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Easter Term 2024
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The Independent
Student Newspaper since 1947

VARSITY

Copycat don caught again

- History professor kept his job last year despite copying a student's essays
- Three new examples of plagiarism from 2006 to 2016 have emerged
- Dr O'Reilly: The allegations are part of a 'homophobic campaign of bullying'

Erik Olsson
Associate Editor

A Cambridge professor who kept his job despite "accidentally" copying a student's essays faces fresh allegations of verbatim plagiarism dating back nearly two decades.

Dr William O'Reilly, an associate professor in early modern history, was allowed to return to his job last term after telling a University tribunal that he copied around 4,000 words of his student's essays "inadvertently" and "in a situation of extreme personal difficulty".

However, new evidence published to the academic portal PubPeer has revealed a pattern of verbatim plagiarism dating back to 2006.

Three different journal articles by O'Reilly - published between 2006 and 2016 - have been found to have large sections of verbatim overlap with uncredited sources.

In O'Reilly's 2011 article 'Movements of People in the Atlantic World, 1450-1850', two pages appear to have been lifted almost directly from a 1995 article by Michael Heffernan. O'Reilly does not credit or cite Heffernan anywhere in the article.

More than a third of O'Reilly's 2016 article 'Non-Knowledge and Decision Making: The Challenge for the Historian'

similarly copies word for word the work of two other academic papers without acknowledgement.

O'Reilly's article on 'The Historiography of the Military Frontier, 1521-1881' also borrows word for word from a 1973 article by Kurt Wessely without proper credit.

O'Reilly told *Varsity* he acknowledges the "great seriousness" of the allegations and claimed he has "never consciously sought to represent the work of others as mine". He apologised that his acknowledgement of work was not to the standard it should have been, and claimed that one of the uncredited authors had accepted his apology.

O'Reilly believes these revelations form part of a wider homophobic bullying campaign against him, and that other academics would fall short if subjected to the same level of scrutiny. He claims that after the Financial Times first reported on the plagiarism of his student's work, his car was vandalised outside his home.

Following a 2020 investigation into sexual assault hearings at Trinity Hall College, O'Reilly has been the subject of controversy. Tortoise, an independent news outlet, reported that O'Reilly had presided over the hearings into sexual assault allegations at Trinity Hall College while he himself had been accused of sexual assault.

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Trial and Error: The 'peaks' of productivity

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▲ TOMOS DAVIES

Emmanuel College cut ties with 'race-realist' fellow

Tommy Castellani
Deputy News Editor

Emmanuel College has cut ties with "race-realist" fellow Nathan Cofnas, whose blog posts sparked outrage last term.

Cofnas received a letter on the 5th of April notifying him of Emmanuel College's decision to terminate his research affiliation with the College.

Emmanuel's master, Doug Chalmers, initially told students that he "acknowledged" Cofnas' right to freedom of speech, but has since hosted a town hall to discuss the matter alongside Homerton Principal Lord Simon Woolley.

The letter sent by Emmanuel College reads: "The Committee first considered the meaning of the blog and concluded that it amounted to, or could reasonably be construed as amounting to, a rejection of Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI and EDI) policies."

"The Committee concluded that the core mission of the College was to achieve educational excellence and that diversity and inclusion were inseparable from that. The ideas promoted by the blog therefore represented a challenge to the College's core values and mission," according to the letter.

In controversial blog posts, Cofnas argued in favour of a "hereditarian revolution" and said the number of black professors at Harvard would "approach zero" in a meritocracy.

Cofnas claimed: "Blacks would disappear from almost all high-profile..."

Continued on page 2 ▶

V Easter Term

Editorial

"Sorry I can't get hammered tonight, I've got an exam in 2 weeks" is probably the sentence you'll hear most this coming Easter term.

Almost everyone at this university seems to think that life simply stops the moment daylight savings time comes around. They collectively take off their Blues blazers, put oboes back into dusty cases, and even Varsity does without its fortnightly print editions to instead make way for endless hours of revision. While of course it's good to work hard and try your best in your exams, we all seem to forget that there's far more to life than 18th century literature or the precise mechanics of a combustion engine.

It really is a cruel joke that the exam period coincides almost precisely with the time that our gorgeous city rids itself of the grey skies and rain of Lent and replaces them with summer breezes and sunlight on sandstone. All the while its students sit in self-punishing study (pg. 20), watching the sun rise and set from bedroom windows, refusing to go outside because their 13th hour of revision is just that much more important.

We understand the need to work a bit harder during exam term, but that doesn't mean you can't have any free time whatsoever. We promise you, that

extra hour or two of revision is not more important than taking time to decompress in the sun or down the pub. It shouldn't be normalised to pull 14 hour shifts in the library just for an exam, save those for when you're at McKinsey.

We need to reject this cruelty. While we obviously can't just cease our studying, we can at least work within the confines of the system to make Easter more bearable. Take your laptops out to college gardens, take your Roman legal textbooks to Grantchester, or do your algebraic topology while sipping a Pimm's on a punt. Losing your mind in the library isn't normal and you aren't a martyr for the hours you spend revising so don't treat yourself like one. Instead treat yourself to a night out, an impromptu bake-off in the gyp, and a boozy picnic - the revision can wait just one more hour.

So, for what it's worth, take a moment to sit back and enjoy the pleasures that the sunlight brings instead of focusing too much on looming exams. When you look back on your time at Cambridge, do you want to remember your 12 hour trips to a dim library, or do you want to remember the laughter of your friends in the sunshine? I know which one we'll be picking.

Michael Hennessey & Daniel Hilton

Editors-in-chief, Lent 2024

IN THE PAPER

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Clarissa's Campaign for Cambridge Hearts
Varsity speaks to the students keeping their friend's memory alive
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Comment



Darwin without a chance of Meat Balls

The current president of Darwin's May Ball, Joe Cowan, argues the college's plant-based ball is here to stay.....Page 14



Scrapping state school targets is playing a dangerous game

The removal of school type in future access plans needs to be executed carefully, argues Matthew Taylor.....Page 15



▲ Dr William O'Reilly YOUTUBE

Continued from front page

O'Reilly has always strenuously denied the allegation and no further action was taken following a voluntary police interview.

The fresh plagiarism revelations have again raised concerns about the University's internal disciplinary processes, which did not find O'Reilly guilty of intentional plagiarism in 2023 after he copied his student's work.

The two-year investigation examined

evidence that O'Reilly had praised and then copied two essays by one of his undergraduate students in an article for the *Journal of Austrian American History*.

While nearly half of the article had been lifted directly from the student's work, the University ruled that the plagiarism had been the result of "negligent acts" and allowed O'Reilly to remain in post.

O'Reilly, who said he was "devastated to realise" his mistake, told the tribunal that he had only planned to use the stu-

dent's essays as an "aide-mémoire". He said: "I firmly believe that I copied the material in my planning of the article, intending to use it only in a placeholder way, serving to remind me of the structure I planned to follow."

The recent findings cast doubt on O'Reilly's defence and put pressure on the University to reconsider the action taken against the professor.

O'Reilly provided the following abridged statement: "I draw your attention to the fact that this latest action to destroy me is but the latest in a series of such efforts. I wish to underline that I continue to be targeted by interested parties in Cambridge who seek to destroy me and to hound me out of the institution, who bully and harass and use others as proxies for these malicious actions, leaking, selectively, details of confidential material and briefing anonymously."

"I have acted in good faith in all investigations and have abided by the findings of all processes. I greatly regret that I am restricted in what I can say and write at this critical time. I am in regular contact with my line manager at the Faculty, with colleagues and with senior members of the University with regard to these matters and I am awaiting further developments on this campaign against me and others."

A University spokesperson said: "Any new allegations will be considered in accordance with University processes."

Emma ends affiliation with Nathan Cofnas

Continued from front page

positions outside of sports and entertainment."

Following Emma's decision to cut ties with the philosophy fellow, Australian philosopher and animal rights activist Peter Singer has lent his support to Cofnas.

The Princeton University Professor, who has published successful books, such as *The Life You Can Save* and *Animal Liberation*, expressed concerns about the implications of the College's decision for freedom of speech in an op-ed in *Project Syndicate*.

Singer wrote: "These sentences imply that at Emmanuel College, freedom of expression does not include the freedom to challenge its DEI policies, and that challenging them may be grounds for dismissal."

"That is an extraordinary statement for a tertiary institution to make," Singer said.

In response to the blog posts, on the 16th of February, Emma master Doug Chalmers wrote to students, saying: "We retain our commitment to freedom of thought and expression". Chalmers acknowledged Cofnas' "academic right, as enshrined by law, to write about his views." Singer has accused the College of renouncing these principles.

The University and the Leverhulme Trust are conducting ongoing investigations into the "race-realist" fellow.

Singer wrote: "Were the University of Cambridge to dismiss Cofnas, it would sound a warning to students and academics everywhere: when it comes to controversial topics, even the world's most renowned universities can no longer be relied upon to stand by their com-



▲ Master of Emmanuel College Doug Chalmers hosted a town hall to discuss the issue with Homerton principal Simon Woolley TOBIA NAVA

mitment to defend freedom of thought and discussion."

A protest was organised last term and a petition was circulated among students calling for the University to sack Cofnas. The petition has amassed more than 1200 signatures.

At the town hall hosted to discuss Cofnas, Lord Woolley, the first black man to head a Cambridge College, said: "We should protect free speech but not at the expense of abhorrent racism."

Woolley suggested that the University should sack Cofnas, telling the room: "If this is not gross misconduct [...] I don't know what is."

Pro-vice-chancellor for education Professor Bhaskar Vira said at a meeting last term he believes Cofnas has "crossed a

line" when it comes to the concerns for freedom of speech.

After facing mounting backlash, Cofnas stepped down from his teaching and examining responsibilities but the "race-realist" is still employed by the philosophy faculty as a researcher.

Philosophy faculty chair, Professor Angela Breitenbach, told *Varsity*: "The University is fully committed to academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law. We are considering the concerns that have been raised in relation to Dr Cofnas's blog under our existing processes. These processes are by their nature confidential so we will not be commenting further."

Nathan Cofnas and Emmanuel College were contacted for comment.

Hundreds of elite private schools benefit from ‘widening participation’ measures

Wilf Vall
Deputy News Editor

Almost 300 private schools benefited from “widening participation” measures in the past 3 years, *Varsity* can exclusively reveal.

Freedom of information requests found that the University flagged at least 289 private schools for “low participation in Oxbridge” when assessing applications. This made up for 19% of applicants who received this consideration, despite only around 6% of students in the UK being privately educated.

Widening participation flags are designed to aid applicants “from the lowest socioeconomic groups” including “from the state sector” in the Cambridge application process. “Low participation in Oxbridge” flags are supposed to be used when a school has received fewer than 5 Oxbridge offers in the last 5 years.

Among the schools that benefited from these measures was an online school ran by Harrow, one of the UK’s most prestigious private schools. Gordonstoun School, the school King Charles III attended, was also flagged for ‘low participation in Oxbridge’.

Freedom of Information requests to Christ’s College also found multiple elite grammar schools had been awarded this flag despite a history of Oxbridge success. This included Pate’s Grammar School, which has received 60 Cambridge offers in the last 5 years and was ranked as the 4th best state school in the UK last year.

Thirty six schools which benefited from these flags boast fees above £40,000. One of these, Stonar School, offers students the opportunity to loan a horse each term for an extra £1,260.

The University’s new Access and Participation Plan, which recently announced intentions to abolish state



▲ LOUIS ASHWORTH

school targets, plans to place more emphasis on this flag to provide a “more nuanced” way of assessing applicants, *Varsity* understands.

The new access plan claims that it will focus on aiding “groups of students who are underrepresented at Cambridge” in the application process, and will utilise

flags that reflect individual factors, such as socio-economic circumstances and disabilities than schooling statistics.

Elsie McDowell, president of the Class Act Campaign, slammed these findings as a “slap in the face” to applicants who have faced socioeconomic disadvantages. She claimed that “giving [flags]

out to the UK’s most privileged students trivialises Cambridge’s entire attempt at widening access.”

Caredig ap Tomos, the Student Union’s Access, Education & Participation Officer, echoed these concerns, telling *Varsity*: “Information found in this freedom of information request is clear evi-

dence that careful consideration needs to be given to what a metric shows about a student’s background and that no one metric can be relied on.”

When contacted for comment, a spokesperson for the University of Cambridge told *Varsity*: “All applicants to the University are considered holistically and no one piece of data is considered in isolation, in line with the Admissions Policy.”

“An applicant’s schooling is taken into account, particularly if they come from a school which has not seen many applications to Cambridge, alongside other socio-economic factors to indicate disadvantage of opportunity. The new APP is being drafted now in line with OfS guidelines and is subject to further discussion around the collegiate University. It will continue to reflect the University’s commitment to widening participation” they continued.

Christ’s College has been contacted for comment.

Schools flagged for ‘low participation in Oxbridge’

| | |
|---------------|------|
| Comprehensive | 1234 |
| Independent | 289 |
| Grammar | 47 |
| Further | 131 |
| Tertiary | 19 |
| Sixth-form | 31 |

Comment - ‘A good year for privately-educated Cantabrigians’

Omar Burhanuddin

It’s been a good year for privately educated Cantabrigians. From ongoing secret grants dolled out to their elite alumni, to the scrapping of state school targets in admissions, Cambridge had dutifully stayed true to its heritage, continuing to go out of its way to carve out spaces for the already privileged. And now - in a kind of weird joke - private schoolers can even get to take advantage of the university’s ‘widening participation’ flags. *That’ll* assuage mummy’s fears that we’re being discriminated against! Pip pip boys, pass the port.

Steady on, Marmaduke and Archibald. I can already hear you lot rolling up your sleeves in anger. Right on cue, the usual defences will be trotted out to a story like this. Yes, not everybody who attended a private school is rich - they may have been on a bursary or scholarship. Yes, parents often cough up hefty proportions of their income on school fees, with all the lifestyle sacrifices that will entail. Yes, some less well-known

private schools exist in more deprived regions.

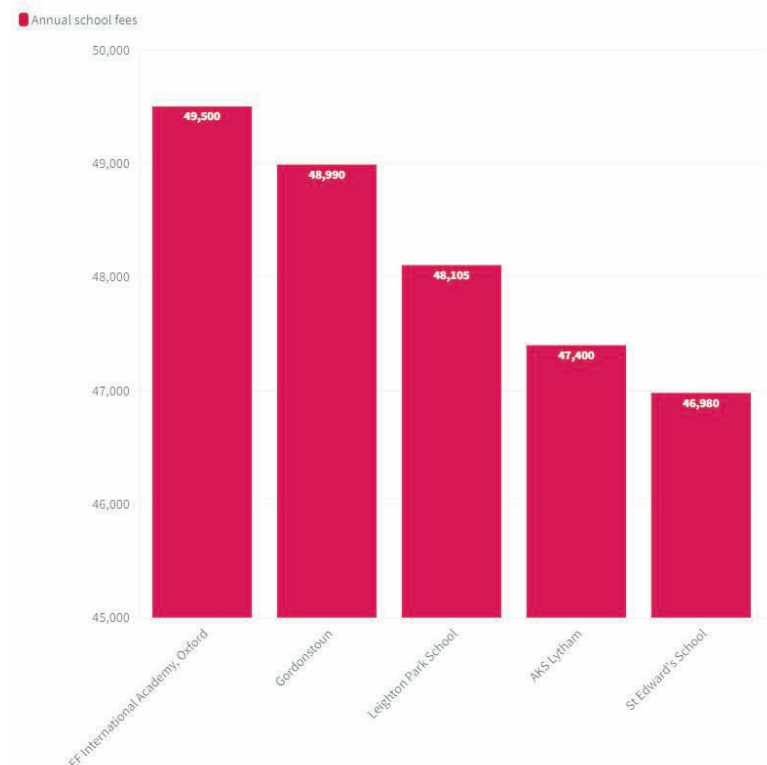
First of all, even if all this is granted, we must consider the practical upshot of flagging masses of private schoolers for extra consideration. Although these defences may be true, they apply to many, many other talented students across the country. While the privately educated are not a monolith, they do share a key commonality: the connections, the social codes - in sum, the cultural capital - which does not discriminate by postcode or income. By flagging these students, the University papers over a significant, unquantifiable dividing line between them and other ‘widening participation’ candidates.

But this is practically beside the point. This is because the usual defences of private schools outlined above are ceasing to hold water anyway. School fees have been outstripping inflation for a while, incrementally pricing out the middle classes and even those with substantial wealth. Providing a select

few bursaries to cover increasingly prohibitive costs isn’t the boon these schools think it is. Labour’s plans to slap VAT on private school fees will only cement this process, lurching the sector even more sharply towards Britain’s very richest - and increasingly, the international market.

This development, then, is merely the latest in a series of unsurprising, retrograde steps Cambridge has made to privilege an ever more rarefied caste. I ask you to consider the message this sends to aspiring disadvantaged students across this country - and by ‘disadvantaged’, I do not mean those who have the opportunity to rent a horse during the school term. It’s been a good year for privately-educated Cantabrigians, because it is always a good year for privately-educated Cantabrigians. Things look less rosy for the university as a whole.

Highest fee-paying schools flagged for ‘low participation in Oxbridge’:



News

Acting vice-chancellor paid £234,000 for nine month stint

Felix Armstrong
Senior News Editor

Cambridge University's acting vice-chancellor was paid £234,000 for a 9-month stint in the role, a University pay report has revealed.

Elsie McDowell, president of the SU's Class Act campaign, has described the University's decision to pay Freeling this fee as "unbelievable".

Dr Anthony Freeling, a former President of Hughes Hall, served as interim vice-chancellor between the 1st of October 2022 and the 30th of June 2023.

Freeling was paid £209,000 in salary for his term as vice-chancellor, and accrued an additional £25,000, described as "payments made in lieu of pension" in the University's annual Financial Management Information report.

Deborah Prentice, Cambridge's current vice-chancellor, was paid £179,000 in the previous academic year, for a four-month period from the 11th of April to the 31st of July. The report states that Prentice was paid as an employee of the University from April, despite taking up her post on the 1st of July.

Cambridge's outgoing vice-chancellor, Stephen Toope, was also paid £86,000 under the University's 2022/23 accounts,

with his post ending on the 30th of September 2022.

The report states that the vice-chancellor's basic salary is 10.3 times the median pay of staff, while this multiplier increases to 10.4 times when considering the VC's "total remuneration".

Toope, Freeling's predecessor, had an annual salary of £475,000. When asked by *Varsity* to justify this pay in 2022, the acting VC said: "You may think it's an unreasonable amount but it's what the best vice-chancellors get and it's far less than they would get in North America."

This year's pay report includes a description of the University's highest pay bands, which it says includes the vice-chancellor. The highest salary band in 2022/23 was £415,001-£420,000.

Elsie McDowell told *Varsity*: "At a time when so many students are struggling with the ongoing cost of living crisis, it is unbelievable that the University is willing to pay the vice-chancellor such an unnecessarily large sum of money."

During his term as vice-chancellor, Dr Freeling made headlines for his stance against the marking boycott when he wrote to academics "begging" them to drop their strike action last June. The acting VC told staff that more than half of Cambridge's undergraduates were likely to be affected, saying that students need



▲ TOBIA NAVA

to "relax and celebrate" their results.

The boycott was not resolved until September last year, when it was dropped a few weeks before it was due to end.

Freeling also attracted controversy

in October 2022 when he told *Varsity* that he doesn't know what decolonisation is. The term "has been misused to such an extent that I don't think, if I'm honest, I can give an accurate definition of what is meant by it," he said. Freeling

had previously said that decolonising the curriculum "holds a lot of value".

The University of Cambridge was contacted for comment.

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AdvanceHE Affiliate Member 23-24

Christian group DMs student ‘sinners’

Eleanor Mann
Senior News Editor

A group called ‘Cambridge Christian Fellowship’ has been direct messaging Cambridge staff and students, asking “sinners” to “repent”, *Varsity* has found.

The group, a branch of the Evangelical missionary church ‘Young Disciples International’, direct messaged university students and staff via Instagram, offering “systematic Bible study” to “deepen your relationship with God for sure”.

The group has told *Varsity* that its members are told not to message Instagram users who do not already follow the account.

One message to an unwitting undergraduate read: “Hi... How are you? This is Faith from Evangelical Fellowship. I’m reaching out to see if you are interested in the Bible study which will help you to strengthen your faith in Jesus Christ.”

“Even though we are sinners, have our weaknesses and shortcomings. When we repent, God still forgives, loves us and embrace us fully,” the DM continued.

“We offer systematic and in-depth Bible study which will deepen your relationship with God for sure,” the message read, adding: “one session goes around 40mins”.

Although it is unclear how the Christian group acquired the social media of

members of the University, they described the messages as part of their “outreach activities”.

Young Disciples International told *Varsity*: “As part of YD United Kingdom’s outreach efforts, our staff in the UK has been actively inviting the students at Cambridge to participate in fellowship and Bible-study opportunities. YD International is not affiliated with the University, but they hope to provide students there with the opportunity to learn the Gospel of Jesus Christ and have a place of belonging.”

“It is our intention and goal to comply with the rules and regulations of each institution and various social media platforms, including that of Meta, in our outreach efforts,” they added.

One undergraduate recipient told *Varsity* that the DMs were “just out of order” explaining: “It’s just out of order to contact random students calling them sinners, especially when those students might have religious trauma or have a different faith - something you can’t tell just by looking at their social media.”

Young Disciples International was founded in China in 2002, and “evangelised and conducted bible studies at the major universities throughout China and Asia,” according to its website.

The Christian organisation established chapters in the UK in 2020, seemingly targeting Oxbridge students first.



▲ The Cambridge Night Climbers returned last week, leaving Palestine flags on rooftops across the city
CAMBRIDGE NIGHT CLIMBERS WITH PERMISSION FOR VARSAITY

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News

Around town



Patrick Dolan

'Prime Target' Leo Woodall spotted in Cambridge

Actor Leo Woodall, known for his role in *The White Lotus* and more recently as Dexter in the hit Netflix series *One Day*, was spotted filming in Cambridge for the new Apple TV+ series *Prime Target*. Woodall plays a mathematical genius named Edward Brook, who attempts to decipher patterns in prime numbers. The series will revolve around Edward's quest to unlock a code that grants access to all computers, while facing threats from an unseen adversary. Woodall's presence in Cambridge isn't new; he was also seen here last summer for another Apple TV film called *Varsity*.

