paul Mescal in that video of him preparing for *Gladiator 2*. I listen to my usual playlist as consolation amid my severe discomfort, introducing Big Thief to an alpha workout for perhaps the first time. I'm beginning to look forward to my freezing showers, the threat of hyperventilation having mostly subsided. I watch another alpha manifestation video, but they're getting rather samey. So, I have a look at the stock market and read some Bloomberg for a thrill. I reheat my leftover scrambled tofu from yesterday (you can't do that with scrambled eggs: meal-prepping is super alpha) before cycling to the Varsity office for a long day of convincing my incredulous co-editors that I am actually committing to my alpha routine.

### Friday

6am passes and I'm asleep. 7am too. Then 8, then 9, then 10. I finally come to and realise my failure. The fifth and final day of my alpha routine has been let down by me being a flimsy beta. I blame this publication entirely, as well as the pub social that led me to Taco Bell at 2am swearing on Dan Bilzerian's life that I would be wide awake in four hours. The day's routine is too far gone to salvage, but I might as

well indulge in some alpha male mindfulness and reflect on my transformation (or lack thereof). As a notorious late sleeper, the early mornings did very little for me: I would often nap in the late mornings rather than using my extra hours awake for any productive use. I do understand the exceptionalism the early rises offer, though: the feeling of being awake far before anyone else is a good one, but it all feels too self-flagellating for me. The alpha coaches with American accents and smooth tones insist that the alpha male is guaranteed everything he wants in life; yet, he must torture himself to attain them - with sleep deprivation, freezing showers, and sweat. By no means am I attempting to sympathise with the poor alpha, but the whole mindset behind the regime feels needlessly punishing and a tad exploitative. Of course waking up early, going for a run, and doing mindfulness exercises could well help someone looking for motivation or a clearer mind, but must it be doused in competition, vitriol, and gender hatred? These are by no means new revelations, and likely an excuse to keep my lie-ins and morning Instagram scrolls. But, to me, the benign components of the alpha lifestyle seem far better left alone and un-weaponised.

## Recipe corner



### Panna cotta with raspberry compote and shortbread crumbs

by Charlotte Knorzer

#### Ingredients

- ① 170ml double cream
- ② 100ml milk (I used whole milk)
- ③ 1/2 vanilla pod
- ④ 90g sugar
- ⑤ 2 sheets gelatin OR a vegan alternative like agar agar
- ⑥ 150g raspberries
- ⑦ 2 shortbread fingers
- ⑧ mint for garnish

#### Method

① Start by soaking your gelatin sheets in cold water for a few minutes. Slice open the vanilla pod lengthwise before scraping out the vanilla pulp. Add 60g of sugar, milk, and pulp to a pot and bring to a boil.

② Remove from the stove, add double cream, and immediately stir in the gelatin sheets until they fully dissolve. Pour into moulds or small bowls/coffee mugs. Let the panna cotta cool slightly, then cover with cling film and put in the fridge for at least 4 hours.

③ Start the compote shortly before serving. Add the remaining 30g of sugar and raspberries to a pot, leaving a few to garnish. Place on a low heat. Stir periodically and until the fruit has broken down and the compote is slightly thick. Turn off the heat and set aside.

④ Place the shortbread crumbs in a freezer bag and hammer with a heavy object. Gently toast the crumbs until they have reached a deeper golden color.

⑤ Pop the panna cotta out of the molds. Tracing a knife along the edges can help with this. Lay a ring of shortbread crumbs. Then, ladle over a few spoons of warm raspberry compote and garnish with fresh raspberries and mint. Enjoy.



▲ HEIDI ATKINS



# A Cambridge guide to Valentine's dates

Struggling to sort out a date for you and your partner? Look no further than **Charlotte Knorzer's** expertly crafted itinerary for a romantic (and cheap) date

**V**alentine's day is looming ahead, and you are unsure how to spend the special day with your partner? Look no further, as I have crafted the ultimate Valentine's Day guide for your romantic day in Cambridge.

11am, let's start the day with some good coffee. Make your way to Bould Brothers on Round Church Street and grab a latte accompanied by a sweet treat. If you are lucky and the British weather graces you with a few rays of sunshine, enjoy your coffee outside with a beautiful view of Round Church. As you wrap up breakfast, plan your day ahead and head

towards Magdalene College.

Check out a few of the shops on Magdalene Street - I really like Lost in Vinyl. While some of their newer or more popular records may break your budget, they have a



huge selection of marked-down older albums; some second-hand records even go for as little as 3£. Personal tip: have a look at their collection of electronic releases; they have quite a few 90s classics, including Leftfield, Massive Attack, and The Prodigy.

Only a few doors down, you will find Country Traditionals.

If you are looking to gift your partner a thoughtful and reasonably priced mug or heart-shaped bowl, you might find yourself in the right place. Even though some of the bigger pieces are somewhat expensive, you can find an ornate coffee cup or a cute dipping bowl for no more than £10. If, instead, you are looking to get your partner a more traditional gift like flowers, pop into What the Fleur and splurge on a little bouquet.

1pm, time for some food. Depending on your budget, head either to Franco Manca or the market. While Franco Manca does have a nice student deal, which includes Pizza and a glass of wine for 12£,



you will certainly find more affordable options at the market. If you are interested in the latter, look for Shelley and Sarah's. Even though market food can (quite often) be underwhelming, we

are trying to fit a whole

day of activities into our budget here. Chips and mushrooms are probably not the most exquisite meal your palate has ever been exposed to, but for only £3.30, they are perfect for a student budget.

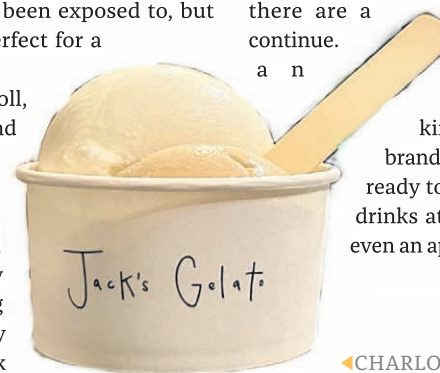
For a little digestive stroll, head down Kings' Parade and make your way to the botanic gardens. If you are lucky, you might already see some early bloomers, such as snowdrops, on your way there. Make sure to bring your CamCard for free entry and enjoy a romantic walk

through the winter garden.

4pm, study break! Enjoy the last rays of sunshine and make your way back to the city. Pick a library of your choice and spend a few hours doing work. It may be Valentine's Day, but the grind never stops.

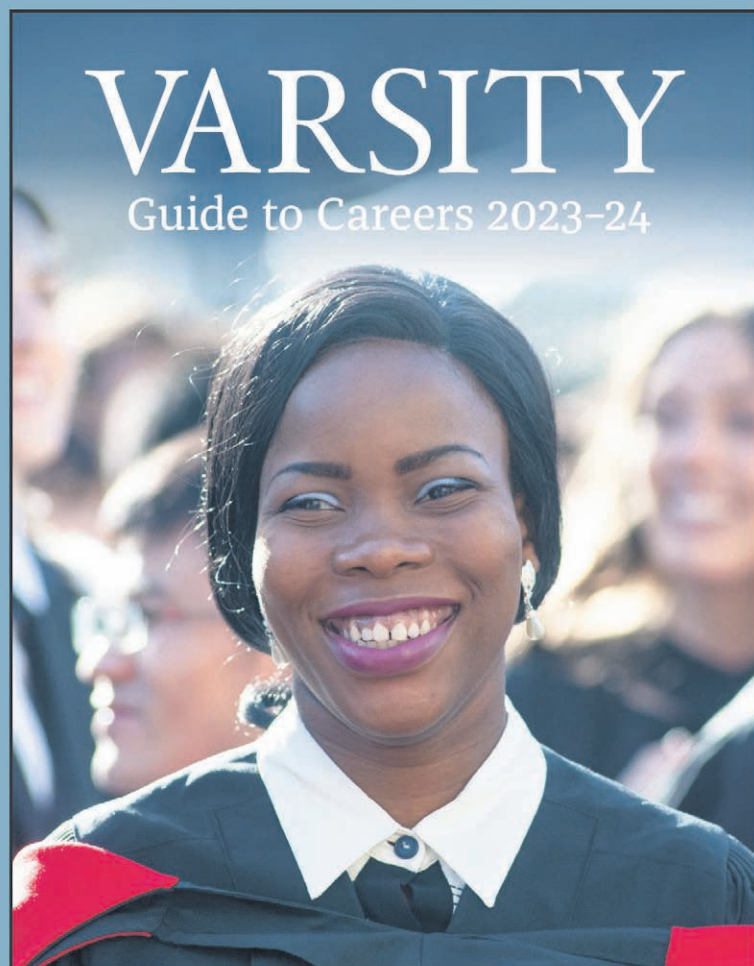
Enough studying? Time to go back to your Valentine's Day responsibilities and look for a restaurant! Walk back to King's Parade and enjoy a hearty bowl of soup or some crispy Pork Katsu at Ittou. This little restaurant's charm lies in both its cosy underground location and the intimate setting and atmosphere. It is unpretentious, fairly cheap, and the star of the show is undoubtedly the food. Have some Japanese beer and share a few appetizers with your partner while recapping your successful day.