Eight burglary blunders

A 36-year-old from Northstowe, Cambridge, has confessed to burgling eight businesses in Cambridge. The admission came during his appearance at Cambridge Magistrates' Court on 12 April. Police noted there had been a series of break-ins at various businesses, such as takeaways and stores, in March. The burglar awaits sentencing at Cambridge Crown Court on 6 May after being remanded in custody.

Professor T back in town

The ITV drama *Professor T* is currently being filmed in various locations around Cambridge for its fourth series. The crime drama stars ex-Varsity writer Ben Miller and Frances de la Tour and revolves around a University of Cambridge criminologist Professor Jasper Tempest who suffers from OCD and assists police in solving crimes. Filming has been spotted around Jesus Lane and near the Quaker Meeting House.

Bye bye Ted Baker

Administrators have announced the closure of 11 Ted Baker stores across the UK, including the branch on St Andrew's Street, Cambridge. The closures are expected to result in the loss of 120 store roles and 25 head office positions. These stores, deemed unprofitable even with rent reductions, will cease trading today. Benji Dymant, joint administrator, said that the store closures "will improve the performance of the business" despite the "regrettable impact on valued team members".

Six students to run in local elections

Felix Armstrong
Senior News Editor

Campaign has begun for next month's council elections, in which six students are running for selection.

Half of the University's student candidates are running for the Green Party, with two Labour Party candidates up for election, and one for the Conservatives.

14 of Cambridge City Council's 42 seats will be contested, including three wards, Castle, Market, and Newnham, with a high student presence.

Labour maintained their strong presence in Cambridge during last year's elections, despite losing 2 seats, leaving the party with 10 across the city. 4 Liberal Democrat and 2 Green candidates were elected.

The Cambridge congestion charge was a key issue during the 2023 local elections, which was dropped in October after a long-running debate. The policy was backed by the University, with provice-chancellor Andy Neely saying of the decision: "It's a shame the politics have got in the way."

Last year's local elections were the first in which voters were required to bring ID to the polls. The new policy was met with allegations that it favoured older generations, as bus passes and old-age Oyster cards were listed as acceptable forms of identification.

Following the elections, Cambridge Council figures reported that over 300 voters were turned away from polling stations. One student told *Varsity* that they had not expected their non-UK passport to be refused, while another said that transgender students would be avoiding the polls due to their deadnames being listed on their ID.

The policy remains in place for this year's elections. Voters can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate, which can be used as ID at the polls, until the 24th of April.

Three students are standing for the Green Party: Joshua Morris-Blake, Esmé Hennessy, and Chloe Mosonyi. Szymon Sawicki, the sole Conservative student candidate, is running against Hennessy in Castle Ward. Ben Cartwright and Sam Carling, who has been a Councillor since 2021, are Labour Party candidates.

Sam Carling
Labour, West Chesterton Ward



"Having been a councillor for two years, I've seen the difference Labour is making in Cambridge - particularly through building more affordable housing, as we have delivered more new council homes than any other UK local authority bar Birmingham. I also want to build on our excellent climate action, following our reduction of the City Council's carbon emissions by 10% in just the last year. I'm restanding to continue that work, and deliver more support for residents through the cost-of-living crisis."

Joshua Morris-Blake
Green, Cherry Hinton Ward



"I'm running because Labour have failed on the basics: potholes, poverty and pitiful protection against river pollution. The Greens have momentum in Cambridge - since moving here in 2021, we've gained more seats than every other party - and that looks set to continue based on campaigning data. More Labour councillors won't make a difference here. In the student-heavy seats, Greens are best placed to hold Labour accountable, protect our most vulnerable residents and push for investment in a fairer, greener city."

Ben Cartwright
Labour Party, Abbey Ward



"As a student it's easy to be bound by the privilege of attending this university without looking beyond our college walls. But for many people this is their home all year round, and local issues really matter to them. Engaging in the issues facing residents is a really grounding experience and is a major part of why I stood. We need to ensure that we make Cambridge a fairer, greener place, expanding community access to local provisions, creating safer streets, and seeking to reduce the city's carbon footprint."

Chloe Mosonyi
Green Party, Trumpington Ward



"I'm running because I believe the City Council should be doing more to address social and environmental problems in Cambridge. The housing crisis is a particularly thorny issue, with young people being especially vulnerable to predatory landlords and high costs. Greens have the policies to challenge Labour on unsustainable development in Cambridge while making sure local housing need is met and our environment protected. More Greens means more progressive voices working for Cambridge."

Esmé Hennessy
Green Party, Castle Ward



"I want to join our growing group of Green councillors in finding concrete solutions to divesting Council funds, night time safety, and prioritising our environment and wellbeing. Student representation on the council is severely lacking - there is a disconnect between the council and young people, allowing the Labour-dominated council to fall behind on too many issues affecting students in Cambridge. Local elections are often so close; this is our chance to elect a council which won't fail on the key issues."

Szymon Sawicki
Conservative Party, Castle Ward



"I am standing because young people, especially from working class backgrounds like me, are underrepresented at a local level in UK politics. The biggest change Cambridge needs is a massive reduction in the cost of living for locals and students, as it is currently one of the most expensive places to live in the UK. Across Cambridge City, the Conservative Party is standing to improve public transport, protect local democracy and build a green and affordable Cambridge."

Student climate protester condemns Cambridge's fossil fuel ties

Patrick Dolan
Deputy News Editor

Cambridge University gives legitimacy to companies that "kill people around the world" through its fossil fuel partnerships, a Cambridge student and Just Stop Oil (JSO) activist has said.

Cressida Gethin, who studies music, was convicted of causing a nuisance after scaling a gantry over the M25 in July 2022. Two years after the incident, the student shared her sentiments towards Cambridge's relationships with fossil fuel companies.

Gethin told *Varsity* that Cambridge's ties with companies such as Schlumberger result in environmental harm by the sheer amount of money involved in these financial transactions. It also contributes to the social legitimacy of companies engaged in destructive practices, the student alleged.

Though the University recently ap-



proved a temporary ban on partnerships with the oil and gas industry, sources have emphasised that the policy is temporary. The moratorium also encourages the body which deals with University donations (CBELA) to "defer making decisions" on funding, rather than refusing cash outright.

Cambridge has been part of the "fabric of UK society" which has historically relied heavily on fossil fuels for its development, so "why would the University be any different?" Gethin said.

According to the *Financial Times*, the university has accepted £19.7 million from oil giants BP and Shell between 2016 and 2023.

The JSO activist, who was originally involved with student group Cambridge Climate Justice, told *Varsity* that she felt the "magnitude and fundamental nature of the problem" had now evolved into a broader social concern for society as a whole.

She emphasises the potential ripple effect of change at a smaller Cambridge level, but expressed a preference for directing her efforts towards "the big game".

She claimed that if she were to engage in any further campaigning, it would be aimed at addressing the entirety of the

issue on a larger scale

This comes after the protester's conviction for causing a nuisance in February this year when she scaled a gantry over the M25 on 20 July 2022 to protest the UK reaching its hottest temperature on record, 40°C, the day before.

"[I] could not just let it go by", the protestor told *Varsity*.

She claims her protest was a "manageable inconvenience" in relation to the impact of climate change.

During her trial, the court heard the protest delayed 3,923 British Airways passengers' journeys. Speaking outside Isleworth Crown Court, the student affirmed she did not regret the protest and would "not back down".

She told *Varsity* that the "political system is too incapacitated to do anything" about the issue of climate change.

Earlier this week, Gethin told Chris Packham, TV presenter and environmental activist, that she would "do it again".

John's spends almost 90 times more on rowing than other colleges

Ella Howard
News Correspondent

St John's College spends almost 90 times more on their boat club than less wealthy colleges, *Varsity* can reveal.

An investigation into Cambridge's rowing scene uncovered that St John's Lady Margaret Boat Club received £172,412 of funding from the college in the last year — £86,066 of which was directly from the college's general funds.

This sum dwarfs the spending of some of its competition, such as Lucy Cavendish College who gave just £1,951 to their college boat club — roughly 88 times less than their wealthier counterpart. Another low spender was Newnham College, who only put £9,000 a year towards their boat club.

This spending was followed by King's College, who pay £20,080 towards the running costs for their boathouse, but this sum only makes up 25% of the overall expenditure of the club. Gonville and Caius were the second highest spenders, shelling out £32,768 annually excluding staff costs and a further £28,453 in gifts allocated to the boathouse.

All of these sums are dwarfed by



▲ HANNAH MAWARDI

Johns' expenditure, who spent over £110,000 more annually than their closest competitor.

Speaking on this divide, Chris Launchbury, President of Lucy Cavendish College Boat Club, told *Varsity* that "not having our own boathouse" is "definitely limiting our ability to expand as a club".

In particular, he stressed how "just

having three boats, two of which are approaching 20 years old, doesn't seem right". Last year Caius spent £20,000 on a new boat, around 10 times Lucy Cavendish's total funding.

Launchbury also expressed his concerns about "displays of wealth" and the issue of "microaggressions", noting the sport's "elitism" problems.

He explained that "it's more on how the rowers feel valued," and how seemingly small differences can affect students who are "predisposed to feeling like they don't necessarily belong in Cambridge".

Varsity found that the Lady Margaret Boat Club awarded each of their captains silver dishes, amounting to £335.80,

and Gonville and Caius set aside £330 in their budget for rowing uniforms. Both of these expenses would make up around 20% of Lucy Cavendish's budget.

Conversely, "less than a third" of Lucy Cavendish boat club members said they felt "membership and kit costs were affordable," according to a survey done by the club.

St John's spends £19,073 annually on professional rowing coaches, yet the Lucy Cavendish Boat Club President stressed the importance of "individual hard work" when it comes to success on the Cam.

For Launchbury, the main disadvantage of less funding lies in the added "stress" and "responsibility" to students running the club, who may not be getting an equal "Cambridge experience".

In last month's Lent Bumps, the Lucy Cavendish M1 team achieved blades, bumping in all their races. However, they remain in the third division, as opposed to Lady Margaret's M1, who also attained blades, remaining at the top of the first division.

St John's College, Gonville and Caius College, and Lucy Cavendish College have been contacted for comment

NATO membership the 'natural and final step' for Sweden, Foreign Minister tells Selwyn

Jude Crawley
Deputy Editor

Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström, a former Selwyn MCR president, argued that NATO membership was a long time coming for Sweden, in a talk at Selwyn College on Tuesday (16/04).

Taking unscreened questions, the Cambridge alum spoke to a packed room about Russian aggression, NATO accession and his views on international security in the future.

Billström described the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 as an "irreversible turning point for Swedish, British, European and global security" and confirmed Sweden's accession to NATO was a "direct result" of Russia's aggression. Asked by an audience member to rank his foreign policy concerns, he said Russia's actions were "outstanding" against other issues like the rise of China or migration.

Billström anticipated a "prolonged confrontation with Russia", dismissing ideas that the West should push Ukraine towards a position of negotiations. It is up to Ukraine and Ukraine to decide if and when the moment is right to negotiate. And it will not forget that Russia could end the war at any time by simply withdrawing its troops," he said.

Billström described Sweden's recent decision to join NATO, while appearing to be "a shift in Swedish Foreign and Security Policy", it is a "natural and final step" of a long process of ever closer alignment with Western Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union. He de-



▲ THISATH RANAWAKA

scribed how Swedish forces had served in a range of NATO military operations throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, including in Bosnia and Afghanistan.

Billström was keen to emphasise Sweden's membership as an advantage to NATO, boasting about the strength of the Swedish defence industry, hitting the 2% GDP spent on defence target and private sector dominance in areas of cyber security.

He dismissed suggestions from one audience member that Sweden has compromised on its policy of free speech to avoid Turkey vetoing their application to NATO. Turkey had threatened to veto Swedish membership because Sweden harboured members of the Kurdistan

Workers' Party (PKK).

Billström openly admitted there was a "memorandum of understanding" with Turkey and called the PKK a "terrorist organisation" saying "we have come down hard on PKK activities in Sweden, and that is right and proper." He denied there is an infringement on freedom of speech in Sweden in any way.

When asked by Roger Mosey, Selwyn Master and ex-BBC journalist, if he increasingly saw the world as divided into two hostile blocs, Billström was quick to dismiss the idea. "China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, they do not fall into a bloc in any way. They have sometimes aligned interests and they come together for certain reasons" he said.

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News

Ex-Varsity editor apologies for pronunciation

Amol Rajan, host of University Challenge and former *Varsity* editor, has apologised over his pronunciation of the letter “H” following a torrent of criticism on social media and in the press. Rajan was accused of causing a “proliferation of ‘haitches’” and sounding “like a small child” for saying “haitch” rather than “aitch”. Rajan has pledged to change his ways, accepting that pronunciation really “matters a lot to a lot of people” and aiming to respect their wishes.

Paul from *Traitors* to spill all at Selwyn

Paul, the star of this year’s season of beloved reality show *Traitors*, is set to visit Selwyn College next week. Paul became known for the machiavellian persona he took on during the show. The contestant will speak at the college on Thursday (25/04) alongside Dan McGolpin, the BBC’s director of iPlayer and channels, and Syeda Irtizaali, the commissioner responsible for the show. The three will discuss the hit show and what it means for the future of television.

Could it be YOU-Bus?

Students will be the next voices of the U-Bus, with Whippet Coaches open for self-tapes for the route’s voice announcements. The project, a collaboration between the bus company, Clare Actors, and Cambridge University Railway Club, is putting 39 stop names up for grabs for student voice actors, as well as multiple other announcements such as “please move down inside the bus”. The project is taking self-tapes until this Sunday (21/04).

Knowing me, knowing you, with Armando Iannucci

Ah ha! Legendary British satirist Armando Iannucci is set to visit Homerton College next week (26/04). The director and writer worked with Steve Coogan on *Alan Partridge* in his early career, and has since created television shows including *The Thick of It* and *Veep*, and films such as *The Death of Stalin* and *David Copperfield*. The event will be hosted by Homerton’s Politics Society. Iannucci also presents *The New Statesman*’s ‘Westminster Reimagined’ podcast.



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University watch

Wilf Vall rounds up student news from around the country

New Glasgow rector slammed for ‘praising’ IRA hunger striker

The new rector of Glasgow University has sparked anger after he praised Bobby Sands, an IRA member who helped plan bombings in Dunmurry, in his maiden speech. In a controversial address, Dr Ghasan Abu Sittah quoted Sands and referred to him as “immortal”. Abu Sittah also accused the UK of being a part of an “axis of genocide” for supplying Israel with arms, and accused Glasgow University of “colluding in genocide”. The university has since distanced itself from these comments, and has also acknowledged the concerns of Jewish students around Abu-Sittah’s appointment.

Bank of ‘mummy and daddy’ for drink driving student at St Andrew’s

Gina Feichtinger, a student at St Andrew’s University, was accused of using “mummy and daddy”’s money to pay a drink driving fine by a judge after she claimed to be relying on her parents to support her studies. Tim Niven-Smith, the Sheriff dealing with her case, expressed concerns that Feichtinger would not pay the fine herself and suggested unpaid community service as an alternative punishment. The Sheriff was eventually convinced otherwise by Feichtinger’s lawyer, who called it an unfair punishment of “naivety”. Feichtinger was instead fined £600 and banned from driving for 12 months.

Police intervene at anti-abortion event at Manchester

Police were forced to escort an anti-abortion speaker away from her event following large protests against the event. The speaker, Madeleine Page, was leaving a talk titled “grill the pro-lifer” when she was faced with a large mob of students blocking her planned travel route, leading the police to organise an escort to her hotel. The talk was organised by the Manchester University Pro-life society, who had previously faced massive protests over their formation last month, including a petition signed by 18,000 students calling for their abolition.

AMES faculty accused of ‘toxicity’ amid high dropout rates

Arwen Godingen & Ella McCartney
Deputy News Editors

Cambridge’s Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (AMES) has come under fire following allegations of an unsupportive and toxic work environment that has negatively impacted students’ experiences and mental health at the University.

Students have told *Varsity* that despite flagging their concerns to the Faculty, “there is no effort from the department to change their degree structure on a widespread level.”

Varsity found that in recent years, around a quarter of students either dropped out or transferred out of AMES degrees in the years after their matriculation, with a peak of two-fifths of students dropping out or transferring in the 2017 cohort.

A *Varsity* Freedom of Information request revealed that these students were most likely to drop out or transfer out of AMES degrees in their second year, with 38% of these students doing so then. The most popular degree AMES students transferred to was HSPS, the choice of almost a quarter of those who have transferred since 2013.

Students criticised the fact that AMES undergraduate courses are advertised as beginners’ courses, despite first year lessons relying on prior knowledge and experience in the languages taught.

One student told *Varsity*: “Whilst being open to people who have never studied the languages before, the faculty, perhaps without realising, seems to rely quite heavily on people already having a decent foundation in either the language, fast enough new language acquisition, and/or an understanding of grammar to a degree that is certainly not taught in an UK school.”

Students recognised that individual language teachers are usually “very sup-

portive”. However, students have also noticed massive disparities in the quality of AMES teaching: “You either get lucky with your teachers/the lecturers you have on your options, or you get it rough,” one said.

At a faculty level, students described the work culture as “out of hand” and the workload expected of students as “undoable”.

The AMES Faculty was described by one student as “diminishing students’ self-worth by claiming a moral high ground because teachers and professors take, or claim to take, a 60-hour work week, so [the students feel they] should also do it”.

Another student explained that, in their first year, they were “expected to do a medic’s level workload,” of more than fifty hours a week.

Some have found this to be confusing when compared to the workload of Modern and Medieval Languages (MML) students: “There’s never really been clarity on why our workload is so much higher than that of MML, whose students study two languages to our one.”

Students acknowledged that the AMES tripos is a difficult course, but that the Faculty “refuses to accept that a lot of [the] issues are faculty related”.

A student explained: “If [a] cohort [does] not [perform] well, to my knowledge, the reflection is rarely put on the faculty structure in general and how the degree is organised, but rather the capabilities of the student themselves.”

Multiple students told *Varsity* that the AMES Faculty has ignored their complaints, stating that the Faculty’s general attitude is: “We know this is something students have issues with every year, but this is how the department is run so we won’t be changing it.”

One student told *Varsity* that almost half of their Chinese class left the course in first year, which they believe “shows a stunning ignorance to their issues or

a stubbornness to change” on AMES’s part. Another student even alleged that the Faculty’s “sense of pride” over “the difficulty of the course [...] makes the high dropout rate more of a positive than a negative to them in some ways.”

One student, who was physically unable to attend lectures in person, highlighted the Faculty’s approach to attendance. Despite explaining their situation to the Faculty, and asking whether they could instead attend over Zoom or be provided lecture recordings, the department still refused to make any adjustments.

The student told *Varsity*: “If you miss a single lecture in AMES they will come for you,” even believing that “[the teachers] will treat you worse if you don’t show up for whatever reason.” Consequently, the student was forced to make their own adjustments to attend in person, despite their extenuating circumstances “because I just couldn’t get any support” from the Faculty.

“I’m glad I’m out – I’m doing better now and I am never going back to AMES because that was just not the best experience personally,” they added.

Students also alleged a disregard for mental health within the Faculty: “Mental health in general doesn’t seem to be properly understood by most faculty members, and it makes it so that they can often be an obstacle to struggling students rather than a source of support.”

One student described their final year studying Japanese: “I did get quite severe depression throughout my Lent and Easter terms [...] I wasn’t really able to leave my room or go to my lectures and at that point I think the Faculty just completely gave up on me”.

The student expressed how this actually provided them with relief

“because [the Faculty] left me alone for the first time ever”.

Multiple students share the belief that because AMES is a relatively small faculty, teacher’s perception of students can result in biased teaching and antagonising students.

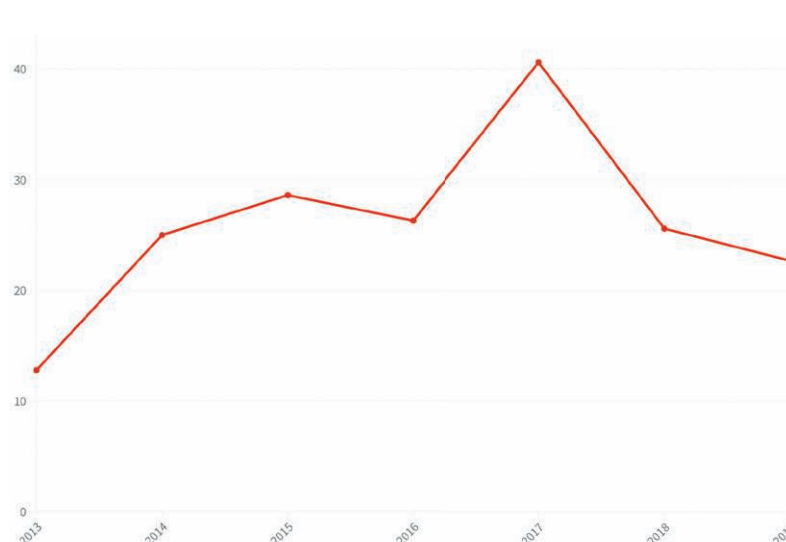
One student said: “I’ve seen grudges get quite personal (both ways) and every time it has been to the detriment to both parties, but of course particularly to the student, whose mental health and productivity inevitably suffer.”

“Such cases often lead to intermissions, dropouts, or switching course (if they are lucky enough to do so), and rarely do they resolve otherwise,” they continued.

“The AMES department needs to seriously consider whether they can honestly say they’re providing the world-class education/degree that Cambridge is supposed to offer, and if I was the university, I would be wondering what’s wrong with the faculty to have such high dropout rates, rather than pushing the issue to the side and onto the students,” the student added.

Professor Christine van Ruymbeke, the Co-Chair of the AMES Faculty, told *Varsity*: “We take the wellbeing of students very seriously and work to ensure they study in an environment in which they feel supported. There are several channels available for students to seek support, voice concerns or submit a complaint and we strongly encourage all students to take these up where needed. Within the Faculty students can speak to their course’s Undergraduate Coordinator or a Faculty Co-Chair, alternatively within College they can speak to their Director of Studies or Senior Tutor. The University also offers a Student Complaint Procedure, as well as a range of Student Support services including academic support and counselling.”

Percentage of students who dropped out or transferred from AMES, by academic year:



Ten colleges paid below real living wage

Felix Armstrong
Senior News Editor

Ten colleges failed to pay some staff the real living wage in the academic year 2022/23, a Cambridge Student Union investigation has revealed.

The real living wage, which is based on cost of living in the UK, stood at £10.90 last academic year.

Downing, Emmanuel, Fitzwilliam, Gonville & Caius, Homerton, Lucy Cavendish, Magdalene, St Edmund’s, Trinity Hall, and Wolfson failed to pay the rate to some of its staff last year.

Emmanuel College paid the lowest rate to casually employed staff, which was £7.49. The college paid 50 staff below the national living wage last year, which is the Government-set minimum pay for adults aged over 23, and stood at £10.42 before an increase this month.

Magdalene College also paid nineteen staff below this rate last year, with their lowest pay for casual staff standing at



£10.18.

Downing, Fitzwilliam, Caius, Homerton, Lucy Cavendish, and Wolfson Colleges all paid £10.42 to some staff in 2022/23, while all other colleges paid all employees above this rate.

Selwyn, Girton, and Queens’ are accredited as living wage employers, while Fitzwilliam was expected to complete the process by this month, which would mean that it pays £12 per hour or above to all employees.

Gonville & Caius and Darwin colleges have no current plans to increase pay, while Trinity, Wolfson, and Newnham stated that pay is under consideration, according to the report.

King’s College refused to disclose its living wage statistics, telling the SU: “The College shares your concerns about fair pay and conditions for workers, and the Living Wage campaign. However, we also operate in the collegiate environment, which means we have to consider our

commercial interests such as remaining competitive in a tough recruitment market.”

Fitzwilliam College told *Varsity*: “In FY2022-23 the RLW was £10.90 per hour, and the College paid permanent employees a minimum of £10.90 per hour up to the end of April, and from 1st May 2023, paid £11.50 per hour (above the RLW). During FY2023-24, the Governing Body approved both the payment of all employees (including casuals) the RLW, and that the College would apply for accreditation with the RLW Foundation. From 1st April 2024 all employees (permanent and casual) receive the RLW of £12 per hour.”

A spokesperson for St Edmund’s College told *Varsity*: “We pay our staff the National Living Wage in line with Government-set wage rates. We value our staff and provide a comprehensive benefits package that includes training and development opportunities.”

A Homerton College spokesperson

said: “Permanent and temporary staff are paid at least £12.02 per hour, which is slightly higher than the RLW. The college

37%
The number of colleges that paid some staff below the living wage in 2022/23

introduced this on 1 January this year, a full three months before it came into effect nationally.”

“Back in 2022/23, casual staff were paid NMW at the 23+ age rate even if they were younger. Some people choose to be casual for a range of personal reasons, but Homerton strives to employ workers on permanent or temporary contracts rather than casual wherever possible,” Homerton said.

All colleges mentioned have been contacted for comment.

Interviews

Alan Rusbridger on the media, technology and climate change

Sana Soomro speaks to the former editor of *The Guardian* about the future of journalism

I rushed back from my overrun supervision fully aware of my jittery nerves. It is not everyday you get to speak with someone as accomplished as Alan Rusbridger. Having spent two decades as editor-in-chief at *The Guardian* and another six years as the principal of Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford, Rusbridger now edits *Prospect*, doggedly commenting on issues that plague contemporary times. During his tenure at *The Guardian*, the newspaper underwent a significant transformation from a modest print audience to a global digital giant currently boasting 81 million unique visitors every month. Huddled behind a room divider as the hall filled with students excited to hear Rusbridger's thoughts, I was sat opposite one of the most influential people in modern British journalism.

With all the impressive positions he has held, I had not anticipated the softly spoken and humble person who met me. Echoing the fears that haunt many Cambridge students, Rusbridger reflects that he always felt a bit of an imposter during his time reading English Literature at Magdalene. "I wouldn't have got in on the grades that I got, which was always a factor on my mind when I went to be the head of house at Oxford. That was one of the reasons I sort of felt I had to make recompense for, but I still love Cambridge." Not getting involved much in student journalism, Rusbridger went on to work for *Cambridge Evening News* after

finishing his degree. "It feels strange coming back because Cambridge is just so much slicker and smarter than it was," he tells me.

Rusbridger's book *Breaking News* details the turmoil involved in the transition of *The Guardian* from print to digital journalism. I ask how difficult it was to navigate the changing landscape of news consumption. "Nobody knew anything about websites; nobody knew anything about social media. It seemed ridiculous that anybody would want to read anything on their phone, you know, so it was like every time you thought you had got to grips with digital there was another revolution around the corner. Somebody referred to it as rebuilding a plane in mid-flight," he explains.

While some journalists cast doubt on freely available online journalism,

Rusbridger was enthusiastic about it in what he describes in his book as "the re-making of journalism": "It was incredibly exciting, exhausting, frightening, exhilarating. It was quite scary at the time." His enthusiasm about digital media raises questions about how long he thinks print media is going to last. "I think it is definitely a medium for older people. And I think there are enough older people that will go on reading newspapers until either they die or the newspaper dies. But there hasn't been a single national paper that's gone yet. It surprises me but it's more resilient than I thought it would be."

Opening American and Australian editions of the newspaper, Rusbridger played a key role in expanding its publishing bases to the extent that 60% of *The Guardian's* audience now resides outside of the UK. I asked him to give us some insights into his leadership style. "*The Guardian* is a very unusual paper because it has no proprietor. It's owned by a trust. So there was nobody almost uniquely in British journalism. There was nobody above me telling me what to think or who I had to think about or what they might think." With this immense editorial freedom he describes his management style as being much more inclusive, as "if you've got nobody above, you have to edit the paper in a different way because the only reference points are your colleagues and your readers. You're really gathering the expertise and the eyewitness reporting around you rather than as I think happens on some newspapers with editors sitting behind the desk telling people what to go out and write."

◀ WEB SUMMIT/FLICR

During his time *The Guardian* won the prestigious Pulitzer prize and covered major stories including Assange's WikiLeaks, *News Of The World's* phone hacking scandal and the Edward Snowden confessions. Rusbridger tells me that he is proud that they have built

“It seemed ridiculous that anybody would want to read the news on their phone

up a tremendous reputation for investigative journalism. "The economic challenges continue to be severe, but I think it's a great paper, and I was proud to have a role in helping to transform," he says. Referring to these financial difficulties, he explains the paper as an economic model: "Because we can now see what works and what doesn't work, especially in local newspapers, if you cut half the staff and reduce the value of what you're doing, people won't pay for it. If you do journalism that is courageous and matters then you can go to the reader and say will you pay, and they'll say if you do stuff like that we will pay."

At *Prospect*, Rusbridger covers a wide array of topics from his commentary on modern society and opinions on British politics to his thoughtful reflections on current global affairs. Perhaps I was be-

ing restrictive by asking him what the most pressing issue that people should be discussing right now is, but after pausing to reflect, Rusbridger settles on climate change as the single topic that trumps everything else. Despite this, he explains how it can be a challenging topic to report on: "It is very difficult journalistically to cover climate change. Journalism thrives on things that are new, and in a sense, climate change moves slowly in journalistic terms. It doesn't present fresh stories all the time. Finding ways of reimagining it and revitalising it and keeping it on the front page, is I think one of the great challenges. I don't think journalism has done very well in meeting that challenge."

As the restless chattering from the other side of the room became louder, I glanced through to see a brimming hall eagerly awaiting to hear from Rusbridger. What advice would he have for aspiring young journalists? "You have to think of it as a vocation," he tells me. "There are so many reasons not to do it. It is hideously insecure, badly paid and stressful. So unless you feel you have that vocation, find something else to do." Rusbridger's comments confirm the fears budding journalists have about this career possibility; however, he is quick to note the positive aspects as well. "I think it is quite exciting to be a part of a generation that is obviously going to reinvent journalism. When I first went into journalism a mile away from here, nothing had changed in journalism for about a hundred years, and it felt like nothing ever would change. So I think the one thing about being your age is that you can change things."

'The constant threat of not being here next year is all consuming'

Olivia Kiely asks a foundation year student about the challenges of integration and the intense academic pressure they face on the new course

The foundation year course is still in its infancy, the pilot year group having graduated only last year. The fully funded course aims to help students whose circumstances would have prevented their studying at Cambridge, offering a stepping stone to propel them onto a three-year tripos. However, despite the course's commendable aims, some of its students are experiencing significant challenges.

Talking about the position of the foundation course within the University as a whole, Sam, whose name has been changed for anonymity, shares the difficulty foundation students face when trying to integrate with their peers. "I've had people who find out I'm on the foundation year and just not talk to you again, literally just walk away." They explain how this reaction can perpetuate a feeling of imposter syndrome: "I feel like they've purposefully set [the course] up in a way to make it difficult so you have to prove yourself." Moreover, Sam points out how the course's eligibility criteria can result in prejudgments of those on the foundation course. "If people know about the course, you're either going to be labelled as disabled, a carer, was in care, went to a really bad school, economically disadvantaged [...] they're all

quite personal." Sam tells me how one of their friends has experienced a noticeable change in how they've been treated since progressing onto a tripos course, demonstrating the tangible impact such prejudgments can have.

“It's a great opportunity, but it makes you question your identity

Despite the problems, Sam is keen to express the positives of the foundation year. "I think the aims of the foundation year are really commendable, and I think they have [our] best intentions at heart [...] Our course director, our lecturers especially, they care for you as a person." However, these intentions are not always achieved. "Where it falls short is how it fits into the community and also how it's set up because it's one of the most abstract, multidisciplinary courses in Cambridge." The structure of the

course is designed to cover a variety of topics, which are split into four streams: material, languages, data and textual. "I don't think [it's] very well designed [...] it doesn't feel very streamlined." Speaking on the problems with the wide-ranging syllabus, Sam explains that "writing for so many different academic discourses and lecturers who want different things" is particularly difficult.

Sam also highlights the unique emotional strain posed by the foundation course. "If you have a mental health condition, having that constant threat of not being here next year [...] it's all consuming." Sam adds that this pressure is also exacerbated by "the disparity between colleges in wellbeing support, academic support and then also grade boundaries". The required grade for tripos admission varies from college to college: "I could get 4% more than a student at [another college] [...] and I still might be rejected." Expanding on the pressure of the course structure, Sam explains how "the fourth and fifth essay you'll write makes up 20% of your overall course [grade]", a pace they describe as acutely stressful. "I remember someone saying if you mess up in your first term, it's really hard to pick yourself back up." Asking whether this difficulty is due to a lack of support, Sam responds: "I think the support tries

to be there, and I wouldn't say the onus is on the foundation course [alone], but I would say it is on the way the course is designed."

When asking about the course's future, they make one thing clear: "Obviously, no student would want this opportunity to be taken away." However, they openly admit there is a need for re-evaluation, but are unsure how and when this change will occur. "I believe they only have funding for a certain amount of years and then they'll re-evaluate [...] it probably also relies really heavily on what grades [the pilot group] get in three years' time." I ask Sam whether they would have applied to the foundation year course if they knew what they do now. "I've never really thought of that," they say, taking a moment before adding: "I do know, I had

someone say to me the other day they would not recommend this course to their disabled friends."

Despite the course's downfalls, its benefits in supporting those who have faced significant obstacles on their journey to Cambridge cannot be underestimated. Sam acknowledges this, explaining: "It's a great opportunity because it is a stepping stone, but it makes you question a lot about your identity [...] it feels very raw sometimes." They are keen to ensure this opportunity continues to improve so that both current and future students can fully benefit from it.

◀ EMILY LAWSON-TODD



‘When you stop being curious, you stop being a good diplomat’

Sam Nicholson discusses international diplomacy with Cambridge alumnus and experienced diplomat Dr Peter Abbott OBE

When preparing to speak to Dr Peter Abbott OBE, an experienced diplomat, cinematic portrayals of intense diplomatic deals and crises came to mind. Halfway through our discussion, Abbott calmly mentions: “My colleagues have just said the building is shaking ... I’ll call you back.” 20 minutes later, he shares that there’d been a 4.8-magnitude earthquake in nearby New Jersey. Earthquakes rarely happen in New England, where Abbott serves as his majesty’s consul general. Despite the unusual event confirming some of my prior speculation, throughout our discussion he paints a rich picture of diplomacy and the core values of curiosity and humility held by any “good diplomat”.

Abbott’s career has spanned west Africa to Washington DC and Islamabad to Boston. Still, diplomacy “was an entirely accidental career choice” with “no sort of grand plan”. Nonetheless, his Cambridge education, earning a BA and PhD in Greek Tragedy at Magdalene College, prepared him well for the challenges he faces in his job. “I don’t use Greek tragedy regularly,” he chuckles. “The best thing that an education can give you is never to receive anything at face value.” As reality becomes increasingly unclear, “you really need to be a

good critic nowadays.”

Responding to my questions about how he adapts to such diverse postings, Abbott explains: “You’re always promoting the UK wherever you are, so the context of your work doesn’t change very much. I think a good diplomat is humble and aware that there are different ways of doing things around the world. If you have that humility [...] I think that’s a good starting point [...] You must be curious, ask good questions, listen, travel, try the food, listen to the music.” Despite adapting to life abroad, I ask what he misses most about being in the UK, “It’s home; you always miss home, the British sense of humour. I miss our approach to life, which is usually quite relaxed. I miss pubs and dogs in pubs.”

Abbott believes the UK’s role in the modern world “hasn’t changed a huge amount; we are still one of the world’s great conveners; we sit in all the world’s major decision-making centres.” There is international respect for the efficacy of the UK’s civil

service, we have “one of the world’s most powerful armed forces”, and “our intelligence agencies are world-renowned.”

Abbott raises the simultaneous strength of British soft power through music, film, television and the Premier League, posing that those features come together into an enduring and “potent mix”. He challenges a tendency for “navel-gazing” a declining role in the world, suggesting: “Britain has a huge amount to add to solving some of the very difficult challenges that we’re facing, and our history, for better or worse, means that we have deep relationships around the world - long-lasting relationships that give us a unique ability to analyse and provide insight.”

Abbott interned on Capitol Hill in his younger days and so I ask if turbulent elections on both sides of the Atlantic could strain transatlantic relations: “We get a little bit obsessed with that dynamic. The UK-US relationship is

so deep, so multifaceted [...] that relationship will always endure, irrespective

of who’s in Downing Street or the White House.” He cements this in the history of “science and technology at the heart of the UK-US relationship”. During the second world war and its aftermath, “it was technology that started to build the special relationship [...] Winston Churchill sponsored the Tizard Mission, which was the fact that the UK had been developing unique radar capability [...] so Churchill sent British scientists over here to MIT in Cambridge, MA to develop that technology.” Within the year, radar detection turned the tide of the war.

Similarly, he highlights the Manhattan Project and the endurance of the nuclear relationship, affirmed by the recent AUKUS pact to collaborate and supply Australia with nuclear-powered submarines. Science and tech are at the heart of his consulate’s mission, connecting Britain to a global innovation hub across biotech, AI, clean energy, and beyond. I asked Abbott to share the best thing about living in the USA. “I love American optimism; there’s never anything impossible. Americans have a very healthy attitude to failure [...] that’s why America will always be one of the big science superpowers.”

Ultimately, “there is no doubt that our science is as good as American science. Where we have a bit to learn from the US is how we can take this science to

turn into commercial product.” Abbott illustrates how New England has one of the world’s highest concentrations of universities and is proud of this region’s regard for the University of Cambridge, notably what he frames as Cambridge’s capacity for innovation and commercialising them for social good.

When asked for his most memorable diplomatic experience, Abbott draws on the Prince and Princess of Wales’s recent visit to Boston for the Earthshot prize at the iconic home of the Boston Red Sox, which was followed by “a pretty extraordinary 12 months”. The Queen’s platinum jubilee, her passing, and the coronation spotlighted the royal family. They can be “a very powerful advocate”, he explains, referencing descriptions of the monarch as “Britain’s top diplomat”.

Finally, I posed my most significant question: How do you take your tea? Without hesitation: “Strong English breakfast tea, milk, one sugar,” he laughs. “I don’t drag Britishness around with me. I try to be in the place I’m in; coffee is done well here.” Abbott values serving one’s own nation and fostering connections with the homes of others just as much. Despite global turbulence, his enduring trust and optimism in the strength of the US relationship and Britain’s international role is encouraging.



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Features

In conversation with Clarissa's Campaign for Cambridge Hearts

Clementine Luisiana speaks to the students fighting to keep their friend's memory alive



CLARISSA NICHOLLS ▶

Meet Izzy and Jess at Clarissa's bench. It is low and wooden, and on it is a metal plaque that gleams in the sun.

"The best bench on Sidgwick," Izzy says.

Clarissa Nicholls was a student at Trinity Hall who would now be in her fourth and final year at Cambridge. She should be sitting alongside us today; not on this bench, but another, free of an inscription of her name. While on her year abroad in Paris last year, she collapsed and passed away from an undiagnosed heart condition.

Clarissa, to all who knew her, was a vision of perfect health. Her death was an unspeakable tragedy, and it was also frightening: how could a top athlete who was an active member of the Cambridge sports scene, played University hockey, and ran regularly, die of a heart condition?

"A few people just assumed that because she was our age, it must have been mental health related," Jess tells me. The truth is, 1 in 300 young people aged between 14 and 35 in the UK suffer from

an undiagnosed life-threatening cardiac condition like Clarissa's. 12 of those young people die every week from sudden cardiac death, often with no prior symptoms. Had Clarissa had the right checks, she would be with us now.

The sun is on our faces as we talk. "It's the sunniest bench too", says Izzy. "It's amazing for tanning. Clarissa loved the sunshine so it's perfect. And we've come up with a few jokes. I had my mourning coffee on the bench. Get it?"

The two are steadfastly determined to focus on the good amidst the bad, committed to carrying on the boundless positivity that Clarissa was known and loved for. This is why they have launched Clarissa's Campaign for Cambridge Hearts, which aims to raise money for a university heart screening service, established in the hope of preventing the reoccurrence of a tragedy like Clarissa's. The idea was pitched by Clarissa's mother, Hilary, who has been relentlessly fighting for change. Their answer was resounding. "We just said yes, absolutely."

The Campaign is hoping to raise a

“

Had Clarissa had the right checks, she would be with us now

total of £28K, which would be enough to provide Cambridge University students with a 4-day ECG heart screening service in partnership with charity CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young). The service is statistically guaranteed to prevent another young heart-related death from happening at Cambridge, and would detect a number of other underlying heart conditions. If all goes to plan, the 4-day screening would become an annual service, ensuring young hearts are given the right checks, at the right time.

Since its birth midway through Lent term, Izzy, Jess, and a group of Clarissa's close friends have firmly situated

the Campaign as a regular feature on the university's social scene: they have fundraised through collaborations with Spotlite and Jazz Soc, added optional donations to May Ball and Garden Party tickets, and hosted events at the likes of Clare Cellars and The Portland Arms. Events alleviate the pressure that can sometimes be associated with donating money, encouraging people to give as much or as little as they like. Jess and Izzy do this with characteristic positivity: their Jazz Soc event served a fundraising 'Clarissa Spritz', an ode to the Hugo Spritzes enjoyed on a second-year Italian trip to Florence.

"We can see so much joy in what we're creating," Izzy says. "At some of these events we just think this is brilliant, Clarissa would be finding this so funny."

They have also turned to Cambridge's sports, raising money through collaborations with Varsity hockey, netball, lacrosse, and football. 20 of Clarissa's friends, Jess and Izzy included, ran the Cambridge half marathon alongside Clarissa's twin brother Ollie. All of this on top

of a flurry of personal donations means that within just a month of launching the Campaign has raised £11,000 - well exceeding their day 1 screening target. The sum is an enormous feat, made all the more impressive by the fact that Izzy and Jess have been wading their way through Lent term of final year and Masters, respectively.

But there is further to travel, and they are determined to keep gathering momentum. They hope to soon reach 14K, which would get them to their day 2 screening target, and halfway to their total goal. A number of plans for Easter term events are in the works, and word of the cause is quickly spreading beyond Clarissa's network of friends and peers. Her faculty, MMLL, have committed to helping the Campaign raise money and awareness. Garnering attention on a wider collegiate and institutional level, however, has proven to be more tricky. "A big part of this whole process is discovering who is helpful," Jess tells me. "Maybe the reason the university hasn't got involved yet is because we haven't got in touch with the right person." In any case, this has not deterred them: "If we make a massive noise, it will show the university that people care," Izzy says. "Money isn't a problem for Cambridge - we just need to show them we're worth investing in."

Nevertheless, the two emphasise the overwhelming generosity they have received in response to the Campaign, even, to their surprise, "from people who had never met Clarissa." They tell me that the first weeks were "a whirlwind of people reaching out and asking how they could help, donating, offering support."

Support must be a welcome thing given the effort the Campaign has required to get off the ground, with both saying they work on it "every day." I ask them how they have managed to balance this huge commitment alongside all that Cambridge demands, without it getting a bit too much.

The answer is, by focusing on Clarissa. "This is such a great way of channelling all that love we have for her into something," Jess tells me. "We get to celebrate her through this. It's about honouring someone who deserved to be here. Nobody deserves to lose a life through a lack of available checks."

"Jess and I have become friends through Clarissa's death, and there's not a day I don't see Jess now," Izzy says. "We get so much of Clarissa through each other. Sometimes when I don't see Jess for a while, I find myself missing Clarissa more."

"I think that's classic Clarissa in a way," Jess adds quietly. "You couldn't not love her straight away, and it meant that she really did bring people together. In her death, as in her life, she's doing that - still bringing people together."

Follow @clarissascampaign on Instagram for updates on upcoming events and collaborations.

College roots: a Cambridge history in trees

Gemini McKee takes a tour through the arboreal history of Cambridge's colleges

As the fourth-oldest university in the world, few things have had the longevity to watch over the 815 years of Cambridge's history – but it may be its trees which have seen the most. In a 2004 survey of veteran trees (trees in the final mature stage of their life; often over 100 years old), Cambridge City Council commented that “nothing complements this historic character better than very old trees.” It would be hard to imagine the eastern end of King's Chapel without its leafy companion, a 150-year-old horse chestnut tree, or picture the Backs without its avenues of limes and hornbeams.