Now, depending on how you are feeling, there are a few ways your night can continue. If you are in the mood for early night, simply head to Jack's Gelato (cheesy and kind of predictable - but so on brand for Valentine's Day). If you feel ready to keep going, how about a few drinks at the Prince Regent or maybe even an appearance at Wednesday Revs?



◀CHARLOTTE KNORZER

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**Arts**

# Space Invaders: 'A whole lot of tat'

**Loveday Cookson** finds Emily Lawson-Todd's room weaves sketches, plants, and bits and bobs together into a tapestry of potential

**B**itter gusts punctuate Sidney street, affirming I am again in Cambridge. Emily Lawson-Todd's room feels entirely separate from the hostility of the city, offering an enveloping warmth. With sprawling windows overlooking King Street, self-confessing to being "really nosey" it is the perfect perch for the journalistic curiosity she exudes. Observing everything from break-ups to fights, her view is as fascinating and eclectic as her room, a tapestry of moments, memories and acquisitions. Subtly curated, Emily's artistic flair weaves itself through every item. The sunny orange colour palette is freckled with flecks of vibrant green from numerous fake plants – though she "can't keep anything alive", her room is far from devoid of life.

**“Emily's room is more than 'white walls' but a tapestry of the past and potential**

Vibrancy consumes the well-worn sage candlesticks adorning old wine bottles, bunting brushing against the blurry film photos that Emily has “mag-pied”. The “magpie-

ing” e x - tends to her rich blue rug, wilfully surrendered by her parents. “There’s photos of me on this rug from when I was little” – it’s more than a centrepiece. More than tying together a room, or providing somewhere to put your feet when clambering out of bed in the cold winter months, it offers a chronology of Emily’s room, incorporating every iteration of herself. The white pinpricked paper star echoes this continuation, a first-year Michaelmas birthday present that has been put in “all the rooms I’ve lived in and has just been a bit of a constant”. So too does her mum’s green 90s necklace, a recent unearthing, mediating Emily’s “mourning” of the leather coat her mum discarded.

Her fireplace or “yee-haw corner”, owing to the residence of her banjo and cowboy boots, litters the space with artistry. While others “have made them into mini-shrines”, including one honouring Danny DeVito, Emily’s

houses “some remnants of the tragedy paper” and boasts the postcard of a home nightclub from her mum. Emily believes “I can find sentiments everywhere,” even in “sticky floors and £2 jagerbombs”. Her room is swelled with traces of her illustrative talents, and she admits her “love [of] looking at spreads. Just going through papers and looking at how they’ve set out the pages.” Like the tapestries above her bed, each object amounts to a patch of fabric, in isolation able, but viewed h a r - mony

with her hand-painted fish mug, nestled next to a water bottle of watercolour koi or her elephant garland, it forges a tapestry, an inhabitable art.

If her room were an exhibition, Emily would title it: “A whole lot of tat”. ‘Tat’ may feel at first affronting, casting aspersions on the value contained within her cream walls; people rush to defend the value of freshers’ first day pictures, her friend dressed as Dolly Parton, or the incidentally dried flowers, forging themselves as the focal point of her mantlepiece. But so what if it is ‘tat’? It’s not so much “little fragments of the everyday but it’s more just a room and I live in it ... I don’t know why you would want to be somewhere with white walls.” Like the early modern

**“Subtly curated, Emily's artistic flair weaves itself through every item**

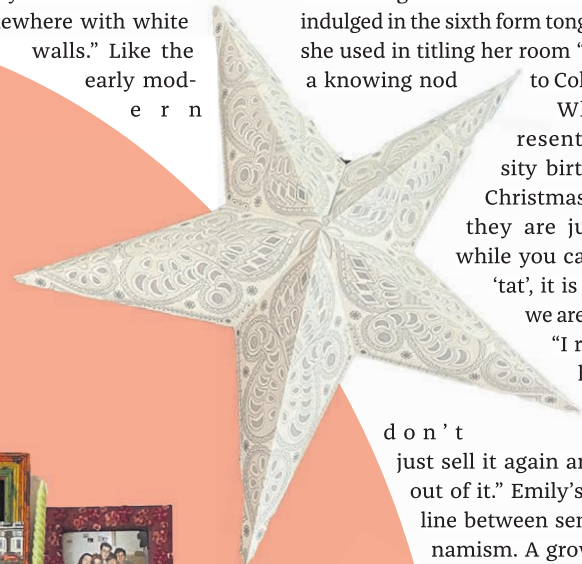
people of her seminars, Emily fills the feared “blank space” of “white walls” with tapestries. Is there any harm in having things, having ‘tat’ for nothing other than filling “white walls”? Part of me wishes she indulged in the sixth form tongue-in-cheek humour she used in titling her room “the Pleasure Dome”, a knowing nod to Coleridge’s Kubla Khan.

While physical representations of university birthdays and cousins’ Christmas presents are great, they are just material items: while you can always buy more ‘tat’, it is their sentimentality we are compelled to savour.

“I really like the idea of holding on to things – but also if you don’t love something, just sell it again and make something out of it.” Emily’s room straddles the line between sentimentality and dynamism. A growing jumper collection accumulates beside her desk, the product of numerous years of charity shop purchases and depop scrolling. But she could just as easily be rid of her possessions, just as she sheds New Yorker postcards to

friends, her collection adorning not just her mantlepiece but enshrining her friendships. Most of her possessions are “not exactly what you want or near to exactly what you want, but it turns out to be just the thing.” She “make[s] something” out of every sliver of space and fragment of objects.

Emily claims she “cannot keep a surface clean”, but why would you want to, with life model sketches as your mouse pad and Shakespeare tossed by your pillow; while she may “never get [my] deposit back”, I think it’s worth it. Emily’s room is more than “white walls” but a tapestry of the past and potential.



◀ EMILY LAWSON-TODD AND LOVEDAY COOKSON



# Botticelli teaches us to make love, not war

Ailsa McTernan delves into Botticelli's irresistible depiction of Venus and Mars on display at the Fitzwilliam Museum

Venus, the Goddess of Love, lies semi-reclined on the cool spring grass. Her left hand delicately pulls down the semi-translucent frock that has gathered around her thigh. A dreamy gaze falls upon sleeping Mars, his head resting against a tree stump at the opposite end of the panel. One drooped hand falls deftly on his thigh, a suggestive sign of his now recumbent member. His neck cranes backwards into a deep slumber. The male habit of 'falling asleep after sex' was, all a popular subject for bawdy jokes at Renaissance weddings.

The viewer has stumbled into an *al fresco* post-coital scene. The God of War, exhausted from his love-making with the Goddess of Love, is utterly oblivious to the Bacchic mischief of the chubby satyrs around him, despite their best efforts. One blows a conch shell directly into his ear while another traps his finger in a pointed metal instrument. His military regalia have become the innocuous playthings and dress-up attire of the giggling satyrs. Stripped of his soldierly garb, the God of War is rendered incapacitated in the face of passion, while the Goddess of Love appears utterly unaffected by her encounter with the 'ruthless' Mars. The message is clear: love always triumphs over war.

The work takes centre stage in the 'National

Treasures' display at the Fitzwilliam Museum this spring, which forms part of the National Gallery's bicentenary celebrations. It brings together a number of other Renaissance works from the Fitzwilliam's permanent collection to explore ideas of sex, power and the body in art. The historic loan presents a rare opportunity to see the work outside of its permanent home in London.

Painted in around 1485, it is one of Botticelli's most well-known works, celebrated for its playful yet intimate treatment of the popular theme. The unusual longitudinal panel, besides providing a deliberate snug setting, indicates the painting's function as a 'spalliera' panel. According to the 16th-century writer and painter Giorgio Vasari, the painting decorated a room in the Vespucci Palace in Florence. The wasps (or *vespe* in Italian) that encircle Mars's head suggest a pun on the name of the affluent Florentine family. The myrtle bush behind the figure of Venus, a well-known symbol of matrimony, suggests that this work was

commissioned to commemorate a marriage. A likely setting would therefore seem to be a bedroom or 'camera', possibly as a backboard for a bench or a chest or in-set into the architecture of the wall.