Some of Cambridge's picturesque trees are hard to miss, like the autumnal glory of Darwin's copper beech, or the red-flowered horse chestnut which dominates Trinity's New Court – both over 100 years old. Others can be missed among shrub borders, like Pembroke's Japanese banana plant; or hidden in private gardens or quiet walks, like Queens' 35-metre-high elm trees – not only the tallest trees in the College, but the tallest elms in the UK. Walking through the courts of Cambridge's colleges is a green experience, but many of these tourist-proof lawns were once agricultural spaces that provided fruit, vegetables, and herbs for the members. Throughout

the medieval period, orchards were essential to the self-sufficiency of colleges like Corpus Christi, Jesus, and Pembroke, to name but a few.

Few traces of these old trees remain, although Girton's Old Orchard has provided fruit, flowers, and shade for the college since 1893. Both Girton and Peterhouse planted an orchard during the Second World War as part of the 1940 'Dig for Victory' campaign to combat food shortages. Although Girton's New Orchard boasts a wide collection of pears, plums, medlars, quinces and cobnuts, its apples won the college gardeners several Royal Horticultural Society prizes in the 60s and 70s. Meanwhile, Murray Edwards students celebrate the harvest of their apples with 'Apple Day' on 23 October. Prior to the College's construction, the site contained the Darwin family home, known as 'The Orchard' – true to their pomiculture heritage, Murray Edwards students bring in the autumn by enjoying apple juice and crumble, doing arts and crafts, and listening to live music.

Apples aren't the only fruit trees cultivated on college land. Several ancient mulberry trees around Cambridge appear to be survivors of a mass planting across England from around 1603. Silkworms feed on mulberry leaves, so King James I supposedly commissioned

10,000 mulberry trees to be planted to increase British silk production. The most famous example is 'Milton's Mulberry' in Christ's Fellows' Garden, which might easily be assumed to be planted by the poet himself. However, college records show that the tree was planted in 1609, a year after his birth, so he may just have studied in its shade instead; the tree was named in Milton's honour around 200 years ago. Although planted during the lifetime of Shakespeare and Cromwell, the ancient tree still produces a crop of mulberries that college kitchen staff turn into jam every year.

Pembroke's mulberry tree was planted from a cutting of a 17th century tree and is also (misleadingly?) named after a poet alum – Edmund Spenser. Other mulberries from the Stuart era can be found in Queens' Fellows' Garden, or

the Masters' Gardens of Jesus and Corpus Christi. Emmanuel has records of purchasing several mulberries around 1610, but those standing today are Victorian plantings – the originals long gone.

Some of the most famous treescapes in Cambridge are the lime avenues which flank the long drives of river colleges like Trinity and St John's. Now iconic, the towering lime trees in Trinity have been replaced several times since the first record of an avenue in 1671 – today's trees are just over 75 years old.

Perhaps the most famous tree in the University is the oriental plane tree in Emmanuel's Fellows' Garden. The huge specimen (its trunk is over 5 metres

around) is renowned for its unusual boughs which swoop, coil, and snake along to the ground. During the Second World War, Spanish poet Luis Cernuda wrote his poem 'El Arbol' (*The Tree*) after spending two years living at Emmanuel. When not providing poetic inspiration, the great tree has also been used as shelter for church fêtes and open-air Shakespeare performances.

Trees have long been the sentinels of Cambridge's courts, cloisters, and avenues – but unlike marble and stone, they won't last forever. Many of the University's ancient trees were removed long ago, like the elm planted by Emmanuel's first Master, Laurence Chaderton. The tree's remains, then around 300 years old, were removed by a controlled dynamite explosion in 1935. Old trees make way for new buildings – the “exquisitely wreathed” ash tree of Wordsworth's student days, (mentioned in his poem, 'The Prelude'), was felled to make way for construction of St John's' New Court in 1825. In the past 15 years, trees like Kings' horse chestnut have received surgery to protect both the tree's health and public safety. Moreover, gardening teams across the University have planted new saplings to succeed the current mature trees – as Chaderton said 400 years ago: “We plant for another generation.”




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Please direct questions to the VarSoc President at president@varsity.co.uk or the Editors at editor@varsity.co.uk

The deadline for applications is midday, Wednesday 5th June 2024. Interviews will take place on the morning of Monday 10th June 2024.

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Any current member of the Society may stand for election. They must be proposed by a person who is, or has been, Editor or Deputy Editor of the paper and seconded by another member of Section Editor or higher status.

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Please email president@varsity.co.uk for further information.

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Hugh Jones is
a third-year
English student at
Magdalene College

Greenwashing isn't a problem

Environmental activists might be best known for their gloomy predictions of eco-apocalypse, but those in Cambridge finally have a reason to celebrate, or at least put down the orange spray paint for a bit. Last month, the University finally bowed to their persuasive combination of megaphones and property damage and, with a couple of exceptions, placed “a temporary moratorium on new funded collaborations with fossil fuel companies.”

The move is meant to tackle ‘greenwashing’: polluting companies striking deals with prestigious institutions, in the hope that some of their lovely prestige will rub off and make people forget about all the oil spills and dead dolphins. It comes after a report last year told Cambridge that taking oil money is reputationally risky. Academics prodded them to act on that report, and the University Council has finally acquiesced.

The catch is that there are already guidelines which stop Cambridge from taking money “where to do so would be incompatible with the best interests of the University”. What’s more, because the University Council has pledged to tackle climate change, that ‘best interests’ test already rules out taking money which would jeopardise Cambridge’s quest for net zero. In other words, the greenwashing ban Cambridge replaces

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Environmentalists
need to
persuade
rather than
protest
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the current, nuanced system with a blanket ban which stops the University from taking oil money even if there are absolutely no downsides.

That, you might say, is for the best. Climate change is a problem, and fossil fuel companies sell a product which makes it worse. To which I would say: “So what?”

The problem with the arguments about greenwashing are that they exaggerate how evil fossil fuel companies actually are. We should all want fossil fuels to be extracted and burned as cleanly, cheaply, and efficiently as possible, while we transition to green energy as quickly as possible. Yes, fossil fuels cause global warming, but they also keep lights on and homes warm. The former is bad, but we can’t go without the latter, so compromises have to be made.

Once you accept this premise – which is the basis for all realistic discussion about climate policy – it’s clear that BP and its ilk are not so evil that it is never acceptable to take their money. The situation is complicated, because they sell something which we still need. It is possible to imagine research their funds could support – into better drilling methods, say – which would benefit oil companies, consumers, and the planet. Not doing that research because a big scary oil company wants to pay for it

is not only silly, but counterproductive.

Equally, oil companies might do bad things, and profit from a regrettable trade, but this doesn’t automatically mean they should not be allowed to boost their reputations by funding good projects. One has to weigh the pros and cons – as Cambridge was doing before the ban. It is hypocritical to treat fossil fuel companies as pariahs while buying their oil and gas. Despite what the environmentalists might want, we cannot escape that hypocrisy by ‘just stopping oil’, because doing so would inflict vast and democratically unsustainable economic hardship on millions of people. Instead we will have to ‘just phase out oil, hopefully as quickly as possible’ – and, in the meantime, we might as well keep taking the donations.

Ultimately, climate activists’ biggest challenge is persuading voters to make sacrifices in the name of net zero. If you are paralysed with fear about climate change, you should be trying to work out the most efficient set of compromises you can ask people to make, in order to reduce our national carbon emissions without causing a backlash. Instead, the most vocal and visible campaigners seem driven by an alienating puritanism. People at the University will suffer as a result of this fossil fuel funding ban, despite it bringing almost no practical ben-

efit. Researchers will miss opportunities, students will lose out on PhD funding, and Cambridge will do a little bit less of its world-improving work.

I don’t want to catastrophize. Cambridge doesn’t get that much money from fossil fuel companies, the ban is only partial – a temporary moratorium on new donations – and hopefully cash from elsewhere will replace that which is being foregone. The real danger this move presents lies in what it says about the environmental movement. It is almost obscene for Cambridge to turn down good money while the rest of the British university sector (with one exception) suffers acutely as tuition fees continue to fall in real terms. As an infamously and literally cloistered institution, Cambridge can afford to be idiosyncratic. Environmentalists, however, still haven’t realised that if they are to succeed, they need to persuade rather than protest. What they should fear most is not moving too slowly, but igniting opposition which reverses their gains. Just ask yourself which is more likely to hurt the environmental movement: a few BP-branded lab coats, or voters believing that net-zero is not about saving the planet, but rather a radical, elitist fad – and one which they are being asked to pay for.

Hugh Jones



Joe Cowan is a
linguistics PhD
candidate at
Darwin College

Darwin without a chance of Meat Balls

Darwin’s ‘Meal Discussions’ group-chat pings, it’s a picture of the dictator Fransisco Franco. The day before, the college MCR was compared to the Nazi Party. Why? You may ask. Well, on account of the college’s ‘militant veganism’, it seems. Although waters have now settled whispers of an insidious vegan agenda continue to stoke the paranoia of Darwin’s meat-friendly underclass. Is this paranoia justified? Perhaps. Last year, I, alongside my co-President, Toby Brann, helmed Darwin May Ball committee’s decision to throw the first 100% plant-based May Ball in Oxbridge’s history.

The project was successful. While the choice to do away with meat, cheese and eggs garnered initial interest from the likes of the Times, PETA and Jacob Rees-Mogg, discussion on the ground was far less feverish. Bar a disgruntled email or two and one refunded ticket, attendees took the plant-based offerings in their stride, overcame the supposed ideological imposition and, against all expectations, appeared to have fun. Tanked up on falafel wraps and deep-fried pizzette, Darwin’s party-goers embraced the ball with open arms. Post-event, reviews were glowing. From the committee’s perspective, we’d pulled off the un-pull-off-able, and in the process, hosted Darwin’s most sustainable full-scale ball to date.

However, with a fresh batch of students, Darwin’s May Ball committee

must, yet again, justify its decision to host a 100% plant-based ball. From my perspective, the justification is painfully and inevitably clear; swapping out animal product-based meals for vegan meals has a profound environmental impact. Our food system is responsible for approximately 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions while requiring the use of 70% of our freshwater and 50% of our habitable land. Even if all other non-agricultural greenhouse gas emissions were erased overnight, the continued effect of the agricultural industry would still take us over the 1.5° - 2 °C global temperature increase stipulated by the Paris Agreement. With 2024 set to be the hottest year ever recorded, why are we so unwilling to forego meat, even for just one night?

Push-back against Darwin’s plant-based ball comes in two forms. The first refutes that swapping to a plant-based offering indeed reduces emissions. I refer to this as the ‘Mexican Avocado defence’. The Mexican Avocado defence pits a pastoralised imagination of well-treated, locally-raised and ethically-slaughtered cattle against an avocado that is flown small-batch via private jet from some far-flung country. The ‘gotcha’ is that the latter is far worse for the environment. In one sense, the argument is correct: if we create an imagined beef burger and imagine it to be more sustainable than an imagined avocado, then it will be. However, we can neither will the footprintless burger nor the oil-soaked

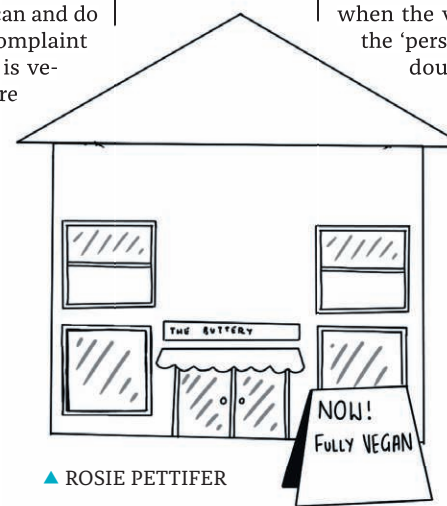
avocado into existence. In reality, the carbon footprint of one avocado is around 5% of that of the same amount of beef. Drowned out by the groans of the naysayers is the fact that meat-based meals have a 14-times greater impact on the environment than vegan meals. The typical May Ball serves multiple meals to hundreds and hundreds of guests – the environmental savings are clear.

The second batch of discontent takes the stance that a plant-based May Ball comprises some form of ideological imposition. The vegan food is supposedly not the issue, but rather the fact that it is ‘forced’ upon attendees. An absence of animal products at Darwin’s May Ball is seen as an act that curtails personal freedom and expression. To this, I remind meat-eaters that they can and do eat ‘vegan’ food without complaint (after all, even a chip-butty is vegan). Moreover, our choices are constantly constrained by the choices made by those higher up and a May Ball is no different; the choice to serve burgers may preclude the choice of serving hotdogs, or a Food Officer may swap waffles for churros, and so on. A Ball, or indeed any event or restaurant, is inherently restrictive in its offerings, the difference here is our restriction is delineated by environmental impact, rather than taste or blind choice alone.

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The justification is
painfully
and inevitably clear
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Restrictions perceived to be motivated by personal belief are rarely well received. Anti-vegan debate, at Darwin and beyond, is often fuelled by the misconstruing of veganism as a purely ideological stance. As a result, many take the implementation of plant-based menus as a political affront. While for some, veganism comprises a set of beliefs, outlooks, ethics, and consequent practices, not all instantiations of ‘veganism’, in the practical sense, are such. Darwin May Ball’s decision to host an 100% plant-based May Ball is driven by the scientifically-backed stance that eliminating the use of animal products at the Ball leads to its decreased environmental impact and not by the machinations of an amorphous liberal agenda. At a time when the validity and importance of the ‘personal carbon footprint’ is in doubt, it becomes clear that

decisions to try to reduce carbon emissions need to come from an institutional level, where they will have an invariably larger impact. If this does indeed curtail our individual freedom, we can exercise it by spending our money and time elsewhere, while recognising that our diets are not exempt from pragmatic scrutiny in terms of their environmental impact.



▲ ROSIE PETTIFER

Joe Cowan



Sam Hudson is an MPhil student in History and Philosophy of Science at Trinity Hall

Sam Hudson

The University is right to cut funding for private ADHD diagnoses

The decision by the University to cut funding for private ADHD diagnoses has, predictably, been met with significant opposition, with the incoming SU disability officer describing the university's decision as one that "amounts to discrimination" against disabled students. This paper, too, published an article accusing the university of "invalidating [disabled students'] experiences while being ignorant of the true problem at hand". While well-meaning, I would argue that these accusations are misguided. The University should instead be applauded for taking an unpopular, but ultimately necessary step to guard students, and themselves, against the rapacity of private healthcare providers.

Given our limited understanding of the brain, the vast majority of psychiatric disorders can only be diagnosed through self-reported symptoms. This sets psychiatry apart from other fields of medicine which usually rely on identifying an underlying cause to establish a diagnosis. The fact that psychiatric conditions require a degree of subjectivity in the interpretation of diagnostic criteria leaves them open to exploitation. As a *Panorama* investigation from last year discovered, this has enabled many private clinics to play fast and loose with

“*In an ideal world, the NHS would have capacity to deal with students requiring an ADHD diagnosis*”

the symptom-based diagnostic criteria of ADHD to exploit patients.

Many patients who were diagnosed with ADHD privately later discovered they did not meet more rigorous diagnostic criteria or had a different condition when diagnosed by the NHS. Indeed, as the BBC discovered, positive diagnostic rates were as high as 90% in some private clinics. Equally, while a typical diagnosis might take around three hours through the NHS, appointments at private clinics were substantially shorter - some lasted only 45 minutes.

There is a very clear incentive for private clinics to find positive diagnoses where others would not. ADHD is one of the few psychological conditions which is widely medicated. Under private healthcare, patients (or their insurance provider) pay for the provision of this medication from their clinic. It is hardly conspiratorial to suggest that a consistent stream of income from patients provides a strong incentive to diagnose positively for ADHD specifically, even if a different diagnosis may be better for the patient.

In an ideal world, the NHS would have sufficient capacity to deal with students requiring an ADHD diagnosis. This is, unfortunately, a world we are

very far from. Funding for students to skip the years-long NHS waiting list by going private, while well-intentioned, has become a greater evil. Though many students have undoubtedly benefited from a faster diagnosis, it is simply impossible to be confident in the care being provided when private healthcare providers have been so reckless. It seems eminently sensible then for the University to stop paying for inadequate services.

Despite the obvious conflicts of interest held by private clinics, many were critical of the BBC for suggesting that more nefarious motives might be behind the elevated diagnosis rates within private clinics. Some accused the BBC of minimising or even denying ADHD when the programme first aired. It is understandable why people might be wary of the idea that ADHD is being overdiagnosed by private clinics. As with many psychological conditions, there has been a historical tendency to blame those with ADHD for their own predicament or even argue that some are "faking it" for personal gain.

But by creating a culture where any scepticism is seen as taboo, many who have sought to defend disabled people have carried water for those who wish to exploit disability. It is possible to both recognise the reality of ADHD while con-

sidering the possibility that some individuals have been falsely diagnosed due to malpractice.

None of this is to suggest that those falsely diagnosed do not genuinely suffer. Patients here are not villains, as some worry they are portrayed as, but victims of NHS failure, an opportunistic and exploitative health "care" industry, and a culture which has unwittingly defended and normalised these excesses. Though the University may not have intended it as such - their rationale for cutting funding was simply that it had become too expensive - they are right to stop more of its money going to a crooked industry.

A better and ultimately more cost-effective solution would be for the university to employ its own psychologists to diagnose students. With perverse incentives removed, we would have much greater confidence in the care being provided to students. In the long term, I hope this is a solution the university will consider and adopt. In the meantime, it is understandable why people are unhappy with the provision being removed. Even so, there is a certain irony that smart, progressive people will so vocally play defence for the worst excesses of private business.



Matthew Taylor is a second-year Natural Sciences student at Pembroke College

Matthew Taylor

Scrapping state school targets is playing a dangerous game

In 2022, Trinity College piloted a grant providing Cambridge Bursary students with an additional annual sum of over £4000. In an unprecedented move of intercollegiate support, this scheme was extended to students who had originally applied to Trinity, but through various pooling mechanisms had found themselves at another college. Unfortunately, the acceptance rate of state-educated UK students who originally applied to Trinity in 2022 (even if this was not where they ended up) was 20%, compared to 31.1% from independent schools. No such discrepancy exists at a university-wide level but it does persist across admissions cycles at Trinity.

What this suggests is that the process of applying through Trinity is biased against state-educated students (no doubt more likely to qualify for the Cambridge Bursary). It is plausible then that a student whose college choice is influenced by the prospect of an additional £4000 might be rejected when they may have otherwise been successful if they had just applied directly to Lucy Cavendish (not that they could afford it). This is just one example of a policy that *seems* to increase accessibility, but doesn't appear particularly well thought out.

There are a number of reasons why admissions targets around school type should be scrapped as is intended in the next Access and Participation Plan. First and foremost, the category of a state school has never been particularly useful. The amalgamation of state comprehensives and grammar schools for the purpose of reviewing the accessibility of higher education is laughable - it is no

secret that the cultures of these school types are often (though not always) drastically different.

Beyond the grammar school problem, there is also a large variation in the quality of education at state comprehensives. The proponents of school-type scrapping will therefore say that this metric undermines other, better factors in assessing access to higher education. The Office for Students is now encouraging universities to look at 'individual level socioeconomic circumstances' such as postcode specific indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) when formulating their access plans.

Despite these arguments, I remain sceptical of the efficacy of such a change. A quick browse of an IMD dataset tells me that someone I know of who went to a boarding school with fees in excess of £16,000 a term is considered to live in an area sufficiently deprived for their hypothetical admittance to Cambridge to be considered widening participation. Clearly, individual-level data is not foolproof either. It is curious to me that there is not more drive to combine generalised and specific data to construct the best picture of applicants at a university that so commonly throws around the term *holistic* with regards to

“*The category of a state school has never been particularly useful*”

its admissions process.

If you are not yet convinced of the importance of state school targets, perhaps clinging onto the fact that at a university-wide level, the acceptance rates of state-educated and private-school students are roughly equal. I must ask you to consider how this can be at a university that has a state-educated intake of 70%. In no way is the educational background of the UK reflected in this figure. Yes, acceptance rates are equal, and yes, that is a great step, but it is only so because not enough state-educated students are applying. Whether this is due to a widespread lack of ambition, or an aversion to the perceived stuffiness of Oxbridge, our aim should surely be to remedy this situation.

Should these barriers be removed, it is reasonable to think that these additional state-educated individuals would make a marginally less competitive application (though by no means not worthy of admittance), than their peers who have been applying in spite of them anyway. This is of course a gross simplification of the psychology of applying to Oxbridge, but one

that from my experience has at least a modicum of truth behind it. In the unlikely event that this disparity in attitudes can be fixed, the cultural and social capital that tends to come with a private education, predisposing a student to excelling at interview, would render state school targets more necessary than ever.

The reality is we have a lot to thank school type targets for. They are behind the extensive outreach operations we see at secondary schools encouraging students who are not otherwise being told to, to aim high. But also, they have proven their own importance by allowing us to see that a state-educated student will, on average, perform better than their privately-educated peers with the same grade profile at A-level.

While it is true they aren't perfect, shouldn't we give these targets a proper chance by being a bit more specific with how we define a state school for access and participation purposes, and *combine* this information with new specific metrics? Apparently not. It is a consolation that school type will still be *considered* in applications, but I worry that without a formal procedure for doing so, we risk being passive in getting a diverse intake of students into these tired institutions. Adjustments to admissions targets should reflect how access to education in our society is changing. Only time will tell if this move is doing that, or if it is simply a strategy to assuage the fears of Eugenie's or Cordelia's mum and dad that having paid some half a million pounds for their daughter's education, she will not be discriminated against when it comes to applying to Cambridge.



LOUIS ASHWORTH

Science

How Cambridge bred eugenics

Lorelei Booth unravels the University's historical relationship with eugenics

Nathan Cofnas is the spectre haunting Cambridge University discourse at the moment. Who is he? A self-described “race realist” and Vanguard of the “hereditarian revolution” against “wokeism”. In a moment of self-loathing, I subjected myself to reading his infamous blog posts which detail how Big Woke can only be brought down by exposing the Big Lie it is built upon: equality. Essentially, he claims that admitting there is an intelligence gap between the races is the only antidote to the disease of affirmative action and the corresponding epidemic of white children hating themselves.

“**The Cambridge Eugenics Society records are star-studded with some of our most prominent alumni**

Students are rightly horrified that someone who believes that genetics account for an IQ gap between black and white people has a place in this university. Concerningly, his role isn't limited to research as he's taught students in undergrad Philosophy supervisions. His acceptance into the University, and the later defence of his position after this controversy, is shameful to the Philosophy department and Cambridge as an institution. But within the grand scheme of the University's history, his appoint-

ment is much less surprising. Eugenics and its rebrand as “race realism” have had a lengthy and passionate affair with Cambridge University. It is an entanglement that the University is notably reluctant to either acknowledge or take responsibility for.

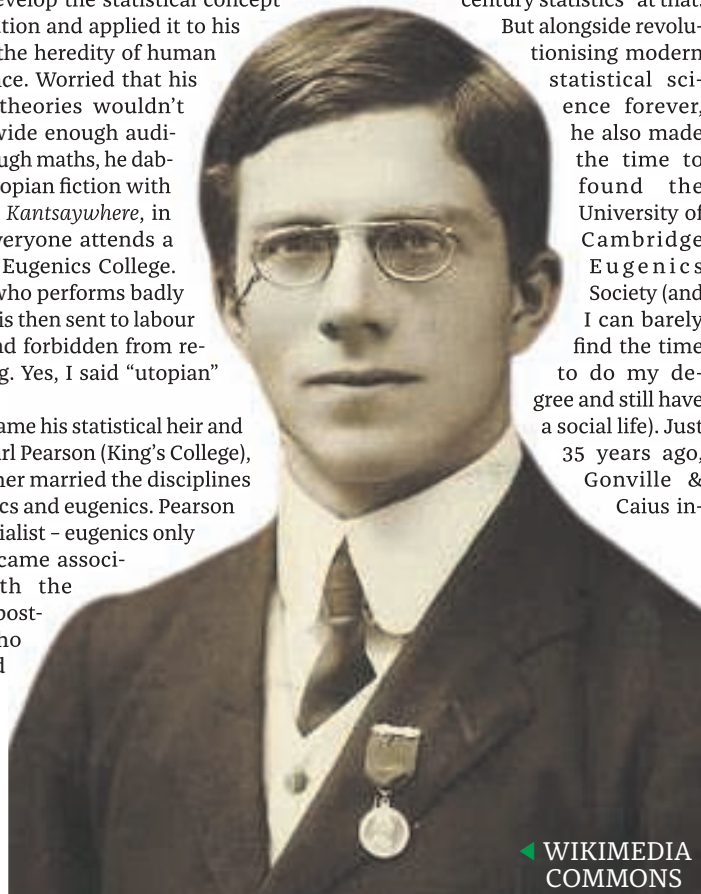
The term “eugenics” (from the Greek for ‘well born’) was birthed here in Cambridge by Trinity's own Francis Galton in 1883. Galton was inspired by his cousin Charles Darwin and adapted the idea of natural selection to presuppose that the survival of the fittest had been distorted by social welfare policies. He was the first to develop the statistical concept of correlation and applied it to his study of the heredity of human intelligence. Worried that his eugenic theories wouldn't reach a wide enough audience through maths, he dabbled in utopian fiction with his novel *Kantsaywhere*, in which everyone attends a National Eugenics College. Anyone who performs badly in exams is then sent to labour camps and forbidden from reproducing. Yes, I said “utopian” fiction.

Then came his statistical heir and friend, Karl Pearson (King's College), who further married the disciplines of statistics and eugenics. Pearson was a socialist – eugenics only really became associated with the far-right post-war – who believed it a fact that superior races would wage war

against inferior races. He changed the field of statistics forever with the development of the biometrical approach, a methodology that uses statistical analysis to make sense of the heterogeneity of the human race. Unfortunately, rather than being used for good, Pearson used biometrics to call for “a homogenous white race” that should “dominate that of the black”.

Pearson was then succeeded as the Galton Professor of Eugenics by Ronald Fisher at Gonville & Caius. Fisher was also a statistician, and arguably “the single most important figure in 20th century statistics” at that.

But alongside revolutionising modern statistical science forever, he also made the time to found the University of Cambridge Eugenics Society (and I can barely find the time to do my degree and still have a social life). Just 35 years ago, Gonville & Caius in-



← WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

stalled a commemorative stained-glass window for the “father of modern statistics”, an unrepentant racist. To put that into perspective, Caius thought that Fisher was a suitable person to cel-

“**Cofnas is a mere continuation of the Cambridge tradition rather than an anomalous disjuncture**

brate immortally in their dining hall in the same year *Honey, I Shrank the Kids* came out. It seems even eugenics were acceptable in the 80s.

Unfortunately for the Cambridge University PR team, the Cambridge Eugenics Society records are star-studded with some of our most prominent alumni. The opening page asks members to please send their £2.10 membership fee to a John Maynard Keynes at King's College. Not satisfied with being only treasurer of the local branch, Keynes upgraded to director of the British Eugenics Society during the Second World War. Back in Cambridge, Charles Darwin's son Horace was also on the committee, and the chancellor of the University was the patron of the society whose objective was to “promote the science of eugenics” with “particular reference to their bearing on racial and social problems”.

The only other university that could out-eugenics Cambridge is UCL. They made a public apology for their role in

the history of eugenics in 2021, but only after it was discovered a secret eugenics conference had been running for at least three years on UCL grounds by one of their honorary senior lecturers as late as 2017. But on closer inspection of the guest list, Cambridge pops up again. A prominent attendee of these secret meetings was Toby Young (Trinity College) who had recently written an article advocating for embryo selection as a standard reproductive therapy to raise average intelligence by 15 IQ points every generation.

The unsung heroes of this tragic story are the students and staff who advocate against Cambridge's endorsement of scientific racism. Whether it be the BLM protestors who forced Caius to remove Fisher's window in 2020. The students who have signed the petition calling for Cofnas's removal. Or the Sociology department staff who ground us on the right side of history by reminding us of the racist, imperialist and ableist past of the recurring villain in this story – IQ testing.

But nonetheless, this rogues gallery of Cambridge's eugenics BNOcs highlights Cofnas as a mere continuation of the Cambridge tradition rather than an anomalous disjuncture. It is horrifying that Cofnas is right that it's easier for him to be hired by the University of Cambridge than to have his “race realist” views published by the conservative-leaning National Review. This shouldn't be the case. Both should be impossible. He is not a controversial defender of free speech, but a dangerous fearmonger appropriating scientific language to grant his branch of racism legitimacy. History has shown us Cambridge has a habit of allowing pseudo-scientific theories to back abhorrent racism. When will this finally end?

Research Roundup **Ananya Vijay** explores some of Cambridge's most recent scientific news

Embryos, ectoderm and enigmas: “black box” of human development discovered

Scientists were previously unaware of the mechanisms causing some cells to form the surface layer of skin and hair and some to create the amniotic membrane surrounding the embryo. Research by the Babraham Institute and the Wellcome-MRC Cambridge Stem Cell Institute has unveiled part of the process behind this.

It was discovered that the level of cell crowding affects the specialisation of the cells. The method involved in uncovering this incorporated a cell culture system which differentiated the stem cells into amniotic ectoderm and surface ectoderm based on cell density, as well as single RNA sequencing analysis to fully comprehend the differentiation pathway.

High-density culturing correspond-

ed to cells which differentiated into surface ectoderm, whereas sparse conditions catalysed the creation of amniotic ectoderm. Dr Teresa Rayon describes this breakthrough as shedding light on the “black box of human development” – in the future, this discovery could aid with understanding diseases which affect the first step of foetal development.

Energy, equality and empowerment: Lord Martin Rees's musings on our scientific future

In an interview with the Lord Speaker, Lord Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal and Cambridge astrophysicist, delineated his opinions on the future of humanity and technology. He argues that while we won't have driven ourselves to extinction by the close of the 21st century, being “empowered by technology” has emboldened us to deplete the

natural resources of the world without much care for the prospects of future generations. Furthermore, he is convinced that the interconnected nature of the world has increased the threat of cyber-attacks and issues on a large scale, with the ability to be caused by a few “dissident” members being particularly worrying, something which he accedes, however, is difficult to tackle.

Lord Rees's stance on energy is that the requirement to catalyse the development of clean energy sources for both the richer north half of the world and the poorer south is imperative. The richer countries in the north have the technology and the finances to implement these clean energy solutions; however, he postulates that for this to simultaneously have a lasting effect while allowing the south to develop, they essentially need to “leapfrog directly to mobile phones” while “never having had landlines”. This theme

of technological inequality is something which he is keen to ameliorate. Staunchly against the desire of billionaires to extend their lifespans significantly, at places such as Altos Labs, he argues that increasing medical knowledge to improve the lives of wider humanity is more important. The running theme of his argument is to preserve and care for what we do have, as he believes “dealing with climate change on Earth is a doddle compared to making Mars habitable”.

Spectrums, starlight and space: discovery of new planets impending

In a joint collaboration between physicists at the University of Cambridge and Heriot-Watt University, an astrocomb has been developed. This technology employs lasers, which allow astronomers to detect minute

changes in the colour of starlight. Professor Derryck Reid likens astrocombs to distortion on an electric guitar – when the signal is high, audio distortion is detected, but when the signal is lower, it is not. He explains that this audio distortion is due to new frequencies being created in the guitar amplifier, which is akin to how the astrocomb and light interact.

Previously, astrocombs only detected the green-red part of the colour spectrum, but now the smaller wavelength ultra-violet to blue-green part of the spectrum can be detected, which contains absorption features of interest to astronomers. Dr Samantha Thompson at the Cavendish Laboratory states that this could enable smaller, previously unseen planets with larger orbits to be observed, some of which may share similar properties to the Earth.

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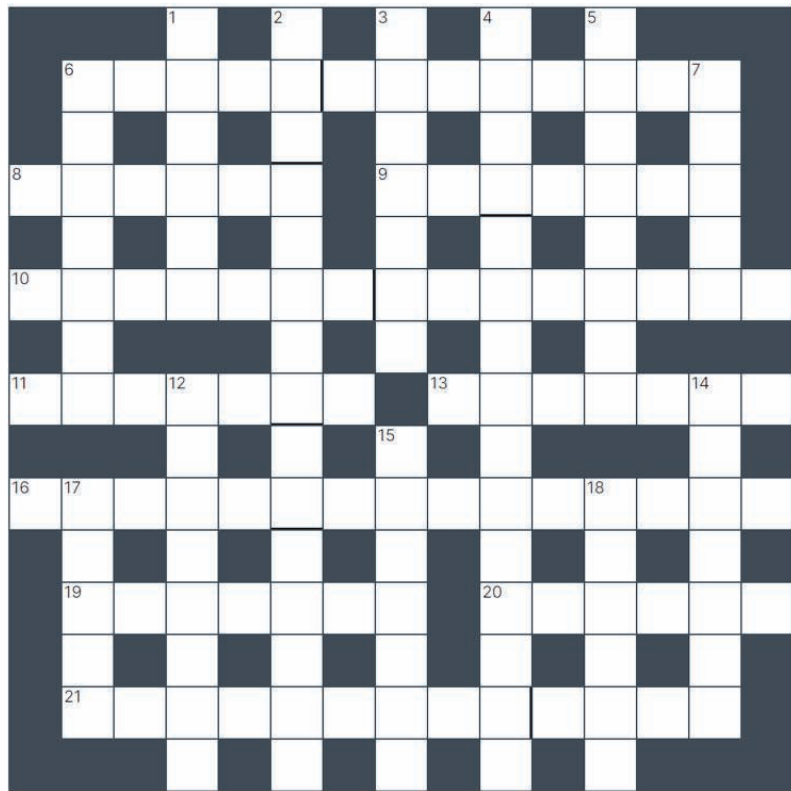
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The Smoking Area

Varsity Crossword



Cryptic by Tiro

Across

- 6 Top Pole's Christmas song has heart of Okinawa state (5,8)
8 To help with Tory in charge's not basic (6)
9 Violent movement by sheep's suggestion of problems with age (7)
10 What R.I. has in common with, say, Honduran? (7,8)
11 Advocate in favour of noisy water feature (7)
13 Work privy to assuming one's view (7)
16 Review of coarse rendition needs editing (15)
19 Sweet-natured girl dumped American (7)
20 Lust seen in beginnings of teasing him in "Renaissance" suppo tasks (6)
21 What former agricultural machinery enthusiasts tend to make wind? (9,4)

Down

- 1 Recognition that after forgetting end of Hilary, Oxford, for instance, admitted communist (6)
2 The time is right once ultimately nationalist Catholic erases Byzantine (3,5,2,5)
3 Islander nun with aura got hammered (7)
4 Average conditions with mature, emo porter going berserk (4,11)
5 Mention summons (8)
6 New London University takes body part during extreme course of action (7)
7 Postcode encompassing new stadium (5)
12 Tube station showing age with motor in pieces (8)
14 Musicians with bass wearing glasses, above second half of violists (7)
15 Teach Englishman on date to conceal undomestic fringes (7)
17 Delete portion of career as endocrinologist (5)
18 Country where AI was first engaged in mathematical function (6)

Quick by Sophocles

Across

- 6 1979 film by Francis Ford Coppola (10,3)
8 ... and flowing (6)
9 Fine particles mixed in a gas (7)
10 What a student does most? (15)
11 Puzzles, but not this kind (7)
13 Instrument for measuring current (in amperes) (7)
16 Spewing words (6,9)
19 Record chart (3,4)
20 Ninth largest US state (6)
21 College namesake (4,9)

Down

- 1 Belt of the heavens (6)
2 20th century British composer (7,8)
3 '80s soap following the Carringtons, revived in 2017 (7)
4 Ex-Trinity Master's new job - that of Edmond Halley (10,5)
5 Liqueur tasting like liquorice (8)
6 Renaissance Florentine architect (7)
7 Wally, outside of North America (5)
12 Sympathy trap (3,5)
14 Tour Montparnasse, for example (7)
15 Cars made between 1919 and 1930 (7)
17 Surrey town, seat of Royal Holloway (5)
18 Borne in mind (6)

ANSWERS TO PUZZLES ON INSTAGRAM @VARSITYCAMBRIDGE

VINTAGE VARSITY

Visual Varsity

By Amelia Platt

When looking for a history of visuals at *Varsity*, photography is the obvious place to start, revealing *Varsity's* early commitment to reporting on world events: from call-outs for photos of 'post-war reconstruction' happening in Europe, to pictures documenting the Fall of the Berlin Wall. Their captions enable photos to weave a narrative independent of the text: but what makes photography so important as a visual element is how it's able to cut through the years, reminding us that the students of the past were real people just like us.

Of course, the visual goes beyond photography. Cartoons were a recurring and important feature of past *Varsity* editions: their prominence points to a key feature of student journalism - attempts to skewer Cambridge and those

within it. They testify to the individual student creator's artistry - drawing can't be made uniform, as text edited to meet the paper's house style can.

Varsity's covers are perhaps easiest for historical comparison. The first ever *Varsity* edition was published on January 17th, 1931, with its cover adhering to the look of the classic broadsheet. Since then, it's undergone endless transformations. The 70s stand out as an era of experimentation, with titles changing colour, size, style and design; perhaps *Varsity* at its most 'fun', student culture taking itself unseriously.

Varsity's 'tabloid' era also stands out: with its short, dramatic headlines, 'racy' photos and black-and-white block colour front pages, covers in the early 2000s are immediately reminiscent of *The*

Daily Mail or *The Sun*. Looking at such editions from today's perspective, it's hard to ignore the potentially cruel edge of the tabloid - shock often rooted in exploitation.

Today's *Varsity* covers look quite different. Following the commercialisation of higher education, there's a desire to be taken seriously; the navy blue headers and white headline font, signalling a move away from 80s irreverence and 00s scandal. It's a shift which recognises how student journalism increasingly functions as a stepping stone into a competitive job market, making professional visual design a must.

We have a contradiction here of sorts - lots of words seeking to explain the value of the visual. Yet a paper's visual elements deserve as much attention as the textual. They can immediately signal the paper's period and ethos, and crucially humanise their creators, reminding us of the real hands that were involved in making what we are reading. In short, they provide us with something unique.

An extended version of this article, with accompanying illustrations, can be found online.

Easy Sudoku

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

Hard Sudoku

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

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DEPUTY EDITORS Eric Williams, Romilly Norfolk & Jude Crawley deputyeditor@varsity.co.uk

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vulture.



Notebook: Auden, my

Caught in the crossroads between her dissertation and why half of her essays have been about

I've never really been all that into studytubers. Even as a bright-eyed sixth former, I found the pastel highlighter-covered notes cloying and the overly-cheery admission that they read books while brushing their teeth unbelievably tragic. The fixation on grades was deeply disturbing, too. I still stand by my belief that if your main personality trait is getting an A* in A-Level History, then you really need to get a hobby. I'm sure Unjaded Jade is a lovely person, but there is something about watching other people study that really doesn't appeal to me.

Perhaps the mild hatred is really jealousy. Ruby Granger wakes up at 6:30am and drinks herbal tea at her meticulously organised desk. I, however, crawl out from under my filthy hovel of a bed at 8:30am, down my Aldi coffee from an unwashed mug (I like to believe mugs preserve flavour like cast iron-skillets do, rather than accumulate mould), and then attempt to do 'admin' (AKA browsing Facebook) on a filthy desk.

However, the ideal time for me to bite the bullet and start using Notion is probably now: I'm in third year. Rather than fester away at my mouldy desk while flicking between two unfinished dissertations, I decided to take a leaf out of Unjaded Jade et al's book and get on the grindset. What could possibly go wrong?

Unfortunately for me, there are no SparkNotes summaries of all the crackpot stuff Ruby Granger gets up to on the regular. So, I had to do my research the old-fashioned way: by watching copious amounts of YouTube. The first thing I noticed was that all of the studytubers I watched had impeccably tidy rooms. The cynic in me put this down to my belief that no

sane person would want to show their disgusting hovel of a room - with its overflowing bin and mountains of clothes strewn across the floor - to tens of thousands of strangers on YouTube. But the optimist in me also remembered reading something about how tidy spaces make us feel less distracted. So after hauling myself out of bed at 7am, my first step was to tidy my pit. Easier said than done. All Ruby Granger had to do was make her bed and open her curtains; I nearly had to call in a waste disposal unit.

One hour and three rounds with the Henry Hoover later, my room was beginning to resemble a livable and studyable environment. Did I feel calm and ready to study? Absolutely not. I'd found no fewer than three mouldy cups and had started to worry that my recent headaches could have been the consequence of black mould poisoning.

With my room tidied and mould (mostly) banished, it was time to get scholarly. I'd watched one studytuber read a book while brushing her teeth because if you don't spend those precious two minutes of scrubbing those pearly whites while being an academic weapon, then apparently your whole life will fall apart. Or

I read *Funeral Blues* again this morning. I don't feel blue, and I haven't been to a funeral recently. When I was 14 my English teacher used Auden's poem as a method of tackling GCSEs. Four neat quatrains, perfect rhyming couplets. Full rhymes. Short. With a nice clip from *Four Weddings and a Funeral* to fill some of the lesson and keep a class of poetry-bemused teenagers on side.

Thoughts of that being six years again begin to feel really quite intrusive, and for a

something like that. As it turns out, brushing your teeth and reading is easier said than done. Being utterly unable to coordinate items in both hands, I opted for resting my book on the edge of the sink. This way, I was able to turn the pages with my left hand while brushing my gnashers with my right. This was a sorry mistake. Almost immediately, I found myself having to make a real conscious effort not to drool my toothpaste-y sputum all over the pages every time I looked down to try and read a few words. The book carried on trying to fall into the sink, and in concentrating on the words, I found that I couldn't focus on getting all the nooks and crannies of my mouth squeaky clean. By the time the ordeal was up I had read one page, avoided incurring any library fines for leaving spit on a book, and done a mediocre job at maintaining my dental hygiene.

Teeth marginally cleaner, and feeling all the better for the 50 words that I (sort of) read, I was ready to get into the 'study' in 'studytubing'. Ruby Granger says she likes to have an internal deadline, which was fantastic news for me because I only run on internal deadlines. However, I supposed hers didn't consist of doomsday-esque messages such as "if you don't finish this section of your dissertation by Friday then you will fail your whole degree and your entire bloodline will be cursed." That's just a matter of preference, though. I set myself the task of writing two thousand words of my dissertation by the end of the day, and like Ruby, sat myself down to get right to it. It worked, but it was nothing new.

In between simply throwing myself into an entire day of uninterrupted studying, I also tried out a few of study methods. My version of the Pomodoro Technique involved a walk to Pret. While there, I spent the entire duration wondering

while, I let myself sink into the morbid fear that having entered my twenties holds over me. I should get over it soon. The prognosis really isn't that bad.

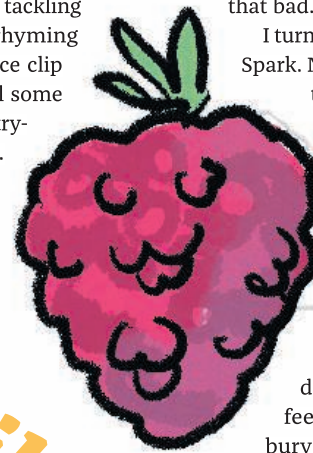
I turn back to my dissertation. Muriel Spark. Narrative control and apocalyptic endings. Ruins. Footnotes. 8 more days. *Stop all the clocks*, I think, and I laugh to myself. Must sort out next year's accommodation. Must remember to get a prescription refill. Absolutely must clear out my inbox.

I colour code my to-do list, think about whether I've drunk enough water today, and feel slightly upset about Sainsbury's raspberries not tasting very fresh. My brain offers me a wonderfully romanticised tangent daydreaming about the fruit farm I worked on as a teenager, picking raspberries for 5 hours a day and popping my head between the vines to check I wasn't

that if I hadn't worked hard enough in my degree up until this point, and if I wasn't doing Ruby Granger-esque eleven-hour study shifts, then maybe I was an academic failure.