Beyond its obvious visual appeal, this work was believed to have carried a magical, talismanic power. The erotic subject was intended to initiate love-

making between the young couple while Mars's beautiful naked body was thought to bring the birth of a male heir. Although some have suggested that Venus's relatively demure state of dress indicates her chastity, her

purety and simultaneous fidelity. Her creased skirt and relatable 'bed hair' are the tell-tale signs. She is not the shy, modest Goddess of Love we see in Botticelli's famous *Birth of Venus* (c 1485-86), but a self-assured, lascivious woman here. This candid 'morning after' scene would have felt as familiar as *Harry Potter* to a 15th-century audience. To a strikingly modern telling of this popular theme. Venus, with her pale skin, blonde hair and rosy lips, denoted the 'ideal' Florentine woman. Similarly, Mars's nudity, although a clear citation of classical statuary (the equally lubricious *Barberini Faun* comes to mind), sustains none of the marble coldness of its Greco-Roman exemplars; his soft, fleshy body, painstakingly rendered in egg tempera and oil, still appears as palpable over half a millennium later. The informality and tenderness of this scene feels as timeless as the work's overarching message: *make love, not war*.

Although we can't put the work's alleged aphrodisiacal powers to the test in time for Valentine's Day, you can catch this romantic masterpiece in the Fitzwilliam's 'National Treasures' display from 10 May until 10 September 2024.



▲ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/NATIONAL GALLERY / CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/3.0/DEED.EN

of a male heir. Although some have suggested that Venus's relatively demure state of dress indicates her chastity, her purety and simultaneous fidelity. Her



▲ PUBLIC DOMAIN / WIKIMMONS

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## THE MAYS 32

### IS OPEN FOR SUBMISSIONS

The 32nd edition of the Mays Anthology is now open for submissions of poetry, prose, and artwork.

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Please read our guidelines carefully prior to submission.

You can scan the QR code or visit

<https://www.themaysanthology.co.uk/submissions/>



Send pieces to [mays-submissions@varsity.co.uk](mailto:mays-submissions@varsity.co.uk) by 12pm on the 1st of March 2024





**I**t's that time of the year again; whether you're an enthusiast for red roses, chocolates and love letters, or prefer to drop the festivities altogether, the season of love is upon us. For weeks now, supermarkets have been stocking their shelves with Valentine's-themed sweets and cards, as people hurriedly look for the perfect gifts for their loved ones to show them that they care.

Yet the season also brings up the immensely complicated issue of what on earth you're going to wear for Valentine's Day. For those who have a romantic date planned for the evening, the panic inevitably begins to set in: "Do I go for the jeans or wear the dress instead?" The dilemmas continue: "Should I do the red lip, or is that too much?", "hair up or hair down?" - getting the balance right is tricky.

We've all read plenty of self-help articles promising to give us excellent what-to-wear advice and outfit ideas for all kinds of plans. But perhaps focusing on what we're wearing misses the point of Valentine's Day entirely.

Valentine's Day is also a time for reflecting on why we love the people in our lives so much. Undeniably, this often comes down to their unique and quirky personality traits that make them special to us.

This notion also translates to clothing; why adhere to what you should wear when being yourself will attract the people who love you for who you really are anyway?

way to honour than by organising a tea party in a garden shed, inviting some Cambridge students, and dressing them up in some funky outfits?

Zara, one of our recruited students, tells us how she sees Valentine's Day as more about "a celebration of love" rather than a day for couples - a notion

### Photographers

Adam Choudhury & Hannah Mawardi

### Models

Patrick Dolan, Alicia McDowell, Esther Arthurson, Jamie Martin, Aimee Hobley, Hannah Drayton, Zara Salari & Emily McDonagh

### Designers

Sophie Wheeler, Charlotte McGregor & Rebecca Cennini







# For the love of fashion

that encapsulates the essence behind the photo-shoot. For Zara, our tea party, although organised for a shoot, actually turned out to foster those feelings of togetherness that epitomise Valentine's season. She reflects, "the shoot was so much fun and really embodied how love is multifaceted – whether that be platonic, familial, or romantic". Jamie, one of our other models candidly noted that "the cake aspect" was the best part. We don't blame him.

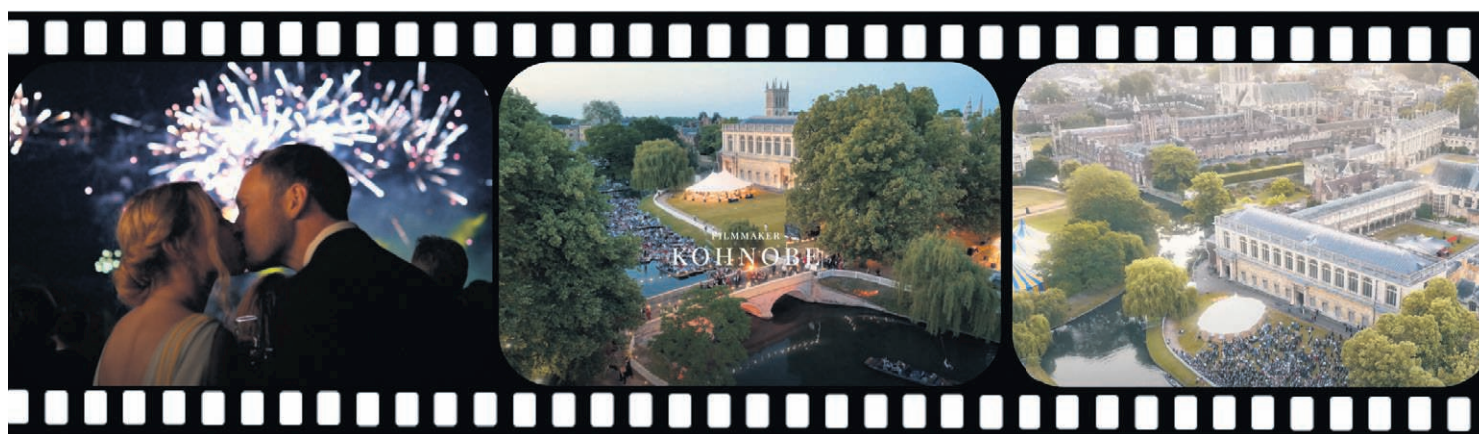
So if you're celebrating Valentine's Day this year with friends why not follow suit – cook together, make a mess, and enjoy each other's company?

Deciding on what to wear for certain occasions can be hard, but it can also be a fun and expressive process. Be true to yourself, and don't put too much pressure on the exterior. After all, perhaps the greatest accessory to any outfit is personality; if someone is beaming with smiles and laughter, what they're wearing is probably the last thing you'll notice.





# Film & TV



▲ JEDRICK KOH (KOHNOBE)

## The man behind the May Ball videos

Georgia Finucane chats to Jedrick Koh about post-production perfectionism and his path to becoming a major event filmmaker

If you've spent the last couple of weeks perusing the Instagram pages for this year's May Balls, you've likely come across the work of cinematographer Jedrick Koh (@KOHNOBE on Instagram). With a portfolio that includes 12 May events since 2022, you may already be familiar with Jedrick's work at the Trinity May Ball and King's Affair from 2023, or perhaps his promotional reels for this year's theme reveal at Jesus, 'Into the Surreal', even enticed you into purchasing a ticket.

Jedrick discovered a passion for filmmaking on the deserted streets of Fitzrovia amid the London lockdowns of 2020. In a difficult period of illness, Jedrick began taking walks and filming the jarring "ghost town" of what was once the typically bustling central London on his iPhone, encountering a number of photographers and filmmakers in the process. A street photographer approached Jedrick and took his portrait on a Hasselback camera – the camera used to capture the first images taken on the moon.

With this small step, Jedrick founded the Moon Bunny Collective, a buzzing creative

community bridging together the various photographers and filmmakers around London Jedrick met during this period and beyond. "Within 30 days, I had met 33 filmmakers and photographers," he says. Jedrick realises that the pandemic was a difficult period of disruption, but for his creative journey, that "disruption brought transformation".

“Within 30 days, I had met 33 filmmakers and photographers

After lockdown, Jedrick returned to his Cambridge studies with an invigorated passion for videography, and took on his first official project with the 2022 Girton Spring Ball. From this experience, Jedrick felt confident and eager to do more, following up with event films for the Murray Edwards Garden Party and the May Balls of Churchill, Wolfson, Homerton, Jesus and Sidney Sussex College. After building an impressive portfolio with these events, Jedrick returned for the 2023 May Ball season with Trinity, King's, Downing and Wolfson, to name a few. Indeed, Jedrick's prolific creative fingerprint

can be found all over past and present May Weeks and the Cambridge event scene at large.