Maybe it was the tidy room helping my synapses fire, or perhaps the Cornell note-taking I'd been attempting, that was streamlining my thoughts, but I suddenly had a moment of clarity. Most studytubers are trying to market themselves as aspirational, creating their content more as a form of study inspiration than to showcase a realistic depiction of how most people work. Most normal students don't work in immaculate rooms with neat notes; most of us work in crowded libraries with slightly messy desktops while blasting the soundtrack to *Wonka* (2023). They also don't have limitless time to study; throughout the day, we simply have other things to do, such as attending society events, meeting friends, or working a job.

At the end of the day, I didn't really find living like a studytuber to be all that more productive than my regular life. Sure, my room was tidier. But I'd just come to realise that I was already doing a lot of similar things to many of these people, just without the nice planners and tidy desks. At the end of the day, YouTube isn't real life. Most students aren't pulling 11-hour study shifts, usually because they simply *can't*. So reorganise your room, attempt the Pomodoro Technique, type your essays from the comfort of your own bed - whatever works for you. Just maybe try and keep books out of your teeth brushing routine.



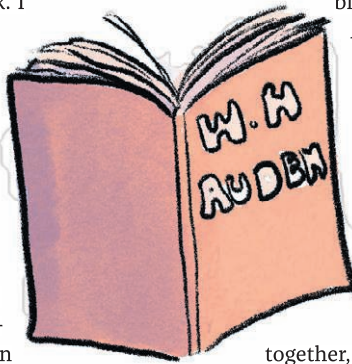
twenties, and dissertation stress

and entering her twenties, **Alice Mainwood** reflects on GCSE English classes prisons

being watched before I ate half my day's work. I almost resist.

Deciding that the pending Easter term calls for me to sit down and have a proper think about how to improve my productivity, I open my calendar. I have an hour and a half free on Wednesday. 'Think about productivity', I write. 15:00 Wednesday 24 April. Would I like my phone to send me a reminder 10 minutes before this event? Probably. For now, I close some of my tabs, and open up twelve more. I find the English faculty's referencing guide, and tell myself that if I write the references for the articles on all tabs I have open, I'll get myself a Pret.

I close the tab where I've been reading *Funeral Blues*. God forbid that I, an English student, read anything from a physical book when the option to sizzle my brain in



blue light is on offer. A brief depression descends like a brick thrown from the fifth floor as I think about having to get a full time job next year, as I catch a glimpse of the AI generated analysis of the poem. I pull myself together, and start referencing. Efficient, I tell myself, and I

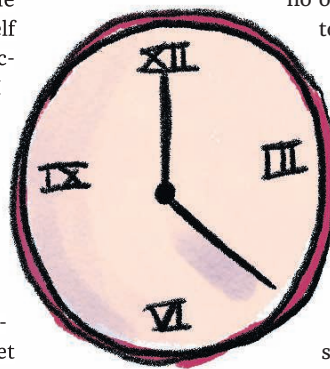
spin around on my desk chair trying to remember what day of the week it is. Sunday, so I decide to go to Pret before it closes. 'Deadline: met', I think, and I smile to myself. A barista makes my day by complimenting my summer dress. I walk back home in the crazing wind.

I sit and think about whether my dissertation will ever come to any good. I schedule my working week. If I wake up at 7am every day, I can get ready before Pret even opens, I think. I laugh to myself. I write 'get coffee' on my to do list, and I tick it off, as I notice that my to do list is actually called 'Tuesday to do list'. I think about whether I

have time for a Sunday rest this week, and I decide not - especially if I'd like to hand my dissertation in.

Notion comes to rescue me from general academic-related panic, and I flick through the folder when I've been making my revision notes. Solace is found as I remind myself that I actually am not falling behind again. Everything will work out, I think. It'll just be fine. I begin to think about the long 18th century, and I wonder why we call it that, when actually the paper spans nearly 200 years. Maybe

no one has ever thought to change it. I think about Moll Flanders, and I wonder why so many of my essays have been about prisons. I spent a very short moment wishing I did psychology A-Level so I could know if my passive prison obsession says something about my psyche.

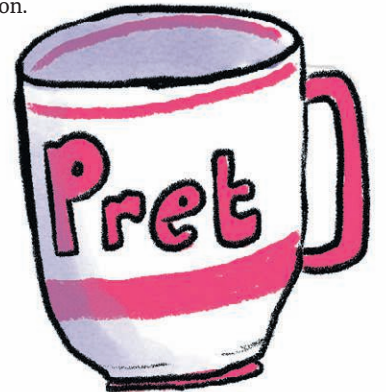


Boots call me, and I wish I could cut off the telephone. They say I'm overdue for an eye test. I

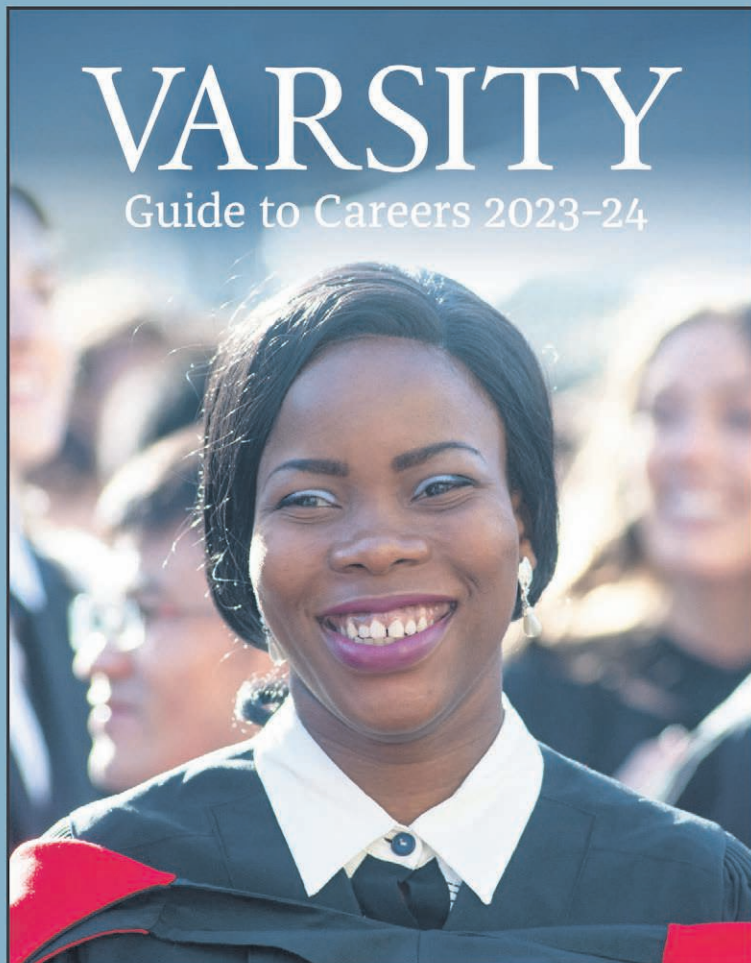
tell them I go to Specsavers now. The man on the phone says they'll miss me, and I think what a funny thing that is to say. Must book an optician's appointment; must book a haircut; must book a dentist's appointment. All three go from head to to-do list in seconds, and I think about how they'll probably cost me over £100 combined. Enough.

I add full stops to the end of all my footnotes, I sip my latte, and I think how happy I am to have a Pret subscription. I start to delete e-mails en masse, and I send one off about my accommodation. Sorted. I pick the good bits out of a packet of trail mix, and I go back to my dissertation.

8 more days. Then Easter. Everything will work out.



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Arts**Issam Kourbaj's 'Urgent Archive'**

Saranka Maheswaran reviews the new exhibition at Kettle's Yard by the Christ's College educator and artist

Taking time for art in the Cambridge chaos

Poppy Miller

It's still early enough in the term that I'm a little bit in awe of Cambridge itself. I have to resist the urge to pull out my phone like a tourist every time I walk around town on a particularly nice morning, or visit a friend's college, or even just during dinner in Caius' hall. Every term is the same; for a few weeks I'm amazed by the sheer volume of beautiful things around me, art everywhere I look, from ornate libraries, to perfectly arranged gardens, to portraits seemingly everywhere, the excitement gradually fades as I realise I actually have a degree to do.

The same seems to happen with aspects of the Cambridge arts scene. For a few weeks I want to do as much as possible. I'll visit the Fitz or Kettle's Yard every weekend or wander around the Museum of Classical Art and Archaeology whenever I have an hour between my lectures and the idea of going to the library feels a little too daunting. Then, eventually, I stop. As term goes on, deadlines pile up, I seem to become impossibly behind on my reading, societies become more active, and I become exhausted.

Within the chaos of term, an almost oxymoronic feeling of monotony creeps in. The endless essay deadlines, lectures and supervisions force a routine that leaves little room for anything else. Anything that distracts from these core activities seems like an unnecessary piece of self indulgence. Some weeks it feels like the only places I have been are my room, the library, Mainsbury's, and Sidge. Often an hour spent in the "Arc" feels incompatible with my priorities, never mind a fifteen minute walk to a museum, to spend a couple more hours staring at paintings.

When I was out of Cambridge for the holidays, I would regularly spend upwards of an hour on three different methods of transport just to spend a few hours in an art gallery or museum, looking at the same exhibitions over and over again. In Cambridge the fifteen-minute walk to the Fitz feels like a burden.

There are a few reasons why I seem more motivated to seek art out when I'm away from uni. The fact that I didn't have rapidly approaching deadlines made it easier to justify spending the a day devoted to art rather than revision, but I believe there was more to it. The need to travel meant that I needed to plan where I would go and what I wanted to see so that I could deal with train timings accordingly. This gave me specifically assigned time to engage with art, rather than just expecting it to happen eventually. The fact that I wasn't being constantly inundated with news about different events, talks, and exhibitions meant that I could see everything I wanted, without missing out on anything else. There was a small sense of the scarcity of opportunities to see new art and hear from new speakers, so when there was an event that interested me, this became a priority.

Paradoxically the fact that there is so much happening in Cambridge makes me more prone to skipping events at any minor inconvenience. I have fewer regrets about the things I missed when I know that something else will pop up, or that the exhibition is open for another three weeks. Ultimately, I end up desensitised to both the art of Cambridge itself, and the activity of its arts scene. Something else always seems to be more important.



PHOTOS BY JO UNDERHILL

Seeds, TVs, and poetry are just a few of the motifs that are married together in Issam Kourbaj's latest exhibition at Kettle's Yard, 'Urgent Archives.' Kourbaj explained that the title of the exhibition may sound contradictory, given that archives traditionally preserve the old and are not necessarily considered a pressing matter in times of crisis, as in Syria and Gaza. Yet the exhibition subverts this viewpoint, instead highlighting the resistance inherent to archiving and visually commemorating the destruction occurring.

Kourbaj has lived in Cambridge since 1990, producing work documenting the events in Syria as they occur, as well as teaching at Christ's College between 2007 and 2011. His work as an educator and his deeply collaborative nature reverberate in 'Urgent Archives.' He explained to me how, when he was asked to teach as a bye-fellow at Christ's college, it was his students who helped his English. Previously, he has worked with his son Mourad, aged 3, to create 'is/am.'

This new exhibition is no different. Kourbaj works with not only Kettle's Yard, but also the Sainsbury Laboratory to actualise his vision with the use of seeds. Seeds are a metaphor for fleeing migrants who are attempting to flee the dark for the light, just as seeds emerge from the soil into light. However, they work beyond

pure metaphor, in this case directly referencing the bomb attack on Aleppo's seed bank in 2015. Working with the laboratory, Kourbaj is growing Syrian wheat outside Kettle's Yard with the help of Cambridge University Botanic Gardens, as well as at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew.

'Urgent Archives' is also being run concurrently with Kourbaj's exhibition at the Heong Gallery, 'You are not you and home is not home.' Both exhibitions are enriched by their multiple locations of display, actively engaging the viewer to understand the migratory experiences of refugees with greater depth.

While 'Urgent Archives' is still on display, Kourbaj will be returning and constantly adding to it. By adding and altering elements throughout the exhibition, he is also able to highlight the significance of accessing the constantly changing situations in Syria and Gaza. Although the devastation occurring is not always effectively published by mainstream channels, the exhibition treats us to actively seek out information. As part of the 'Action/Time/Performance' room, there is a computer that has a link to the Facebook page of a news outlet that provides constant updates as to what is happening in Syria.

Time is harnessed further by involving the site of Kettle's Yard, Jim and Helene Ede's former home. Within the home, some

miniature boats have been placed with matchsticks as part of 'Dark Water, Burning World' (2016), a constant reminder of the immense danger refugees are forced to face as their only alternative. By placing them in the comfort of the house, there is a direct urge to face not only our privilege but also to be ever aware of the severe distress refugees face. This importance of awareness is extended in the 'Killed, detained and missing (women)' (2019) piece created with ink on pianola scrolls found in the exhibition. There is a permanent reminder of the brutality being faced by women in Syria, which passersby are rendered aware of as the exhibition continues on the Castle Street window. By being on display to all those passing by on their day-to-day routines, there is again an active disruption of public space encouraging awareness.

It is not easy work; Kourbaj's art embodies and expresses a "painful distance". "It is not a joyous thing ... but this is the only thing I can do". Kourbaj's keen attention to current events combines with rich metaphors of migration and growth throughout the exhibition, "activating artwork" in an essential and innovative way. He explained how he often returns to the exhibitions at Kettle's Yard about three times each time —with the constantly changing nature of 'Urgent Archives', he encourages viewers to come again and again.

Issam Kourbaj's 'Urgent Archives' was curated by Guy Haywood and Amy Tobin, and will be on display from 2nd March until 26th May.



Space Invaders: The ‘happy hodgepodge’ of Poppy Jo Lee’s room

Loveday Cookson visits St Catharine's College to see the technicolour cosiness of Poppy Jo Lee's room

Exhausted and borderline delirious on the penultimate day of a long Lent term, I find myself outside Chads, the second year iteration of St Catz. Nestled between Wilberforce sports grounds and the UL, Poppy's room is possibly the furthest I've ventured towards Sidgwick site since week five. Her room offers a technicolour cosiness, the perfect respite for post-term tiredness, swathed in patchwork blankets and freckled with vibrant crafting endeavours.

"I went through a phase of making squares out of any old yarn I could find"; her bedside table is swaddled with a throw, incidentally matching the one adorning her bed. "The original idea for this was it was going to be a throw for my uni bed, but then I realised it was going to take way more effort than I thought". However, as if fated in the crocheted stars, like the bunting draped along the room's perimeter, an almost identical one stumbled into her path in a local charity shop. Compelled to buy it, Poppy recognised its sentimentality. "It's definitely homemade by someone's grandma or something - I understood how much effort has gone into making this", she reflected, with its measly £3 price point breaking her heart. A self-described maximalist, especially when it comes to colour, Poppy's room is flooded with the sparks of intensity: "I like a lot of colour, and like to have no empty space." Unsatisfied with university-prescribed grey carpeting, her bed is surrounded by a pale blue rug with delicate white embroidery, while the same intricate work extends to her hand-drawn lampshade, its beige blankness replaced with pencil imaginings of woodland scenes.

Patchworked like her quilt, Poppy is

multitudinous; with her own life resisting the mundanity she rebukes in her decorating, she describes her space as "a happy hodge-



podge" and a bit of a "motley mess".

JCR president, university-level water polo player, runner, saxophonist and emerging interior design whiz, her room contains snapshots of her life, held in collaged mugs, a salvaged yoga ball rescued from the JCR, and an overflowing music stand swelled with the promise of future performances. They reside together harmoniously like the collaging upon her expansive pinboard. Populated by handcrafted Galentines cards from devoted friends, photographs catalogue the holiday adventures echoed in the sunflower plate perched on her bathroom cabinet, a reminder of warmer Athens adventures.

Poppy's pinboard, like most of her room, brims with gifts from far flung friends or closer family - like the pop-up flowers sent by her

mum, circumnavigating a traditional bouquet's inevitable demise - or products of her endless creative talents - like her hand painted clock, with its face illus-

can feel fleeting. This ephemerality is echoed in the hostility caused by a lack of common spaces; because "no one wants to traipse over to the JCR common room to go and have breakfast together", this inevitably leads to perching in stairwells and on countertops during meal times, with the little common time we share snagged by architectural realities.

Also brimming with this devotion to friendships is Poppy's jewellery box, populated by micro crocheted earrings from her flatmate, alongside a set of earrings from her first visit to the Cambridge anthropology museum. "Even though we never had an open day because of COVID, I convinced my mum to go on a day trip to Cambridge to look around... It was really sunny, and I fell in love with Cambridge." Just like her recent half marathon, where "some of us went wrong at the end and lost the finish line; it was so wet and muddy I was like bambi on the ice", this memento brings her back to what matters: "it always reminds me that - although things might get tough - it reminds me how much I wanted this".

Our days are collations of lectures, supervisions and socialising, punctuated by societies and endless Mainsbury's trips, from which we glean all that we can from the time available - even if that means eating pasta perched on a cupboard. Each one comprises another stitch in the ever-increasing squares that constitute our university experiences. Days can feel colourful, but many make us want to retreat to the safety of our charity shop blankets. Poppy is surprisingly optimistic about the impending term, as it "starts with C-Sunday and ends with May balls"; I only hope that this next square in the blanket is colourful, neon even, radiating a term which may be eclectic and overwhelming at times, but holds space for comfort and colour. As we pull ourselves through the mud, temporarily losing sight of the finish line, we need to be reminded to look for the vibrancy, staying warm beneath the potential of perfect charity shop destinies, and remind ourselves of those first sunny Cambridge days.

trated by books whose titles share the

number of each hour. As she recalls "my mum sent me an actual bouquet of flowers for my birthday last year, and this year she sent me a bouquet of pop-up flowers", these items add a sense of permanence to a space that



PHOTOS BY LOVEDAY COOKSON



Film and TV

A new interpretation of *Pride and Prejudice*

Alex Brian chats to the team behind the new student adaptation of this Jane Austen classic



▲ HOLLY SAHOTA

When the team behind the new student adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* were filming at Forde Abbey in Dorset, a member of the public approached them and asked when Ryan Keys, the actor playing Darcy, would be getting in the lake. During my interview with the directors, Matilda Barker reiterated her position: “We could not put Ryan in lakes!”

Beyond not wanting Ryan to catch hypothermia, this decision was motivated by a desire to differentiate the film from earlier adaptations. The trouble with producing another *Pride and Prejudice* film is that the 1995 and 2005 versions are so culturally ubiquitous. However, as director and screenwriter Holly Sahota argued, this need not be an obstacle: “The wonderful thing about the book is that everyone who reads it will imagine it slightly differently, and I just wanted to make a version which was how I pictured it.”

All three directors have more experience in theatre than film. Hence, they approached *Pride and Prejudice* the way a theatre director might handle Shakespeare. Rather than aim for “the most accurate adaptation”, the trio sought “a version that says something different”.

One element of this was their decision to cast a mixed-race Elizabeth. Coming from an Indian-British background herself, history student Holly Sahota was inspired by her studies of colonial India to make this creative decision. “For British men with the East India Company, stationed in the interior of India, it became ridiculously common for them to live with an Indian woman and have mixed-race children,” Holly explained. “If they were born fairly light-skinned, then sometimes they would be taken back to Britain by the father’s family and would have some opportunities within British society, but would also spend time being treated like an exotic pet.”

While acknowledging that this was hardly Austen’s intention, Holly believes that it’s plausible for the Bennet sisters to be mixed-race: “In the text, Mrs Bennet has married up from the middle class so [...] her family could have been a respectable military family or merchants of some kind involved with the East India Company.”

To avoid accusations of “changing Austen”, this aspect is primarily communicated through the visuals rather than the screenplay. Director and costume designer Rose Beedle sought to incorporate south Asian culture into her designs, which was “surprisingly easy to do [...] because Regency styles in general borrow a lot from those styles.” For instance, the second half of the film sees Darcy’s costumes increasingly incorporate Paisley patterns. “It’s sort of an acknowledgment on Darcy’s part of Elizabeth’s heritage and him accepting that,” Rose explained.

The main other new dimension was inspired by Autumn de Wilde’s 2020 adaptation of *Emma*. Like the sections of *Emma*, the four scenes of Holly’s 20-minute screenplay each reflect a different season and stage in the main couple’s relationship. Impressed with Greta Gerwig’s use of colour palettes in *Little Women* (2019), Rose aimed to align the costumes with these seasons.

According to Camdram, these four scenes are supposed to “illustrate the wider vision for a full filmed production”. I asked Holly

how she would approach a longer feature. “I would like to have all five Bennet sisters,” she responded eagerly, “and I would love to pull inspiration from Gerwig’s *Little Women* and have them interact in a very naturalistic, slightly chaotic way so you can really believe they’re siblings.” Her other plans include focusing on Lydia’s storyline and – surely most importantly – giving the Bennets a cat and Darcy a large dog.

From this interview alone, it was clear that the trio share a strong bond. Each director was full of praise for the others, with Holly exclaiming about Rose: “This woman was printing fabric! She was boiling cornstarch in order to starch Darcy’s collar!” “She hand-sewed so many things,” Matilda added, “and she didn’t need to.”

Nevertheless, combining friendship with producing a film was never going to be easy. Rose recalled having to establish a rule when they went out for dinner not to

talk about *Pride and Prejudice* until dessert. Another similar idea was the “*Pride and Prejudice* Hat”. “If we were hanging out and you wanted to say something about *Pride and Prejudice*, you had to put on the hat,” mimed Rose jokingly.

Their friendship undoubtedly proved an asset during the filmmaking process – but that doesn’t mean it was all smooth sailing. From pinecone foraging to malfunctioning SD cards, the team experienced countless challenges. “I don’t think we ended up, for any of these scenes, using a single location we originally planned,” laughed Holly.

Thus, her advice for student filmmakers is: “It’s better to have something that exists, and that’s beautiful, even if it’s slightly different to what you had pictured than to give all your hit roadblocks.” Likewise, Rose observed that sometimes the best ideas arise on the day, recalling her attempts to contain Holly’s squeal during a particularly good take.

Holly cringed: “My throat kind of inadvertently made a noise that was between ‘aah’ and a tractor, and everyone looked at me all ‘do not mess up this take with your reaction noises’. Rose grabs me from behind, and fully gets her arm and plugs it over my mouth [...] By the end of the take, somehow, my jaw was around Rose’s arm, so I guess in that sense I did bite her.”

While I cannot recommend biting your co-editors, this trio’s can-do attitude certainly provides an example to other student filmmakers. With zero experience and kit loaned from CUFA, the group have gone on to produce an elaborate short in a single term. I can’t wait to see how it has turned out!

Pride and Prejudice is set to be released in May.

◀ HOLLY SAHOTA



Talking film competitions with Film at Jesus

Syna Majumder chats to co-presidents Mabel van Zwanenberg Rouse and Rebekah Garrish

For readers who may not be aware, what is Film at Jesus?

Mabel: Film at Jesus is a society based at Jesus College focused on those interested in film. Both our screenings (once every two weeks during term) and our film competitions (termly) are entirely free!

You're running a Lent term screenplay and short film competition currently, and ran a winter short film competition before that. How did you know the Cambridge student film scene was vibrant enough to stand up to routine inspection?

Rebekah: At this point, it's traditional for the society to have these competitions each term. Students at Cambridge are exceptionally creative, and it's important to support that creativity lest academic stress snuff it out. We hope it's the informality of Film at Jesus that attracts students. A submission could be a project in your spare time, or a small task you return to over a few weeks, as it tracks your creative progress.

Talk to me about the steps taken to organise a competition like the one you're running currently.

R: The first thing we consider is the competition's timeframe. We want to give filmmakers the holiday to have fun with filming and explore styles of editing. Then we decide whether the category will be open or if there's a certain theme we'd

love to see. Previously, we've had specific topics like "One second a day" or "the Rashomon effect" (showing the same events from multiple people's perspectives).

We organise the event on FilmFreeway, listing the rules and providing consent forms for completion by actors. Next comes advertising: we post



to say the competition has started, and follow that with a series of prompts to support the filmmakers until the competition ends. The judges then have a week to watch the films. At this point, the co-president role splits into admin-related and social tasks. One co-president contacts the winners to award them their prize money. They book the room for the winners screening, while the other focuses

▲ Stills from films by previous winners Sameera Bhalotra Bowers and Sanaa Estibal

on advertising the event and inviting students who submitted films. When the screening comes around, we're always so excited to share the winning short films and all the kind words the judges had to say.

Who judges the work submitted to the termly film competition?

M: Our competitions are always judged by the master of Jesus, Sonita Alleyne, and screenwriter James McCarthy. Recently, we had guest judge Laura Mansfield, co-founder of Outline and CEO of Screenskills – a company that offers courses and training on various fields in the film industry!

What parameters are the short films judged on?

R: We're looking for films that are new and unconventional. Technical achievements (like camerawork, cinematography and sound) are rewarded, but the emphasis is on narrative and creative vision. We accept films of all styles. There are a few technical requirements: films must be under five minutes and anonymised but can include curse words if used in the appropriate context. Any music must be copyright-free and actors must consent to the film being published online or screened during film festivals.

What parameters are the screenplays judged on?

M: We want to see what you do with the limitations. Five pages is not a lot of space. Screenplays benefit from exercising judiciousness rather than abundance. Learning what to cut and what to keep is an invaluable skill. Having such little time and space really challenges expository ability. How do you establish who, what, where, when in only a few pages? It's a great way of ensuring that your dialogue is multi-functional and efficient.

As a student film society, you also run screenings. How do you choose what thematic focus to pick each term?

R: One of the co-presidents may watch a film over the holidays that they really enjoy, and from there we try to find three more films that suit it thematically. Watching *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) shaped our eco-critical take on the "dystopian" theme this Michaelmas. We take into account the date of production, mediums used and messages shared, so we can offer a keen representation of the thematic focus.

Any chance we can get an exclusive peek at the theme planned for Easter? No pressure.

M: Haha, of course we can give you a sneak peek! Take our hands, and let's go wandering into the woods. To end our first year heading Film at Jesus, we're going to screen folk films!

Let us know the deadline for those who might wish to submit.

R: The deadline for the Lent Term Film Competition is Tuesday 30 April.

Phantom Parrot details GCHQ's obtrusive data collection policy

Alex Brian reviews the documentary screening and Q&A at Arts Picturehouse

Things like this always make me want to destroy my phone," my co-editor whispers as we exit Arts Picturehouse, still shaken by the documentary we had just seen. However, if we have reason to fear the amount of personal information that can be gleaned from our devices, this pales in comparison to the experience of human rights activists like Muhammad Rabbani, the focus of Kate Stonehill's *Phantom Parrot*.

Rabbani is the international director of Cage, an organisation that campaigns for Muslims held under war-on-terror laws. In 2016, he was returning from Qatar, where he had been investigating the FBI's torturing of a suspected terrorist in a US jail, when he was detained under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

Introduced before the widespread use of smartphones, the law allows counter-terrorism police to detain anyone entering the UK for up to six hours without requiring a justification. During this time, the detainee can be arrested for refusing to provide information, including the passcodes to their devices.

Rabbani has experienced the full force of this act multiple times, both before and after the incident in 2017. However, only then was he arrested – and ultimately found guilty – for withholding his passwords to protect the privacy of his clients.

The documentary has multiple strands which converge satisfyingly by the end. These include excerpts of the parliamentary debates that preceded the passing of the Terrorism Act, highlighting the lack of opposition (only Jeremy Corbyn voted against the bill) and interest (the green benches looked disconcertingly empty) from MPs.

Phantom Parrot also showcases the day-to-day work of Cage. When helping the aforementioned suspected terrorist, Ali al-Marri, to publicise documents obtained by his lawyers detailing his experiences of torture, the organisation sought to promote the best possible media coverage by emphasising his humanity. Such moments highlight an interesting parallel between the role of Cage and that of the documentarian, whose attempts to inspire sympathy for Rabbani include featuring him alongside his family.

For viewers questioning the notable absence of ghostly tropical birds, there are expert witnesses to explain GCHQ's "Phantom Parrot" scheme. Exposed by Edward Snowden, the programme involves exploiting Schedule 7 to demand access to people's devices in order to download their data and upload it to a central database.

I must admit feeling apprehensive before embarking on this two-hour documentary. However, the film remained engaging by adopting the aesthetics of fictional accounts of state surveillance such as *The Capture* (2019) or *You Are Wanted* (2017). Upward shots of government buildings work to symbolise state power while a thundering soundtrack locks viewers in a constant state of tension. The documentary even manages to make politicians sound interesting, which is no small feat! Some might argue that this aesthetics trivialises a serious issue by rendering it perversely exciting. Yet these techniques are what encourage the audience to empathise with Rabbani and engage with the issue in the first place.

Indeed, my only criticism would be the lack of clarity surrounding the sources of the footage. Rabbani's interview during his Schedule 7 detention is effectively reproduced using animation. Yet the rest of the film comprises real footage rather than reconstructions – something which would have been useful to know while watching. For instance, the scenes at the US security conference were so unnerving that I struggled to believe they had received permission to film there. Likewise, news

reports zip across the screen before you have time to digest them.

Nevertheless, Stonehill does a skilful job of highlighting not only Rabbani's plight but also its wider implications. For example, the documentary ends by explaining that, in 2002, Schedule 7 was extended to migrants arriving on small boats. The urgency of the issues raised in *Phantom Parrot* became even clearer during the Q&A after the screening, when Rabbani highlighted Michael Gove's recent decision to shift the focus of the official definition of extremism from action to ideology, citing Cage as an organisation that would need to be reassessed under the new guidance.

As well as mentioning others who have been targeted by Schedule 7 – including French publisher Ernest Moret – Rabbani stressed the film's essential applicability to anyone: "We might not be a torture victim, nor may we know a torture victim. We should all stand with each other ... If we can create a situation where ordinary people are not sleepwalking into surveillance society, I think that's a real result."

Hence, while my co-editor's response to the documentary might have been a little extreme, she was making an important point: these issues affect us all yet are rarely discussed. Documentaries like *Phantom Parrot* play a crucial role in starting this conversation and pushing people to act.

Can the fashion industry ever be truly sustainable?

Emily McDonagh speaks to Cambridge-based designer Cosmin Diaconu on creativity, fast fashion, and luxury vintage

It's no secret that the fashion industry is a major contributor to climate change; fashion is the second most polluting industry in the world and accounts for up to 8% of greenhouse gas emissions according to the UN. Thanks to its long supply chains and energy-intensive production, the fashion industry consumes more energy than both aviation and shipping combined. Through the production of raw materials, manufacturing, distribution, and consumer behaviour, the industry swallows up natural resources like no other; around 9,700 litres are needed to produce just 1kg of cotton – a staggering figure when we consider 785 million people in the world do not have access to drinking water. In addition to water pollution and consumption, the list of destruction goes on, with textile waste, toxic chemicals and fossil fuels, the degradation of soil, and the destruction of rainforests – and that's without even considering the human cost.

Despite these overwhelming truths, few industries boast about their sustainability goals quite like the fashion industry. While more and more fashion brands are claiming to be 'green', it's becoming harder for consumers to know details about the footprint of their purchases so they can make wise choices. With the fashion industry focused on growth, alongside the ever-increasing demand for affordable (but 'trendy') clothes, the task of sustainability continues to loom over us.

Can consumers really change the story on their own? Is 'sustainability' a myth? I sat down with Cosmin Diaconu, Cambridge-based fashion designer and recent graduate of Anglia Ruskin University, to discuss his fashion journey and what sustainability means to him. Cosmin owns small luxury vintage business *RetroGusto*, and has had his designs showcased most recently at the Cambridge University Charity Fashion Show.

When asked about what shaped his path into the fashion world, Cosmin reflects that his passion had "always been there". At the age of eight, he recalls dressing dolls and using scrap materials and his mother's sewing machine to craft delicate designs. While these beginnings were merely childhood fun, it was only later that he realised he wanted to pursue fashion design at university – after he watched several fashion competitions that sparked his creative interests. Cosmin has since had his collections showcased at the Graduate London Fashion Week and the Mill Road Eco Fashion Show and has also worked on two of Beyoncé's outfits for the Renaissance Tour – a moment he describes as "life-changing".

"I always feel inspired by the things around us – objects, emotions, moments, sounds – and when that happens, I take a note of it." Cosmin describes his process from sketchbook to final design as a "moment of magic". He plays some music, draws inspiration from his sketches, collages, or paintings and lets his creativity flow as he works on the mannequin. "I find [the process] hard to describe. I let myself go and let it happen somehow."

For Cosmin, sustainability is something that was embedded in him through his up-

bringing. "For me, sustainability is a way of living. I grew up in a working-class family and most of the clothes I had as a kid were passed down from my older brother or other cousins. Nothing was seen as a waste and my parents always tried to reuse and repurpose them. I think this has greatly influenced my day-to-day activities and my practice as a fashion designer."

Having previously showcased his work at the Untagged Fashion Show, where outfits were made entirely out of deadstock and repurposed second-hand clothing, Cosmin knows all too well the possibilities of creating new art out of old materials. He reflects: "I love how a thought or an idea can be transformed into something that can make people more confident, influence their emotions, and boost their self-esteem. It's a form of self-expression that has a profound impact on our psychological well-being."

While Cosmin has utilised second-hand fabrics in his creations, I ask for his perspective on sustainability in the fashion industry as a whole. He responds: "I believe the fashion industry is becoming increasingly aware of its negative impact on the planet, and it is shifting towards more sustainable practices: sourcing eco-friendly fabrics, reducing carbon footprints, and recycling when possible." He admits, however, that "sometimes they overuse

this concept, and it's our duty to ensure we conduct thorough research before believing everything. We can all play our part, and even small actions can make a difference!"

Reflecting on Cosmin's response, I question whether fashion can actually be 'sustainable', and whether the term still holds value when fast fashion brands increasingly use it to greenwash customers and generate more profit. Even Patagonia has done away with the term, perhaps in an effort to recognise that market-based solutions such as carbon offsetting do not eliminate a history of environmental destruction. I ask whether 'sustainability' is possible whilst the industry continues to seek profit and glorify consumption. Cosmin agrees, "You're absolutely right, unfortunately, and it's very frustrating." Yet he also suggests that we have some power to change this: "By conducting more research before making purchases, we can access the information needed to determine if companies are being honest or not. It's essential always to question ourselves, ask questions, and seek answers."

"If we discover that companies are abusing certain terms, such as sustainability, we shouldn't hesitate to raise awareness among others and inform them. It may sound simplistic, but if we all play our part, we can make this happen!" Cosmin's

ambition to make a change in the world speaks volumes about what drives him in his career. When asked what his motto would be, he reflects: "I don't know if I have a motto that I live by, maybe 'always believe in yourself'? It sounds very cliché, but I believe it's true. When you believe in yourself, you can achieve anything you want, and I've proven this to myself many times."

Cosmin has gone on to promote sustainability in his own way, through his vintage resale business *RetroGusto* (@Retrogusto). "It was born from my desire to change the fashion industry for the better. As a young designer, I feel like it's my duty to do my part, no matter how small, towards a greener planet." In reselling second-hand clothing, *RetroGusto* aims to promote "conscious consumption by showcasing the beauty and value of vintage clothing."

Fast fashion products usually have an extremely short lifetime, and this is reflected in consumer behaviour: Europeans purchased 40% more clothing in 2012 compared to 1996, but wore it for a duration half as long. While shopping second-hand is not a one-stop solution, buying clothes less often, and focusing on quality and longevity can be a good first step for consumers. Cosmin reinforces this perspective: "I feel clothes from decades ago had better quality and lasted longer, which is why I decided to venture into the more luxurious side of the second-hand clothing market ... by offering high-quality vintage pieces, I can provide customers with timeless elegance and durability, while also promoting sustainability."

When asked why it is important to consider shopping second-hand, Cosmin replies: "It is the only way to stop overconsumption. We have all witnessed the direction fashion is heading with the proliferation of fast fashion brands. I believe there are many items out there that can still be worn rather than being thrown away."

Today, the average person buys 60% more clothing than in 2000, an alarming figure that reflects fast fashion's operating model which pumps out new designs at a frightening rate. People are buying more, and thus discarding more, which has disastrous effects on the planet.

Yet while turning towards second-hand and eco-friendly clothes is a good start, we must also be careful not to villainise those for whom fast fashion is the only affordable option. In the face of increasingly gentrified charity shops, and expensive 'slow fashion' brands, the pressure to change should not be placed entirely on the consumer. Governments must begin to enforce regulation on the industry, and hold mass-market retailers accountable.

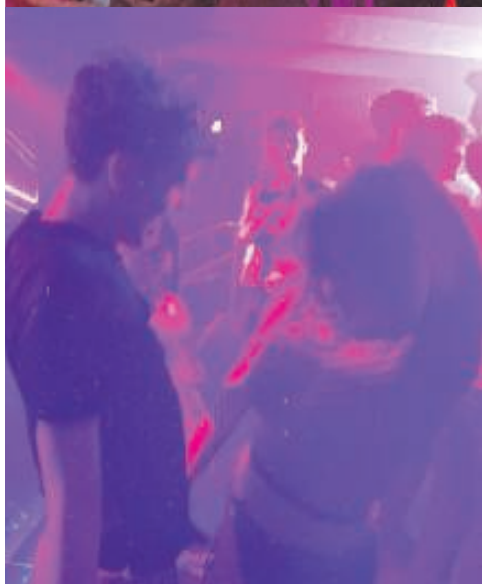
While the fashion industry thrives on innovation, overconsumption comes at an enormous environmental price. It is clear to Cosmin that when "we breathe life into old clothes", we can all do our small part to fight what first appears to be a daunting challenge. Slowing down our consumption is one means to create a sustainable future of fashion – whatever 'sustainable' means.

Models: Olivia Chilvers, Zafirah Badmus and Zuheir Zaidon **Photographer:** Domininkas.com (@domsimages) **Make-up Artist:** Andreea Chitaru **Co-director:** Milena Jones **Creative Director:** Cosmin Diaconu



How Cambridge's queer music scene finally came out

Oliver Cooney explores the rise of the Cambridge gay night out



OLIVER COONEY

Coming to Cambridge from England's gay capital (Manchester, obviously), I feared my beloved queer music would be lost amongst Gold Dust, Titanium, and whatever other 2010s track Rumboogie has on replay. My first night out proved me wrong. While Lola's drip-fed me Dua Lipa once in a blue moon, Glitterbomb overflowed with gay classics. It offered a space to soak in Britney and Beyoncé without having to tone down my singalong. Yet in my three years, Cambridge's queer scene has come a long way, now offering far more than cheesy 00s pop.

At that point, Glitterbomb was Cambridge's only frequent queer event, but allegations of racist staff meant many students needed a new home for their queer anthems. This was the origin story of The Queer Get Down. Hosted at Mash, QGD was founded "to create a safer space... for queer people of colour by queer people of colour." These were the words of QGD's organisers, who told me how important music is for queer identities. "It's about feeling comfortable in your own skin. Queer artists have made music that made me feel that way."

That emphasis on expression is certainly felt in the music, as the organisers expand beyond "the mainstream music that's considered queer." While Glitterbomb's Top 40 hits might keep some satisfied, it was hearing SOPHIE, Arca, and Shygirl that kept me coming back to QGD. But their playlist is by no means limited to artists who are queer themselves. "If the DJ is playing afrobeats and I'm dancing with my queer friends, that's queer to me" one organiser proudly told me.

“It offered a space to soak in Britney and Beyoncé without having to tone down my singalong

To achieve that broader range, QGD platforms queer DJs of colour, including the frequently featured Lorna. Over her 6 years as a medic, Lorna has worked almost every event in Cambridge, but told me she prefers queer nights. "It feels more special to DJ for people who actually need a safe space... it feels more like a community."

As for how the scene has changed, "so many big DJs used to come" Lorna said, but this was destroyed by the pandemic. Nonetheless, having seen Lorna in action, the scene is in safe hands, even with such a broad category as queer music. "I try to be as inclusive as possible in one set" she tells me. "If I want to get more people [on the dancefloor], I'll go for noughties stuff. Once people are more warmed up, then I'll move into stuff that's a bit more left field."

Catering to the eclectic tastes of queer people is especially tough at Lorna's favourite event, Gay-

Dar. The postgrad-focused night is held on the first Saturday of each month in Darwin College bar, and organiser Joe tells me their music is different. "Being older either makes or breaks your music taste," he says, "so you can't really get away with just a generic gay-ish playlist." Instead, GayDar spans the genres, including disco, funk, and hyperpop.

“It feels more special to DJ for people who actually need a safe space

But it isn't just students we have to thank for the expansion of Cambridge's queer music scene. Collaboration between Cambridge Junction, Wising Arts Centre and a handful of Cambridge-based creatives birthed Club Urania, a revolutionary space for queer Cambridge natives. The project emerged from "frustration at the lack of queer spaces in Cambridge," the organisers told me. To combat this, they established a space dedicated to queer self-expression, be that through intimate performance art or large-scale club nights. "There would not be modern electronic music without the pioneering influence of the queer community," the organisers say, as they encourage queer people to see music not just as noise, but as a tool for self-expression.

Yet the most recent expansion of Cambridge's queer music scene was student-led, with RAID launching at Mash in January. For RAID's organisers, music was at the heart of their planning. "No matter how much effort with the decorations and the condoms," the organisers told me (a proud recipient of a RAID-branded condom) "if there's bad music, no one's coming again."

To ensure they did get a returning crowd, the organisers encouraged variety in their DJ sets to "throw a twist on some of the classics of queer nightlife." With a committee diverse in both heritage and music taste, it was important for them to find DJs that straddled all sides of the queer music kaleidoscope, including going "for the more unexpected." With RAID happily alternating their Sunday nights with QGD's every-other-Monday, it isn't hard to find queer music at least once a week.

With that, Cambridge has grown to carry a glimmering queer music scene of its own, even if it may never come close to the infamous scene of my hometown. As a fresher, I praised the upgrade to my nightlife that came with returning to Manchester. Now, staring down the barrel of returning home after graduation, I think I'll miss it. Perhaps swapping King's Parade for Canal Street won't be so much of an upgrade after all.

Varsity's Easter term playlist

• Vienna - Billy Joel

• BODYGUARD

- Beyoncé

• When the Sun Hits

- Slowdive

• The Bug Collector - Haley Heynderickx

• El lugar correcto - Natalia Lafourcade

• Sunny Afternoon - The Kinks

• Good Luck, Babe! - Chappell Roan

• You Ain't The Problem - Michael Kiwanuka

• Help! - The Beatles

• Too Sweet - Hozier

• End of Beginning - Djo

• Get Sun - Hiatus Kaiyote (ft. Arthur Verocai)

Theatre

The highs and Marlowes of a Cambridge education

Christopher Marlowe's Cambridge years hold the secret to understanding the enigmatic playwright, says Michael Allen

Gay, blasphemous, stabbed to death in a pub in Kent, and definitely *not* the real author of the plays ascribed to William Shakespeare - but all that aside, who was Christopher Marlowe? Over four hundred years after his death, it's still a difficult question.

The Elizabethan playwright's place in the literary canon is secure. Before the Bard of Stratford ever picked up his quill, Marlowe bestrode London's dramatic world. Dubbed "the Muse's darling" by peer George Peele, the Victorians commemorated Marlowe with a monument in Canterbury topped by a scantily-clad statue of "the Muse of Poetry". By bonding the transgressively sensual with the divine and exalted, the Victorian sculptors captured Kit Marlowe's best work.

Beyond his art, Marlowe stands as an important influence on the making of modernity. "Within the history of modern unbelief," scholar David Riggs writes, Marlowe represents "the moment when English atheism comes out of the closet and acquires a public face." In the story of the gay liberation movement, Marlowe played an honoured part, with Derek Jarman (the groundbreaking artist of New Queer Cinema) adapting his *Edward II* into a 1991 film that forefronted the play's queer themes. It's not the thick, obscuring fog of history that conceals Marlowe's true personality. He was as mystifyingly contradictory to his contemporaries.