Speaking of his creative process when filming at events like a May Ball, Jedrick explained that a lot of the filming takes place organically, capturing the natural and candid moments unfolding before him. But Jedrick also goes further, getting involved and immersed in the event in order to execute

his creative vision. "Being an event filmographer requires you to chat to people and create the shot you envision for the final product," he says. "I used to struggle with anxiety, but my work has helped a lot with that."

Post-production planning is also crucial to Jedrick's success, and his projects are reflective of a thoughtful creative process that considers how to successfully incorporate the theme of each May Ball into the finished product. From music to transition editing, Jedrick recognises that this line of work is a unique blend of all art and media forms. "There are so many event videographers who do amazing film work but don't use the right base to capture the right energy for the event," he explains. Jedrick is passionate about every element that goes into his projects during filming and beyond, and his holistic approach translates into the expert quality of his filmography.

Discussing the length of time that Jedrick devotes to the post-production portion of his May Ball videos, he notes: "It really just depends on how much of a perfectionist you are." Though Jedrick has now polished his video editing turnaround to an impressive 48 hours for current clients, he has generally spent anywhere from one to two months on previous May Ball event videos in order to take the time to get it right. Working solo throughout the editing process, Jedrick admits, "I spend a lot of time perfecting transitions." Indeed, the high-energy and fast-paced feeling of Jedrick's May Ball films comes precisely from his skilful transition work and detailed editing style.

Entirely self-taught and an ambitious self-starter, Jedrick is now a full-time filmmaker based in London. Jedrick recognises that he has strayed from "the beaten path" of his degree in Human, Social, and Political Sciences, especially when compared to his peers at university. But even though it might feel scary at times, Jedrick couldn't be happier. "You meet people from all walks of life," he says. "It's exciting and it's vibrant."

Jedrick has maintained close contact with the Cambridge community and plans on working at a number of events for next term's May Week. If you're planning on attending a May Ball this year, you might just end up captured in one of Jedrick's films!

◀ JEDRICK KOH (KOHNOBE)

## Q&A with Lillian Crawford

The Guardian film critic speaks to Olivia Townsend about her career

Many a Varsity writer and reader has the fantasy of seeing their name printed in a Guardian byline. Lillian Crawford, a freelance film writer and critic, was happy to provide me with some insight into pursuing a career in cultural criticism and commentary.

With a writing repertoire that spans the *British Film Institute*, *Sight and Sound*, *Little White Lies*, *MUBI*, the BBC and beyond, Lillian Crawford has clearly come to master her field. Before she did this however, she was one of Varsity's own. As we chat over Zoom, she recalls covering the Watersprite Film Festival and late nights spent in the Arts Picturehouse. "I read somewhere that Wittgenstein used to go and sit in the cinema in Cambridge and watch films all day, and so I thought if Wittgenstein can do it then I can do that." Reviewing anything and everything, Crawford built up a portfolio of film writing and secured an internship after reaching out to *Little White Lies* magazine. She tells me that "from there it was a case of emailing anyone and everyone I could possibly find."

Crawford describes her process as "taking a situation or a piece I'd done or some work I'd been doing in my academic interests and then finding a way of developing on it and hopefully someone will pay you to do it." For Crawford, her love of film and her flair for cultural commentary is tangled up in her studies of History as an undergrad at Trinity (you might recognise her from her incredible stint on *University Challenge*). While writing her dissertation on Ealing Studios she "found films that people never talk about." Crawford honed her interest further with an MPhil in Film Studies, also from Cambridge. Navigating the distance between her academic and public work is not always easy. "The most common feedback I'll get from an editor is: 'this is too academic,'" she admits.

But Crawford's academic eye hasn't been a limitation. Her writing has led her to work on curation projects, Q&As and screenings. "I voted in the *Sight and Sound* poll in 2022," she tells me, which means she was selected to help rank the top 250 greatest films of all time. It's a list that a lot of writers, critics and no doubt future historians will work from. "It does make some of the work I'm doing feel reasonably important," she says. "There's a lot of great British cinema that hasn't been celebrated, or remembered, or it's been obscured."

It's clear that Crawford's aspirations to continue working in film, whether through a PhD, archival work, on curation or as a journalist, will bring exposure to under-appreciated pieces of British cinema. Moving beyond writing, Crawford has her own podcast, *Listen to Lillian*, and has recently developed a relaxed screening programme with the BFI as part of her work on neurodivergence and film. "Film, for a lot of neurodivergent people, seems to provide a way of talking about something," Lillian claims. Her programme involves using different lighting, sound levels and curating films that aim to resonate specifically with neurodivergent people.

As our conversation draws to a close, both Crawford and I are under no impression that being a writer, critic or creative is ever easy. In spite of the uncertainty of the industry, Crawford's experiences and successes bring some clarity to the murky waters of the creative world. It helps an aspiring writer like myself to sleep a bit easier, with the reminder that a fulfilling career in cultural commentary is not only possible, but also filled with endless opportunities.



# Beyond the queer love story

Alex Brian speaks to the organisers of two of Cambridge’s queer film nights

This week, *Varsity* has been covering all things Valentine’s Day. One group that is often overlooked during this celebration of romance is the LGBTQ+ community. Although queer love stories are only beginning to enter the mainstream media, they are playing a vital role in challenging society’s cisheteronormativity. But are they the be all and end all? I discussed all this and more with Sidney Sussex’s LGBTQ+ officer, SF, and Kai, an SU aro/ace representative.

Both students use film as a way of gathering their communities. Kai views these events as an unthreatening environment in which to meet new people. For SF, they are also an intellectual opportunity: “They fulfil my role as LGBT officer but also mean I get to show people my favourite films and talk about them.”



▲ CECILE JOHNSEN & ARAUJO / UNSPLASH

During her first term in the role, SF agonised over which films to show: “I was like, I need international ones, I need ones with women, and I need ones which cover every letter in the acronym.” Consequently, the event became more of an intersectional film night, with movies ranging from *I Dream In Another Language* (2017) – a Mexican independent film about the relationship between the last two speakers of an endangered language – to *Paris is Burning* (1990) – a doc-

umentary film about the ball culture in 1980s New York. This term, SF admits, she hasn’t been so diligent: “I was like, ‘I want to watch *Pride*’ and then I googled queer films and that’s how I chose the second one.”

For aspec film night, there is a Discord server dedicated to movie suggestions. Films mentioned include *Nimona* (2023), a comic-book adaptation exploring transness through a shapeshifting character, and *Moana* (2016). “A lot of the other films are just trashy action films because that’s what I like,” Kai laughs.

Representation is crucial for the LGBTQ+ community, SF explains: “We all make fun of *Love Simon* now and that’s because it’s shit, but seeing that in cinemas was crazy. I remember all my friends crying. It was such a huge thing.” Nevertheless, as representation has improved, it has started to feel less important for SF.

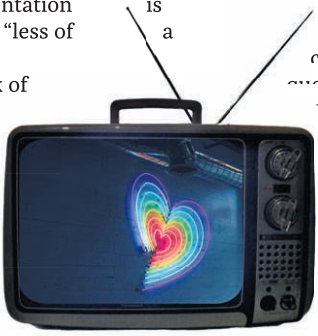
Conversely, the necessity of representation is still very raw for asexual and aromantic people, for whom there is practically none. Kai cites *SpongeBob*, *Heartstopper* and *Shadowhunters*. Yet, aside from Todd Chavez in *BoJack Horseman*, whose asexuality is a recurring plot point, representation generally consists of a throwaway line or retrospective acknowledgement. Often, it merely reinforces existing stereotypes, as evident from shows about “curing” asexuality like *The Olivia Experiment* (2012) and sociopathic characters like Sherlock, who some refer to as asexual as a joke.

Representation is especially important for aspec people as they receive such little visibility in real life. “Before I came to university, I’d met one or two other people on the ace spectrum,” Kai explains. As more and more people are discovering their asexuality via the internet, mainstream media representation essential for making it feel “less of weird online thing.”

“There’s still quite a lack of understanding of asexual people in the general public of what asexual and asexuality are,” Kai acknowledges. “Having to do the TED talk for everyone, it’s really tiring and makes coming out difficult.” Not only would representation ease this pressure, but it would also reduce the other challenges aspec people face, including bullying and a vulnerability to abusive relationships.

I ask SF whether she has noticed any changes in queer representation lately. She believes it has become “trashier”: “I watched *Red, White & Royal Blue* recently. What a load of shite. I enjoyed it so much.” So, what does good representation mean to her? According to SF, queer characters no longer need to be “perfectly representative and well-behaved and have the perfect vocabulary to explain who they are.” As long as they are “based on our own stories and experiences”, they are allowed to be “imperfect and confused”.

“A lot of queer media is very much focused on gay men and I think that’s unfortunate,” she continues. Both students stress the need for more stories about



▲ JIROE & ARAUJO / UNSPLASH

trans and non-binary joy as well as greater representation of queer people of colour. “There’s starting to be a realisation that we need to see more disabled people on screen and it not be an obstacle they have to overcome,” Kai adds, while SF stresses the comforting nature of films about older queer people.

For SF: “What makes a love story compelling is the struggle, which is why queer love stories are often so compelling.” But must queer stories always be about love? “No!” she retorts immediately, “I would love to see more stuff about queer people just being queer.”

Kai goes further, suggesting that society’s obsession with the love story harms everyone as “you cannot expect one person to meet all your emotional needs.” They also emphasise the link between allonormativity and misogyny: “With the rise of feminism, women are not getting into relationships as much, because they are empowered financially to just live their best life.”

Consequently, Kai doesn’t understand the stress some of their friends feel around Valentine’s Day: “If you’re in a loving relationship, you don’t need a special day to go on dates and give them gifts.” Instead, they strongly recommend organising dates with friends. SF, however, loves Valentine’s Day and wants queer people to be able to relate to the celebration as much as anyone else. “I just really like heart-shaped things,” she laughs.

Both students have upcoming film nights in Sidney JCR: SF on 4/03 at 6pm, Kai on 20/02 at 6pm.

## What to watch this Valentine's day – Facebook style

By Georgia Finucane, Alex Brian, Olivia Townsend and Syna Majumdar

Single	Engaged	Married	It's complicated
<p><b>Legally Blonde</b></p> <p>If you spent Valentine’s Day on a date with your dissertation, you are legally required to watch <i>Legally Blonde</i>. Celebrating independence, self-improvement and privileging intellectual and professional achievements over romantic attachments, the forever-iconic Elle Woods (Reese Witherspoon) is an inspiration to single people everywhere.</p>	<p><b>Mamma Mia!</b></p> <p>Centred around Sophie’s (Amanda Seyfried) looming nuptials, <i>Mamma Mia!</i> merges all the joy of an engagement with appropriately fabulous ABBA tunes. A bachelorette party featuring a live rendition of ‘Super Trooper’ from the mother of the bride and a choreographed jig to ‘Voulez-Vous’ performed by all your wedding guests are the kind of engagement shenanigans one can only dream of.</p>	<p><b>Catastrophe</b></p> <p>Only a television series could devote the time and space needed to accurately represent a marriage in excruciating, intimate detail. Enter <i>Catastrophe</i>. Following a marriage born out of an unexpected pregnancy post-hookup, <i>Catastrophe</i> presents the trials and triumphs of married life in ways that are difficult to stomach yet touching to witness, showcasing a realistic form of love that requires constant effort and is far from perfect, but is beautiful all the same.</p>	<p><b>Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind</b></p> <p>After a painful break-up, Joel (Jim Carrey) and Clementine (Kate Winslet) undergo a procedure to remove the other from their memories. While receiving the treatment, Joel relives their relationship and realises he wants to keep both the treasured and tormenting memories of his former partner. Post-erasure, Joel and Clementine are strangers with no recollection of their history. Yet, once again, they are inexplicably drawn to one other and the loop of love and heartache continues. It’s complicated indeed!</p>
An open relationship	Widowed	Separated	In a partnership
<p><b>Open House: The Great Sex Experiment</b></p> <p>Whether you identify as polyamorous, curious, or just love chaotic reality TV, <i>Open House</i> has a lot to offer. Couples keen to experiment with open relationships and polyamorous dynamics are packed off to a stunning countryside mansion under the supervision of a sex and intimacy psychologist, where they are free to mingle and experiment. Results and romance certainly vary, but the show creates space for raw and honest conversations about intimacy, jealousy and self-confidence.</p>	<p><b>Up</b></p> <p>Grab some tissues: It’s time to rewatch <i>Up</i>. With its heartbreaking opening sequence, accompanied by Michael Giacchino’s gorgeous score, <i>Up</i> is one of Pixar’s most poignant animations. A little childhood nostalgia never goes amiss, even on Valentine’s Day. So, kick your feet up and enjoy this story of birds, balloons and boy scouts.</p>	<p><b>500 Days of Summer</b></p> <p>It’s natural to expect that a romantic film featuring a male and female lead will end with a blissful union where love conquers all. But the pairing in <i>500 Days of Summer</i> get their happy ending precisely in separation. The ultimate break-up movie, <i>500 Days of Summer</i> forces its delusional protagonist Tom (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) to realise that the woman who doesn’t and never wanted to be with him is, in fact, not his soulmate.</p>	<p><b>The Birdcage</b></p> <p>The synopsis “Nathan Lane, Robin Williams and Christine Baranski in a gay comedy of errors” should be enough to entice you towards this cosy Valentine’s Day watch, but if not, rest assured that <i>The Birdcage</i> also skewers homophobic political hypocrisy. It’s a deft comedy with an incredible reserve of kindness: Lane and Williams as the Goldmans are just as deeply in love as they are in trouble. Mike Nichols at his Miami neon-sign best.</p>



**Music**

# Cambridge's concert venue crisis

**Jonathan Baddon** investigates what students can do to save local venues

**A**n alarming report published by the Music Venue Trust has identified 2023 as the “most challenging year” for grassroots music venues since the charity began, with 2024 showing no obvious signs of improvement. The first promises of post-pandemic recovery have been erased by the cost of living crisis, leaving local independent music venues throughout the UK in a state of emergency.

Cambridge is no exception. If we want its music scene to survive, students need to make the most of the bands flooding through its often forgotten venues. However, rising ticket prices mean that this isn't simply a matter of choice. Pushing for

political change so that grassroots music venues receive the support they need and people can afford

to enjoy music is essential. Adam O'Sullivan, owner of The Six Six Bar, stresses that “it really is now or never.”

It can be easy to forget just how important these venues are. The sense of community they foster among audiences can be vital in an increasingly atomised world; by the end of a concert, you feel a strange closeness with the people next to you, even if you haven't spoken to them. Just as importantly, venues give artists a place to learn. Steve Pellegrini, owner of the Portland Arms, explains that “we are the testing area for new talent to perform and perfect their craft.” The next generation of artists could be lost because they have nowhere to get started.

With an average profit margin of 0.5%, grassroots music venues are threatened with closure by every single shock. According to O'Sullivan, the cost of living crisis has created a situation where “winning isn't even enough anymore”. Beyond reducing crowd numbers and pushing up expenses, it means that even sold-out shows won't necessarily generate enough income to be profitable.

As Pellegrini points out, uncertainty has driven people to purchase tickets at the last minute, leading some promoters to pull shows for fear of low sales. Staff shortages are also increasingly common: sound techs are forced to work on a more temporary basis, taking on second jobs to survive. In combination, these factors have left music

venues in a dangerously precarious position.