Marlowe's unmarked grave mars his memory; we can't help but read his biography backwards, shadowed by his violent, premature death. Either he was butchered in a pointless dispute over a bar tab, or dispatched by an assassin commissioned by Elizabeth herself to end his blasphemies. Many believe his murder was the state's removal of a wildly indiscreet spy; the much revered Elizabethan takes on, in this telling, the dangerous glamour of a character from the world of Ian Fleming or Graham Greene. The riotous drunk, the vulgar heretic, the inconvenient spy: take your pick, because none are definitive.

These ambiguities relate to the final six years of Marlowe's life. Prior to that, we know a decent amount - Corpus Christi's records include evidence of Marlowe's matriculation in 1580, and consistently record his presence (interspersed with long absences) until he left in 1587. These years appear unremarkable. Marlowe dined in college, paid his rent, and sat his exams. However, Marlowe's time at Corpus Christi helps us take the measure of the man.

Marlowe's biography and buttery records suggest that the great poet would have been conscious of being a second-class student. The Cambridge of 1580 was not the pilloried bastion of privilege it would become; the University then existed to create a class of reliable clerics and lawyers. Even so, Marlowe had to overcome exceptional odds to make it to university. The son of a struggling shoemaker during an economic downturn, he was the prototypical 'scholarship boy'. Social exclusion pervaded the life of his less fortunate siblings - his sister Anne was characterised as a "scold, a common swearer, and a blasphemer of the name of God". Another sister, Dorothy, was excommunicated for "slander" and "fornication". Marlowe's chances of becoming respectable were conditional on his eschewing leisure in his youth, attending 13-hour classes at his Canterbury school, six days a week, and this pressure didn't lessen upon his arrival to university.

Marlowe is listed in Corpus Christi's record books as first dining in Hall in December 1580, but he didn't matriculate until the middle of March 1581, and he didn't pay the college entrance fee until that May. This sort of staggered entrance into college life was unusual, and it some scholars have concluded that Marlowe must have already been a spy for the British state. After all, he had to make ends meet, which leaves the mystery of how he

was able to maintain food and board for six months without formally becoming a member of the College, at which point he would have received his scholarship allowance. We don't have the leap to terrific visions of spycraft to explain how Marlowe managed to support himself through these first six months of university life. It is more probable Marlowe worked as a college labourer, aiding in the construction of Corpus's new Chapel. Imagine the brilliant young poet, conscious that his talent exceeded that of those around him, sweating over the stones of the college's Old Court while his peers sauntered past, and we gain an insight into the ambitions and frustrations that must have driven him.

Marlowe's Cambridge years would have entitled him to take a hostile view of the state. A few decades after Marlowe's time at Cambridge, Francis Bacon warned King James I of the "seditious" threat grammar schools like those attended by Marlowe posed to the equilibrium of the kingdom, arguing that allowing talented young people to access education created a class of overeducated "idle and wanton people", "unfit for the vocations" to which Bacon believed they were predisposed. The routine of unbearable discipline mixed with near-constant humiliation that defined the first 23 years of Marlowe's life did not, as it would have done earlier in the 16th century, permit him entrance to England's respected classes. Instead, arriving in London in 1587 (his attendance at Cambridge having tapered out after 1584), Marlowe would have been treated with suspicion.

Marlowe's first two creative works after graduation are explosions of passion from a man eager to escape cloistered living. Virgil, the pastoral and epic poet of Latin antiquity, was considered the respectable choice of idol for an Elizabethan poet on the make, but Marlowe opted for Ovid's *Amores*, transgressive poems that celebrate raunchiness. His

translation oozes with the cheeky enthusiasm of a youth newly unbound. He followed his *Amores* with his first play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, which, as a retelling of Virgil's *Aeneid*, was a more conventional choice. Marlowe, however, begins the play with a scene of his own invention, between Jupiter, king of the gods, and Ganymede, a Trojan soldier that Jupiter has fallen in love with. Jupiter is keen to indulge his lover, telling him: "I love thee well, say Juno what she will." Juno, queen of the gods, rebukes her husband and kickstarts the narrative of Aeneas, but it is plain that Marlowe follows her begrudgingly; read as an allegory for the young artist, it is plain that, liberated from oppressive duty, Marlowe now wants to explore passion and pleasure. His more mature works feature several mocking dismissals of academic life. *Doctor Faustus* begins with Faustus dismissing different professions of learning, declaring: "Physic, farewell." In *Edward II*, one character is instructed to "cast the scholar off/And learn to court it like a gentleman." Marlowe, liberated from the constraints of academic life, writes against the wound that life as a second-class student in Cambridge left. After years of struggle, he concluded that all those years of hard graft were for nothing; it is not enough to be a "scholar", if one cannot "court it like a gentleman". Style and sensuality are all.

During the years Marlowe penned masterpieces, he was arrested three times for street fighting and held for two weeks in Newgate Prison. The man who left Cambridge clearly felt he had a lot to prove, and did so artistically and violently. If we accept these outbursts as manifestations of a deeper restlessness and unhappiness, the most natural place to look is in his preceding years of study. The central contradictions of Marlowe's life - the stylist of staggering beauty versus the violent delinquent - can both be considered to stem from the collision of a brilliant soul with the inequalities of the Cambridge experience.



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Theatre

The closest Cambridge comes to a Drama degree

I can honestly say I love my degree. That's something you don't hear a lot. Jealous? You should be. Not everyone can confess unwavering adoration for something that sucks the life out of them until they're nothing but a sad sack of skin debating whether to sell their soul to the devil (do a Law conversion). You must be thinking, *wow, she is really passionate about her degree*. While I would love to keep that image of me intact, I ran out of passion by Year 10 mocks. My affection for my degree is not a result of my drive but because I study Education, English, Drama and the Arts (EEDA).

From a totally unbiased perspective, Education is the best degree at Cambridge. It might be disorganised, chaotic and severely lacking in job prospects, but it is also freeing, creative and current. It is stupidly broad and most definitely different. It is a community. It is also the only course in Cambridge that offers a practical drama paper.

Explaining my degree is always entertaining. I begin with how my first theatre lecture involved nearly an hour of playing drama games. Watching Medics' jaws drop and Natscis eye me with a mixture of disgust and curiosity is addictive. In fact, nearly everything about the theatre paper conjures extreme reactions. Speaking with some friends on the course, Mel reminds me of a lecture where we were instructed to walk around the room enacting different levels of emotion. It was quite

the experience to see my Cambridge lecturer screaming and scratching at the floor demonstrating the "highest level of tension". Anna brings up a task wherein we were told to 'feel' the urges of different spaces in the room and walk there with 'purpose' - I can tell you my walk definitely lacked 'purpose'. Jumping around a music room like a frog, slapping a fellow coursemate in the face (yes, purposefully), and 'performing' Artaud's *Spurt of Blood* (read it if you dare) are a few more of my favourite stories. Even the exams are miles away from typical Cambridge expectations. For my exam this year, my only instruction is to write a 'complete' play. What this means, we are still not entirely sure but it is a very cool opportunity. The lecturers even got two paid actors to come in and perform extracts of our plays which I would describe as equally as terrifying as it was incredible.

From my descriptions, I am aware there seems to be a distinct lack of education in my Education degree. Of course I have to clarify what exactly this degree is. No, I do not want to become a teacher. Yes, I am prepared to follow an economically dubious career path. I would estimate that 90% of education students don't plan to teach. We may end up teaching, but we don't plan for it. Funnily enough, getting a teaching qualification (PGCE) is actually much easier for other degrees. I doubt I will be able to apply to do one. I can see why though: what am I going to teach? Is there a GCSE

in experimental classroom design? What you need to understand about Education is that we don't learn to become teachers, we learn why being a teacher sucks. Scratch that, why humanity sucks. To tell the truth, it gets pretty depressing, especially when we finish discussions contemplating the impossibilities of any practical changes to the world. To complicate things even further, on the EEDA track of Education, we study literature and theatre as well as the deep incurable flaws of society. This complication is why many of us EEDA girls (the course is predominantly female) applied for the course.

Talking to my cohort (all 14 of us!) many of them see EEDA as a chance to keep hold of our creative passions while studying a range of other subjects. We study everything from ancient Mesopotamia to critical race theory to language acquisition to the animated *Batman* series (still my favourite lecture). The idea that I could have the chance to study all of these topics excites me now as much as it did when I found the course. I like the variety, and I see the lectures as a buoyancy aid. When we find something that genuinely interests us, it's easier to dive into the deep end when you have something to swim back to the surface with. Anna, however, does also make the excellent point that such variety is a nice way to avoid making real decisions about our futures...

Unlike me, some EEDA students know exactly what they want. Mel

explains how studying drama was always the goal. Cambridge does not offer anything close to a Theatre course for undergraduates despite the popularity of student theatre. I know many people who chose Cambridge for the theatre scene first and their degree second. As the only undergraduate course to offer practical drama in Cambridge, EEDA is, as Mel puts "the only way to study drama." And yet our current second year cohort is the last to ever experience this course. For first year Education students, the separation into different tracks has been scrapped. Instead, they all take the same papers in their first year to slowly specialise as they move into second and third year. In losing the EEDA

papers, there has been a fundamental change in how the course functions. The smaller track specific groups allow students to focus on their interests, like theatre, while engaging with the wider themes of Education. These subjects are already overlooked and dismissed from Cambridge's academic wealth. Within core papers that all educationists take, each student can bring a specialised knowledge from their track-specific papers which creates critical discussion. There is something about the community the tracks create that makes lectures that much more interesting.

More than discussion and lectures, I truly feel supported by my EEDA coursemates. Not to sound soppy but it is an honour to do this course with such inspiring, creative minds. Still jealous? Good. Why don't you give up your future income and join us educationists? Let's change the world, one drama game at a time.



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Matt Edge's triumph in the Boat Race

Jinqian Li speaks to stroke Matt Edge about his incredible journey to victory in the 2024 Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race

In the final moments of the 2024 Boat Race, Matt Edge, Cambridge's Blues stroke, epitomised the sheer willpower and endurance of an athlete. As Cambridge crossed the finish line, a significant lead securing their victory, Edge's physical limits were starkly visible, his face a stark shade of white. Collapsing from exhaustion in the last minutes of the race, his final act before his body gave in, a now-iconic moment, was to stop his watch – a reflexive action ingrained through years of training. "It's just muscle memory," he says. "I got a lot of comments on my Strava about stopping my watch four seconds after the line. That's pretty cool."

The race, however, was fraught with challenges that tested every ounce of the crews'



strength and strategy. Early on, under Hammersmith Bridge, Edge made a critical decision to intensify his efforts. "We were suddenly presented with this opportunity to really move away from Oxford. All the time in training, we talked about how you get those moments, and you've got to take it. So I think I just pushed a few too many chips in myself," he says. This surge was a gamble that ultimately paid off – but it came at a cost.

As the boats rounded the second-to-last corner, they were battered by a fierce headwind, making it difficult for Edge to maintain the rhythm necessary to keep ahead. "I was trying to set the rhythm there, but in the headwind, it became a lot harder to get up the slide. The energy this requires, while trying to set the pace, was what took it out of me," Edge explains. Despite this, he found reassurance in the composure of cox Ed Bracey. "Ed was doing a great job of staying very calm. He never really gave the impression that he was panicking or that

we couldn't handle what was going on."

With the race nearing its end and the cox sug-

gesting he hand over his blade, Edge remained resolute. "Every stroke, you've got a choice," he tells me. "You can collapse and slow the boat down, or you can strive for a strong stroke – all the way to the end." "It wasn't like I'd put the race in too much danger, but there was a lot of relief in making it over the line. I clocked that I'd survived and hadn't completely passed out. It took me a while to appreciate that we had actually won", he adds.

Carried out of the boat after the race, Edge was rushed to the medical tent and hooked up to an ECG. "I tried to sit up pretty quick and tell them that I was fine because I wanted to go on the podium at the end and spray the English sparkling wine that we got," he recalls. "My other thought was that my friends and family, particularly my partner, had seen me collapsing. I needed to make sure I got back on the telly and showed everyone that I was upright." Edge made the presentation "just after the BBC cameras cut away [...] but I'm still glad to join them up there and take some photos, which was really nice."

At the celebration dinner, Edge received a standing ovation. "It was quite strange, really. Whenever I tried to walk across the room, someone would stand up, shake my hand, and say well done.

I'm really just blown away that some of these people that I looked up to for a long time as a kid, people from the 2013 race, the first one I watched, and people from the 1961 race, all came up and said well done," he says. "It's nice when you're feeling like a bit of a muppet, and people who know a lot more about rowing than you do come up and say it was still a good job and to be proud of yourself"

The media attention that followed gave Edge a big boost of followers on social media. "Lots of people were very concerned, and I received many messages, even from complete strangers, saying they hoped I was okay," Edge tells me. "But it's very much 15 minutes of fame. A week and a half later, it's all cleared up now. So I can just go back to being a normal student really." "I didn't want it to take away from the other guys who had achieved this fantastic thing and not mistimed the pushes and collapsed on the finish. They actually got me over the line", he adds.

Edge's rowing journey began when he watched the Boat Race in 2013. Despite Cambridge's loss, he was inspired by the sport and joined a local rowing club with his mother's encouragement.

At Cambridge, Edge initially struggled but persevered. His time there was

marked by challenges and triumphs, with his proudest moment coming in 2022 when he led Cambridge to victory as President of the lightweights. "To finally turn it around in what I thought was going to be my last race and get Cambridge back on winning form, that was a great race," he recalls.

Balancing his PhD and rowing commitments, Edge remains dedicated to both. The friendships and shared experiences make the challenges worthwhile. "I've met some of my best friends through the club," he says. "Really going through the wringer of training all year for one race, you share the outcome, win or lose, with them. That really binds you together for life."

Edge's passion for rowing is unwavering: "The motivation for me is so much more in the process and the enjoyment of the ride than the destination." When asked about the Olympics, Edge explains that the removal of lightweight rowing and his physique makes it challenging.

At the prospect of stopping rowing, Edge explains that he'd be "more than happy" to stop if he became injured. "I'd be sad to not get to do it every day with my friends, but I've achieved way, way more than I ever thought I would," he reflects.

Captain's Corner

Real Tennis Captain Anastasia Sandigurskaia chats to Ed Marsh

Best sporting moment?

My best sporting moment is not related to a particular win or practice but in fact to my return to racket sports. When I was younger, I had a severe shoulder injury that pushed me out of lawn tennis (what we refer to the Wimbledon tennis as). I thus prioritised my academic life and let sport take more of a backseat. I have always done every sport under the sun, and so I continued competing in these once I recovered. In my second year of university, I realised I was trying to replace the void lawn tennis had left with every sport that I could find. I finally felt ready to pick it up again. I found them at the Freshers' sporting fair when I was manning another stall and was told to think about social tennis, but if I really wanted to, I could attend trials. So, knees shaking I attended the trials with no idea what my level was or what others' levels were. I was just hoping to get back into the game irrespective of the team. Little did I know this would later result in making the Blues lawn tennis team! This success then opened my eyes to all the sport offered in Cambridge. Coincidentally, on a whim, I tried real tennis with my now co-captain in lawn tennis. So you could say my best sporting moment was trying real tennis!

Worst sporting moment?

The worst sporting moments for me will always revolve around injury and losing. To some degree, losing isn't bad and much can be learned, but much of the time it can be truly disappointing and a difficult pill to swallow. Honestly,

despite describing my return to racket sports as my best sporting moment, it was not easy. I battled (and still do) with a lot of injuries, losing and slow progress when trying to remember the sport I had played my whole life.

However, in real tennis, my worst moment encompasses both injury and loss; a wrist injury and a tight loss in a match I knew I could have pulled a relatively easy win in.

What is the best bit about being captain?

This may honestly sound a little played out or cringey but the best bit is truly being able to make the changes that I want to see. The club was amazing to me in my first year – it really accepted me and made me feel part of the community. As a result, I have grown very passionate in wanting to help it improve. As captain, I found myself with the power to do this. For example, I helped introduce the first women's Oxbridge fixture against the MCC (Lord's) this year (something the men have had for a very long time), set up a tour of France in conjunction with the men's captain (hopefully to stay for later years), and pulled off the impossible ... Varsity! The support of those around us is what makes it possible for us as captains to make meaningful contributions to the community.

Worst bit about being captain?

I'm sure many other captains can share in the opinion – the admin! There is so much that goes on behind the scenes and sports in Cambridge are mainly run

by students. Juggling this captaincy, lawn tennis captaincy and my degree in my final year has been a challenge to say the least. It has put me through my paces but taught me a lot, like how to toughen up and reply a little quicker! As always, captaincy comes with trials and tribulations, especially in the lead up to Varsity with half our team residing outside of Cambridge and a last-minute drop-out days before the first match. However, all this is expected with the role, and when the team came together with a beautiful Varsity win, it made it all truly worth it!

Is it easy for beginners to join?

Very! This sport can be played by all and welcomes all. First, real tennis is accessible to everyone. We have people playing who have never picked up a racket before as well as those who have never played any hand-eye coordination sports. Of course, hand eye coordination definitely helps, but it is by no means necessary! We have players who have come from all sorts of sports such as cricket and hockey, as well as the usual culprits such as squash, lawn tennis and rackets. Secondly, getting on court could not be easier. As you can imagine, the club is relatively small compared to other sports in Cambridge, and so it is incredibly receptive to new members. At the beginning of the academic year, we have plenty of free trial sessions and fun events to help grow the community and give everyone a go at the sport. The club offers free trial sessions for students with one of the pros (what we call coaches) at the club.

Who could a beginner contact to get involved?

Either the men's captain (Arthur) or myself. We will be able to put you in touch with the pros, put you into a session, book you a court, or anything else you might want. We are more than happy to try and help you find what you need and get you started!

What might a typical training session look like?

Funny you ask as we are actually in the process of rethinking and hopefully modifying our training sessions to help us be better geared up for Varsity! At the moment the sessions are usually with your team or those of a similar level. Typically, we begin with a quick warm-up, small taps or volleys – similar to a service box warm-up in lawn tennis. Then we go into the feeding part of the session where the coach tasks us with drills of all kinds. We usually conclude with some doubles and match play practice. In the future, we are

hoping to incorporate more targeted match play sessions because actual matches are always different to training ones, particularly in this sport which has so many unique tactics, rules and jagged walls!

How did Varsity go?

As you can tell from the previous answers it was amazing! The MCC were brilliant hosts and Oxford were great competition, giving us exciting matches for both the men and the women. To top it all off, the women walked away with a 5-1 win! Everyone stepped up and played incredible matches! It was truly a special night for all of us and likely one that will be remembered for years to come.



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The Thames is Light Blue once again



BENEDICT TUFNELL

Isabelle Watts gives the run down on Cambridge's success at the 169th Boat Race

Saturday 30 March saw the Thames play host to the 169th Boat Race and the 78th Women's Boat Race, as Cambridge and Oxford once again battled their way from Putney to Mortlake in one of the oldest sporting events in the world. Cambridge was vying to defend their spectacular clean sweep last year, when they won every single race: the spares' races, veterans' races, both men's and women's lightweight races, men's reserves, women's reserves, women's Blue Boat and the men's Blue Boat.

The spares' races were held on Wednesday 27 March, where reserve rowers compete in pairs down a stretch of the championship course. The crews battled rough conditions, Cambridge winning both the open weight men and lightweight men spare pair races. The women's equivalents were combined into a 'spare four' at the bequest of Oxford, who went on to win by two lengths.

Friday 29 March saw the lightweight crews take to the river for their races: the lightweight men defeated their Oxford counterparts by over five lengths, and the Cambridge women also won five lengths up from the Dark Blues, defending their victory for the fifth year in a row.

Finally, Saturday arrived and brought with it a bright blue sky and glorious sunshine which drew significant crowds to the banks of the Thames. Furnival Gardens was a sea of light blue, pressuring many of the embarrassed Oxford supporters to keep their heads down.

The women's Blue Boat race was first. Oxford took an impressively early lead, causing despondence among Cambridge supporters. But the crew were unfazed and relied on their confident base pace to carry them through the course. Half-way through the race, just after Hammersmith Bridge, this base pace took Cambridge past the Oxford crew and

quickly put clear water between themselves and the Dark Blues. The plucky Oxford cox Joe Gellett attempted to take advantage of a rule stating that if a bump takes place while one boat is in another boat's water, the boat on the wrong side is disqualified - he thus 'bumped' the Cambridge boat; however, no disqualification took place as Cambridge was not encroaching on Oxford water at the time of contact, and the bump was clearly manoeuvred by Oxford. Cambridge cox Hannah Murphy kept her crew calm as they seemingly coasted to claim victory by seven lengths, an incredible effort by the Light Blues whose celebrations were only marginally delayed by the valiant yet unfruitful appeal of Oxford's Gellett to umpire Richard Phelps regarding the bump.

As millions tuned in to the BBC coverage from all over the world, the crowds gathered along the course had the extra benefit of watching the two reserve races

which took place between the televised Blue Boat races. First came Blondie, the women's reserve boat, which lost to an impressive performance by Oxford's Osiris who had gained a lead off the start and did not let it slip. Goldie, the men's reserves, brought home another victory for Cambridge, finishing the course four lengths ahead of their rivals.

Finally, the men's Blue Boats came storming down the course. The two crews were level until a clash passing Craven Cottage gave Cambridge an advantage and, coupled with the advantage of the Middlesex bend, this left Cambridge with a lead of one length. They continued to increase this advantage even through the Oxford advantage bend. However, just as a Cambridge victory appeared a foregone conclusion, stroke Matt Edge (St Catharine's) began to flag, having clearly given his all. He put up a valiant effort and continued moving at race pace, yet it was up to the seven rowers behind

him to provide the power and control required to cover the final kilometre of the championship course. Luckily, the gap Cambridge had made between themselves and Oxford was large enough to ensure a win of three and a half lengths, in a time of 18 minutes, 56 seconds.

The tradition of throwing the victorious cox into the river was banned this year, due to dangerously high levels of E coli bacteria found in the Thames. Oxford claimed that several of their rowers had missed sessions this week due to illness, potentially caused by the bacteria; however, they were adamant that this does not take away from Cambridge's dominating victory.

After this year's results, Cambridge leads 87-81 in the men's races and 48-30 in the women's races, having won decisively every year since 2017. One wonders whether Oxford can still be considered a worthy opponent - dare I say, it's almost getting boring.