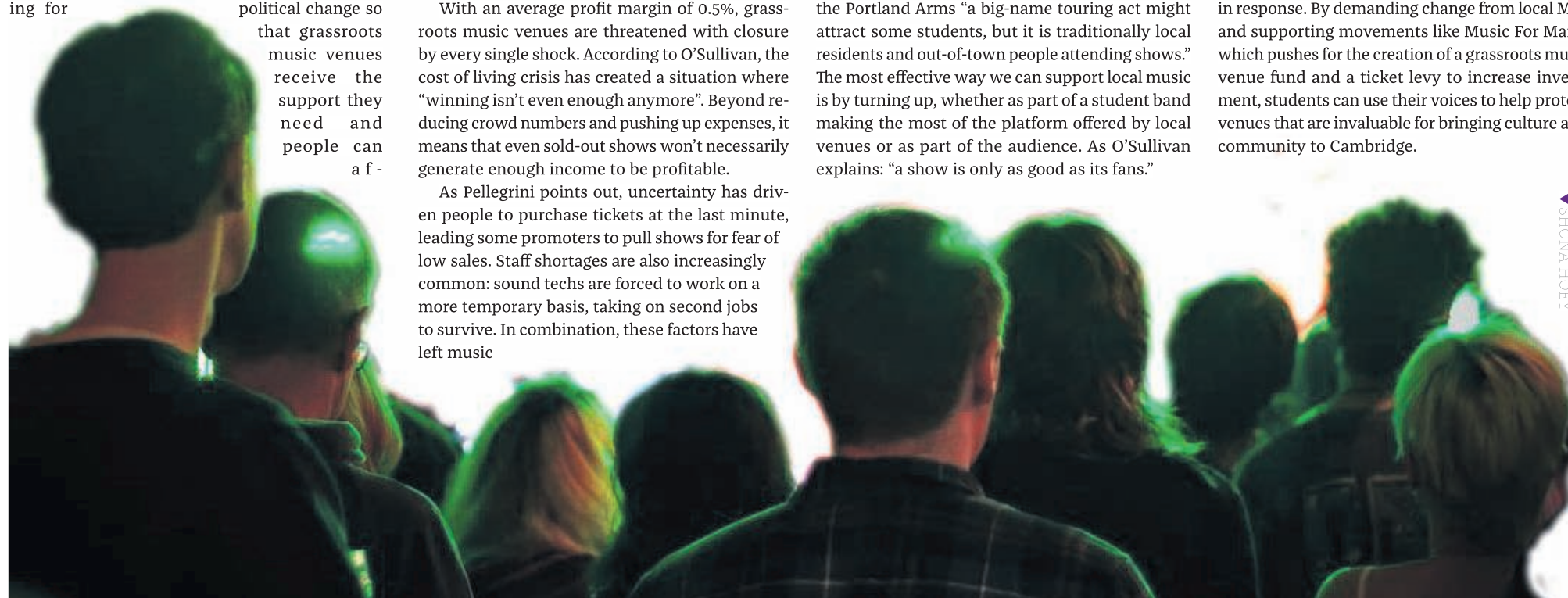
Venues have few options when choosing how to respond. Cost-cutting measures can only go so far and institutional support is horrifyingly limited. For both The Six Six Bar and The Portland Arms, the Music Venue Trust has offered vital crisis grants and raised the profile of grassroots music venues with Arts Council England. However, O'Sullivan explains that “outside the Music Venue Trust we are on our own.”

In a city like Cambridge, students have an important part to play in solving this problem. Despite the diversity of shows on offer, students rarely venture far from the city centre, meaning that at the Portland Arms “a big-name touring act might attract some students, but it is traditionally local residents and out-of-town people attending shows.” The most effective way we can support local music is by turning up, whether as part of a student band making the most of the platform offered by local venues or as part of the audience. As O'Sullivan explains: “a show is only as good as its fans.”

The problem is that students have been hit just as badly by the cost of living crisis and ticket prices are also rising. While some could trade a night of sticky club floors and overpriced shots for a local concert, this won't be enough to counter the economic pressures on venues. Political change is needed to deal with the cost-of-living crisis and offer immediate support to grassroots music venues.

This situation hasn't emerged from nowhere. Conscious choices, including decades of austerity and neglect of the arts, have created an increasingly inhospitable economy and have made it difficult for venues to receive funding from organisations like Arts Council England. Conscious action is needed in response. By demanding change from local MPs and supporting movements like Music For Many, which pushes for the creation of a grassroots music venue fund and a ticket levy to increase investment, students can use their voices to help protect venues that are invaluable for bringing culture and community to Cambridge.

SHONA HOEY



## An alternative Valentine's Day playlist

**Madeleine Whitmore** provides a soundtrack for those sick of soppy ballads

**A**s February 14th rears its chocolate-dipped, heart-shaped head, we are forced once more to contend with the very real fact that our society prizes romantic love – and displays of it – over most other expressions of the emotion. I decided a few years ago, in a fit of teenage spite that I was going to boycott the holiday for the rest of my days and make sure my anti-Valentine's proclamations were heard far and wide. Then I read bell hooks and calmed down a bit; I have since decided to make Valentine's day a quiet celebration of all the people I love in my life, regardless of whether romance features that particular year. What follows is a short playlist of alternative Valentine's Day songs. Most are a little bit sad because I'm nineteen, but I think you'll cope.

### **Haunted – Shane McGowan & Sinead O'Connor**

Every time I hear the first chord of this my body is filled with an indescribable emotion somewhere between waking up next to a friend in the same bed and having my intestines pulled out through my navel.

### **Dramamine – Modest Mouse**

I first heard this song because Matthew Gray Gubler put it on his Valentine's playlist and it was legitimately all I listened to for about a month. It's actually a waltz but too fast to effectively dance to (I have tried).

### **Chelsea Hotel No. 2 – Leonard Cohen**

“You told me again you preferred handsome men / But for me you would make an exception”. What more needs to be said.

### **Quiet Eyes – Sharon Van Etten**

Written for Celine Song's *Past Lives*, this song is like sitting under a trellis in a warm, rainy garden with your lover.

### **The Trapeze Swinger – Iron & Wine**

If you're feeling particularly masochistic, I can also recommend Gregory Alan Isakov's cover on YouTube.

### **I Will Follow You Into the Dark – Death Cab for Cutie**

I first came to this song via Miya Folic's cover in 2020 but the original is now firmly my favourite version. There's something about the softness of the instrumentals and the tragic commitment of the lyrics that hollows me out.

### **This Woman's Work – Kate Bush**

As a diehard Kate Bush fan, I firmly believe

this is her best work both sonically and lyrically – perfect for a Valentine's day centred around female pain and connection, which I think is what all Valentine's days should be about. Would pair well with *The Book of Margery Kempe* and a cathartic scream.

### **Us – Regina Spektor**

The piano riff is so simple but genius, the lyrics haunting and lovely and terrifying. Should be listened to only whilst walking across a moor alone during a storm – if this specific set of circumstances is unavailable, lying on the floor next to a close friend in dim lighting can create the same effect.

SCAN TO LISTEN TO THE FULL PLAYLIST ►

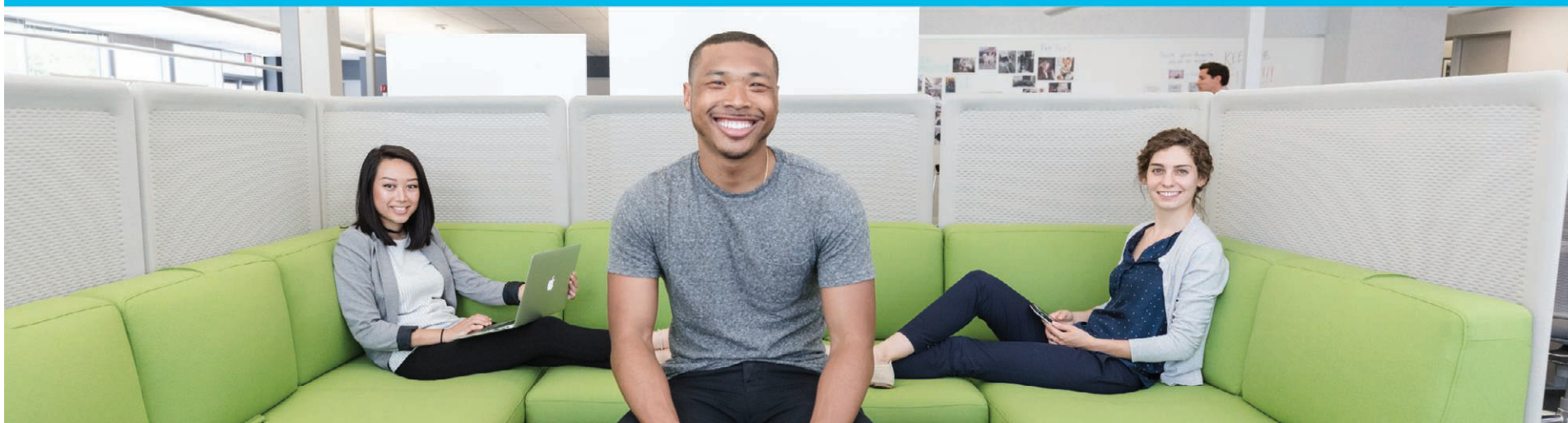






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## Theatre

# An alternative point of (re)view

Molly Scales defends the importance of reviews in student theatre

I'll admit it: I can be a little bit of a bitch. When I'm reviewing plays, that is (the rest of the time, I'm an utter delight). If something isn't to my taste, I'm going to let you know. Mercilessly. If I think theatre is offensive, outmoded, or, worst of all, fails the audience, I'll meticulously document the precise ways it isn't up to scratch, even if that means directors want to scratch my eyes out. And you know what? I'll do it with a pun.

The world is down on critics. To reach for a weighty philosophical tome, Anton Ego of Pixar's *Ratatouille* asserts, in a voice that sounds suspiciously like Peter O'Toole: "The bitter truth we critics must face is that in the grand scheme of things, the average piece of junk is probably more meaningful than our criticism designating it so." They're right. It's easy to be a critic. It's hard to be an artist. So how can a critic be trusted to thrust their opinion upon student theatre?

I'd argue we don't have a choice. Every audience member in every theatre is already a critic. Criticism comes naturally. Even if it's a couple of minutes grumbling over a pint after a trip to the ADC, what you've just seen onstage will stick with you, forcing you to think about it, to analyse it. That's criticism, baby. As for reviewing? Reviewing is just making it to your laptop in time to get that criticism down. There's more pressure to be



pithy, and less gesticulating with the aforementioned pint; but wherever you do it, the fundamentals are the same. Calling the legitimacy of reviewing into question brings the whole, glorious process crashing down. Are you really saying theatre isn't worth talking about?

I can already hear your next criticism. 'But Molly,' you cry, clutching a particularly vitriolic one-star review, 'do you have to be so harsh (re: bitchy) about it?' My answer: 'absolutely'. The problem is, we're forgetting that we're students. I haven't trawled Cambridge newspaper archives (because I have an already-neglected degree and a dust allergy), but I'm willing to bet that if I did, I'd find scathing reviews of students who went on to become some of the biggest names in entertainment. I'd wager a bucket of Camdram credits that even a young Emma Thompson flubbed a line or two.

John

Finemore must have dashed off a sketch that didn't quite hit the mark. Hell, I bet Mel and Sue took a while to perfect their comedic chemistry, way back in 19BB (Before *Bake Off*). Tom Hiddleston would probably cringe to watch his turn in the Cambridge Greek Play. One term in Cambridge theatre was enough for Olivia Coleman. Ok, I'm guessing here, but my point stands. No one is perfect when they're twenty-something, much less twenty-something and scrambling to finish their coursework. Student theatre should be a messy, grimy hodgepodge with blocking that occasionally makes us wonder whether the director has ever actually seen a stage. Most of student theatre is probably going to be – and I say this with the greatest level of respect, professionalism, and even, dare I say it, affection – a bit shit.

For those frothing at the mouth right

now, I

hear you (please don't ransack the ADC props department for weaponry and chase me down Kings Parade). You're probably wondering why I would review Cambridge theatre if I'm oh-so-down on it. I'm obviously biased, incapable of viewing even your thespian brilliance without tearing it to shreds before the first board (or suspiciously sticky floor of the Corpus Playroom) has been trod. My answer is simple. Yeah. Ok. Ya got me. I'm biased. I go along to any student theatre expecting something rough around the edges. Mentally, I knock one star off if a performance is the pinnacle of student theatre but lacking the spark that would make it a five star performance in the 'real world'. Because here's the thing. I think we should be held to the same standards as all drama. It's where Cambridge's best and brightest are heading eventually. Why would I in-

◀ JOHN HENDERSON / FLICKR

sult their potential by tailoring a review of their performance to student theatre standards when they're clearly capable of more? If I'm sitting spellbound in my ADC chair, watching one of the greatest pieces of theatre I've ever seen, it would be a shame for my hypothetical five star review to be indistinguishable from something that's a great offering for student theatre, but firmly within our expectations of Camdram.

I'm thinking of last summer's production of *One Man, Two Guvnors*. "Corden could never," I titled my review, flip-pantly placing the production above the Tony award-winning production starring James Corden. I stand by it. That production could have stood against any piece of professional theatre. I also stand by the fact that if I didn't go along to ADC shows while in possession of the fact that this is still student theatre, I would have failed to notice a show like *One Man, Two Guvnors* was something more.

I actually disagree with (*sacré bleu!*) *Ratatouille*. I reckon the critic can create something of artistic value. I've seen two hours of drama condensed into one pithy comment. It's not unheard of for a comedy review to be funnier than the comedy itself. Reviews aren't a parasite, clinging to theatre's unwashed underbelly. They're a part of theatre. So when my next one-star review rolls around, remember: it's only because I care.

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## Sport

# The Leeds-side streets that we slipped down

## Bea Wood recalls Cambridge Hare and Hounds' success at the BUCS Cross Country Championships, showing us that mud actually is all around

On Friday 2 February at 3.45 pm 50 members of the Cambridge University Hare and Hounds (CUH&H) bundled onto a coach destined for Leeds, for the annual BUCS Cross Country Championships. In store for the hardy runners were miles of foot-sinking, shoe-pinching, leg-splattering mud, brutal hills, a bracing wind, chattering teeth, jumpy nerves, porridge pots and limitless spring rolls.

A quiet evening on Friday saw our athletes preparing in a motley of superstitious ways for their imminent races – routines including, but not limited to, binge-watching BBC News, using time spent locked out of a hotel room for some corridor dynamic lunges, chugging herbal tea and getting prematurely “into the zone” by listening to ‘Lose Yourself’ on repeat.

To slightly paraphrase Molière, there is nothing quite like a cross country race. It is an eclectic, electric and eccentric event which somehow combines the lawless revelry of a festival with the most brutal of sporting endeavours. Face paints, costumes, temporary tattoos, hand-made signs,

deafening cheering, burger vans, loud music and portaloos pivot against spikes, race numbers, bananas, pre-race pep talks, warm-up routines and mud, in a wacky exuberance of sporting celebration.

Despite the incredible team spirit, running can be ruthlessly lonely: you can only blame yourself. But equally, you can thank yourself generously when things go well – which Cambridge at BUCS overwhelmingly did!

In the women's A race Phoebe Barker demonstrated her excellent cross country form with a brilliant individual silver. She was followed by myself in 10th, on the warpath post-injury and not to be undone by losing a shoe in the mud.

It was a painful final 2.5km for all involved – and my first foray into barefoot running (not recommended). Poppy Craig-McFeely completed our scorers in a strong 28th place finish, and these performances proved enough to secure the women's A team bronze medal.

The final race of the day was the men's A, a lengthy battle across the churned-up course, which saw Jeremy Dempsey just missing a medal in a 4th place-rewarded gritty run, followed by Pete Molloy with an impressive 8th place. Max Walk was the next Harey home, the name clearly a red herring – his 19th place result was certainly no stroll in the park. Terry Fawden completed the scoring four in 27th. The excellent performances in the men's A were just short of a team medal, but our club's overall success saw us once again competing at the very highest level of UK university sport.

The afterparty doors were to open at 11.30pm earliest, devastatingly late for some of us, and the Hareys spent their time in the meantime occupied by a variety of differing entertainment. Some used the time to recover as best as possible from the day's exertions – and some didn't.

The most stalwart athletes in our club maintained their excellent form of the day prior with a group long run bright and early on Sunday morning; and the distances covered were far from feeble endeavours to secure historic BUCS memorialisation through keenness, despite a certain Harey's dismal prognosis – that he “spent 95% of that run wishing it would end”.

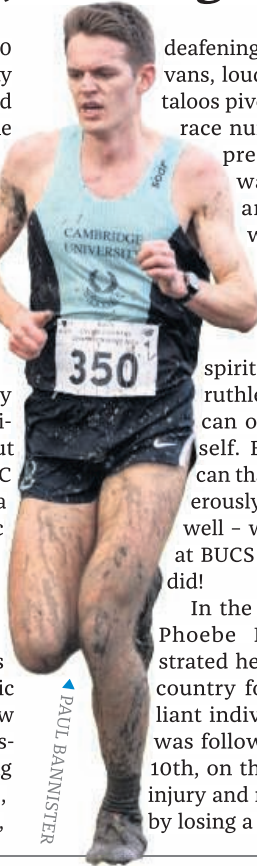
For those of us who had the weekly essay's pressing call bearing down upon us, the coach journey ticked by, time being measured not in coffee spoons but in lines of literary criticism. The post-BUCS blues were beginning to prevail over our mud-coated blue vests, as Cambridge loomed up against the silent and grey Sunday afternoon horizon.

It was always going to be a challenge to match our victory at last year's BUCS XC Championship, where we won a brilliant four medals, but CUH&H managed to prove again that we are the deserving winners of the Cambridge Uni Sport 2023 Team of the Year award, with a serious claim to being one of the University's most successful sporting clubs. Our athletes constitute a significant proportion of the University of Cambridge Athlete Performance Programme, boasting several GB

and England vest runners, including numerous national medallists and titleholders. More immediately, two of our older runners – Jeremy Dempsey and Phoebe Barker – have been selected for the World Universities Championships in Oman, a very well-deserved accolade to add to their series of successes already this year.

As B team runner James Ackland pithily put it, we “dug deep, found more mud”: what nobler credo could guide us doughty cross country runners as we push on with training towards the final few races of the season? Certain Hareys will renounce the track in favour of obscure orienteering events and fell racing; and although these decisions can be met with varying levels of snide opprobrium by other runners, one canonical Cambridge running truth will remain unwaveringly eternal: coach Phil O'Dell is magic.

Although the self-pitying post-BUCS reminiscence began as soon as the coach pulled up at the backs, the glories of CUH&H's experience this year will remain in our memories for a long time, and the temporary tattoos will stick with – and to – us for even longer.



## Why are Fitz so good at football?

Alex Berry explores the reason some colleges dominate college sport

College sport is one of the most popular ways to get involved with sport at Cambridge. It offers a low commitment and enjoyable way to play sport with, theoretically, much more changeability than in university sports. The constant flow of players makes it reasonable to expect that the standard of college teams would vary over the years as the quality of players changes. However, some teams have managed to gain formidable reputations by winning the majority of competitions in their respective sports over the years. But how exactly have they achieved this consistency?

The Fitzwilliam men's football team have cemented themselves as the team to beat in college football. Having won the last 7 cuppers in a row, they're a serious force that other teams dread drawing in the tournament. Their consistent success definitely helps with Fitz's overall reputation as a 'sporty' college, a quality that prospective students particularly interested in sport may look into when deciding which college to apply to, knowing it could have a big impact on their university experience.

When discussing whether this reputation is likely to attract more high quality players to their team, Fitz team captain, Asa Campbell, deemed that about half of the first team players applied to Fitz with sport being a large consideration. But then again, as Asa goes on to say, “ultimately sporting achievement isn't the be all and end all when deciding which college to apply to”, and it will likely only be one of many contributing factors to consider.

However, their reputation does have an impact in attracting high quality players to the team, as Asa says that “about 80% of [their success] is down to players who had played at a high level before

coming to University ending up at Fitz”, rather than the team developing exceptional players.

Despite not commonly attending college training, the first team players are the players who get the most practice. As Asa tells me, this is because “8 of our starting 11 are playing university football and receiving high-quality training 3/4 times a week”, certainly aiding their success in recent years. Again, this unusually high number of university players is likely attributed to the attraction to Fitz and its successful football team, with the best players naturally wanting to play in the best team.

Other colleges are also not short of talented sports teams, St John's holding some particularly strong contenders. The John's rugby team have won ten trophies across league and cuppers competitions since the 2015 season and are well on track to gaining two more in 2024.

When asked whether the reputation of the rugby team may impact the attracting more high quality players to join the team, the John's captain, Finn Dawson, suggested that the majority of players did not apply to the college based on their consistent success, but rather the quality of the facilities and playing fields. It's no secret that John's is a wealthy college, and it seems that their sports teams reap the benefits of this, their ladies netball team is one of only a few I've seen able to provide netball dresses for their players.

John's rugby team is fairly unique in that they remain one of only two teams left in the league consisting of a single college. Many colleges form combined teams to ensure that enough players will be available to play in every match, as the large teams needed can quickly dwindle as injuries are picked up as the season goes on. This makes it all the

more impressive that a single college can maintain their own team, hinting at the huge dedication and interest from within the college.

When asked how the team can maintain such strong numbers, Finn suggested that they encourage more students who are more on the fence about playing rugby to join than in some colleges. He explains that “for new players, the deciding factor is how welcoming we are as a club and the focus we put on social aspects of the team in addition to rugby,” which includes having a roast every Sunday, a hard deal to pass up.

Overall, there doesn't seem to be a single conclusive reason as to why some college teams manage to be so consistently successful. Reputation, funding, and social aspects are amongst the most important factors, and it will take a lot of effort for other teams to upheave their success. Although, to try and maintain the variability that makes college sport so exciting, I have to say that I'm rooting for the underdogs this season.



## Captain's Corner

Caving Captain **Lucy Hyde** chats to Ed Marsh about Cambridge's Caving Club

### Who is your sporting idol?

It is the community that stands out. From the strength of student caving to inter-generational expeditions, teamwork is so built into caving that people rarely shine alone.

### Best sporting moment?

Returning to the surface after two (mildly traumatic) days in the Berger [a cave in the French Alps]: the sunny light of day and salty crisps. Or getting to name a newly discovered cave on expedition.

### Worst sporting moment?

Some things shouldn't be shared! (But also related to that Berger trip!)

### Why caving?

Deep friendship and otherworldly adventure.

### What is the best bit about being captain?

Introducing new people to the world of caving!

### Worst bit about being captain?

Admin and making sure logistics work out.

### Is it easy for beginners to join?

Yes! Most people join caving as total beginners in student clubs. All you need is keenness and general fitness (eg happy with a little bit of hillwalking, scrambling, crawling). No kit or experience required.

### What might a typical training session look like?

After packing kit on a Thursday, we meet at the Tackle Store on Friday evening and set off to a caving region. We stay in caving huts, cave on Saturday and Sunday (spending the evenings with communal food and caving games), then head back Sunday night.

### When/where is training held?

Weekends. In Yorkshire, north/south Wales, Derbyshire, or Mendip (or in the trees on Jesus Green).

### Funniest moment with the team?

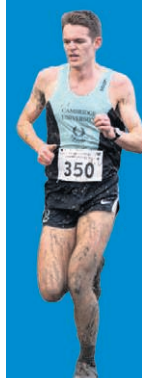
15 cavers spinning round the 'Washing Machine' whirlpool with inflatable llama rings.



# Sport



Why are  
Fitz so  
good at  
football?  
Page 31



Running  
in muddy  
Leeds  
Page 31

## Blues blockade sinks Loughborough



HANNAH MAWARDI ▲

**An early goal was enough to see the Blues beat Loughborough 2s and advance to the Women's National Championship semi-final, [Alex Davies](#) reports**

Cambridge	1
Loughborough	0

The only goal of the game came within the opening ten minutes as O'Connell's fine strike from outside the box beat the Loughborough keeper. Or so I was told, having arrived just after the goal, but within plenty of time for the two o'clock kick off I had obviously imagined. Cambridge's great start was not matched by my own. Fortunately, the goal was described to me by a friendly St Edmund's postgrad called Zubair, whose company throughout the game was welcomed during what was, at times a turgid affair. But perhaps that doesn't do the game justice; it was a proper cup tie and as a lover of the game, one I thoroughly

enjoyed.

The goal was followed by a cagey first half, with neither side able to really take the lead. Some confusion at the back led to an opening for the visitors, but the strike from outside the box rattled the bar. The sound of the woodwork seemed to reawaken Cambridge, as a nice move down the left saw O'Connell beat two players before her cross was pulled wide. This summed up her excellent performance, the winger's movement and trickery throughout the game was a joy to watch, with Cruyff turns even the Dutchman himself would've been proud of. She was obviously a fellow lover of FIFA 19 - she even pulled out a La Croqueta at one point allowing me to reminisce about the good old days.

Towards the end of the game she moved in behind the striker where her vision brightened up a second half where

Cambridge chances were sparse. Speaking to vice-captain Abbie Hastie before the game, she told me O'Connell was one to watch and she certainly delivered. A player of the match performance in the biggest of games.

The half ended without any further goalmouth action to leave the hosts 45 minutes away from a place in the last four. It would be a long 45 minutes though. Loughborough were on the front foot from the start and a couple of early corners needed to be well cleared. This pressure did leave the visitors susceptible to a counterattack however, as on the hour mark a ball over the top broke for Jasmine Wright who forced a save out of the keeper. Despite this, the pressure continued to build on the Blues as Loughborough pushed for an equaliser. Cambridge continued to battle though and the section of the pitch in front of

me was a mud bath by the end of the game, thanks to the consistent drizzle in combination with the fierce tackling of right-back Lara Branston who epitomised the attitude of the home players.

Despite the pressure, Cambridge's goalkeeper and captain, Emilia Keavney (who was back after a spell out with a broken finger) was hardly tested. This is testament to the home side's backline who thoroughly deserved their clean sheet. Loughborough did have the ball in the back of the net with 15 minutes to go, but it was ruled out for a clear handball in the build-up, a point evidently missed by the Loughborough bench. The goal didn't stand, but this seemingly did little to calm the anxieties of the Cambridge coach whose volume increased incrementally throughout the second period.

Unlike the weather, which was miserable throughout, the Blues' play bright-

ened up in the closing exchanges and it started to seem like Loughborough's race was run, but with three minutes to go the visitor's right winger flashed a ball across the six-yard box. There was no-one to get on the end of it though and from there Cambridge were able to see out the game. There were moments of tidy football in the win, but it will be the strong defensive performance and muddy knees that the team will be most proud of.

So what does this mean going forward? A semi-final place in the National Championship is an incredible achievement in itself. Although the greatest challenges are still yet to come, I'm sure the players will relish what's ahead. They'll be keen not to get carried away with ideas about trophies and champagne, but with just two (admittedly large) steps left, it may be difficult not to.