

VARSITY

Yearbook & Review 2024



Inside ● Activism & art pg.12 ● In conversation with Stephen Fry pg.16 ● Bursting the Cambridge bubble pg.34



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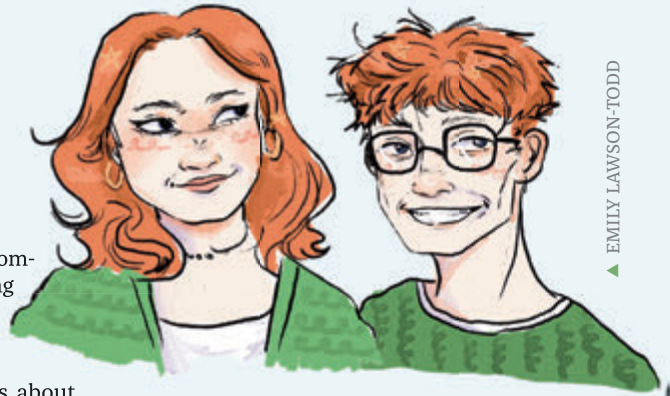


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Editorial



▲ EMILY LAWSON-TODD

We began thinking about this magazine in February. Questions and conversations about what we wanted to feature, who we wanted to spotlight, and how we wanted our readers to feel have existed for much longer than the words and images that you'll find on the next sixty-odd pages.

Turn over, and you'll find the beginning of a news timeline, tracing the city and University's happenings over what we might reasonably describe as a tumultuous year. From the University committing to reviewing its supervision system, to Suella Braverman's visit to Cambridge for Palestine's encampment, our home has borne witness to an awful lot since September. This city, just like its students, is forced to be agile.

This Yearbook celebrates plenty of those students; those who

protest enduringly, those who complete the arduous chore of finding May Ball headliners, and those who contribute to our somewhat miraculous theatre scene.

We devote pages to discourses about majority-female colleges, to students' creative writing, to those embracing their heritage at May Balls, to horrible hangovers, and to finding your feet when the time comes to leave Cambridge. There's a page for puzzles too. There is something waiting for you in this magazine.

The task levied at us was to produce a magazine reflective of a year in Cambridge – indicative of how we exist and feel as Cantabs and as quasi-locals. We hope this publication says something about the life you lead here. It's a task we've taken up with the greatest of respect for the institution we've been awarded a term in charge of.

Varsity is a gift of a student society. We're one of just three fully independent student newspapers in the country. We report reliably and confidently; we comment boldly; and we

review, explore, and examine with heart and a tireless attention to detail. And as for ourselves, we have edited *Varsity* with the deepest of commitments to independent reporting, and to holding institutions to account.

We hope you enjoy this magazine. It's an amalgamation of takeaway pints, 12-hour shifts in the office, and painstakingly adjusted fonts, text boxes, and illustrations. Take it to Grantchester to browse through during a picnic; find some friendly recompense in its pages the day after a heavy May Ball. Share it among your friends, and find solace in the voices we have to share with you.

Alice Mainwood &
Felix Armstrong

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The year in news

Cambridge commits to reviewing supervision system

Rosalind Franklin gets DNA recognition



▲ RUYING YANG

History misses marking deadline

Following the withdrawal of the MAB, Faculty heads told students to expect their results almost a month after the University deadline.

Selwyn: Thanks for investing in gilets amid heating cuts



▲ EDMUND BURKE FOUNDATION

Just Stop Oil paint King's College

The infamous direct action group caused a stir on King's Parade in October when Chiara Sarti, a PhD student, sprayed orange paint over King's College's famous facade. The College later emailed students offering support for the "upset and distress" caused by JSO's actions.



▲ FELIX ARMSTRONG

Divinity don slammed for 'racist' remarks

Professor James Orr was accused of "dehumanising" Arabs and Palestinians. Another academic in the Faculty said it was "unthinkable" that the don could teach without discrimination.

Pants on fire! King's laundry room suffers blaze

SEPTEMBER

Marking boycott ended

In early September, the UCU called an early end to the long-running Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB), which saw many finalists be rejected by grad schemes while awaiting their results. The University had called for its staff to mark all exams by mid-October a few days before the announcement. The end to the boycott came a week after more than a hundred finalists penned an open letter to Cambridge UCU, calling for a pause to the MAB. The authors urged the union to consider the "impact of the boycott" on students' futures, alleging that the MAB "contravenes the strike's wider aims of fairness, justice, and equality".



▲ FELIX ARMSTRONG

Uni leadership criticised in wake of October 7



▲ DANIEL HILTON

The University's response to the emerging crisis in Israel and Gaza came under scrutiny from a range of students and activists. Following the University's initial statement following the October 7 attacks, an open letter criticised Cambridge's "silence" on the Jewish lives lost. Four days later, the University condemned Hamas' "brutal attacks," saying they were speaking to Jewish and Palestinian students affected. At a number of large demonstrations on King's Parade in the following weeks, Palestinian students called vice-chancellor Deborah Prentice "racist" for her "silence" on the "suffering of Palestinians".

Elite John's sports soc refuses mixed gender merger

The Eagles, the College's elite male sports club, voted seven against ten not to merge with its female equivalent, the Flamingos. The womens' club president, Jenny Dunstan, criticised the "outdated" gender split and the "disappointing" failed merger.

Postgrad announces general election candidacy



▲ RICHARD SWIFT

Stop handing out wee-Ks, says John's dean

Students at John's were warned to continue tricking bop-goers into drinking urine at their "peril" by the College Dean.



▲ LOUIS ASHWORTH

▼ MARINE MERCIER / CAMBRIDGE CLIMATE JUSTICE



Climate protesters stage ABBA flashmob

Student activists staged a parody of the Swedish pop group's 'Money, Money, Money' in the Grand Arcade shopping centre, attacking university "greenwashing". "We're always going to call out this kind of behaviour, with music or without," one performer said.

Uni warns against 'stigmatising' ADHD amid rising diagnoses

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

Cambridge Uni hospitals staffed by 'bigots and sexists'

Cambridge University Hospitals were described by staff as containing a "loud minority of bigots and sexist staff" in an NHS Rainbow Badge report. Employees reported that "un-PC" remarks were frequently made towards trans staff, while one called the initiative "mindless virtue signalling".

Gove promises to 'solve' Cambridge water scarcity

RICHARD ASHWORTH ►
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Clare leaks financial data of 100 students

Clare College leaked a list of more than 100 students entitled to the Cambridge Bursary in an email sent to all students. One student whose information was disclosed spoke of their "shock and dismay" at the leak. Clare's bursar offered her "sincere apologies for any inconvenience caused".



▲ LOUIS ASHWORTH



▲ NASA VIA UNSPLASH

Catz academic joins NASA space mission

University expresses 'serious reservations' about reading week

University Council responded to long-standing calls for a reading week, speaking of their "reservations" at the "risks" of the proposal. Uni heads did, however, admit that students face an "excessive workload," commissioning a 'Review of Teaching' to investigate the impact of study on student mental health and wellbeing.

Demands for medical funding increase by 650%

Applications to the University's physical and mental health fund increased by 659% since the 2018/19 academic year, a *Varsity* investigation revealed. Payouts from the Crane fund increased by 853% in the same period, rising to £609,788 in the year 2022/23. In March, the fund was cut to no longer cover ADHD or autism diagnoses, due to an "unsustainable" rate of applications.



Alan Turing statue unveiled

Anthony Gormley's monument to the King's alum and legendary WW2 codebreaker attracted criticism from Historic England but was defended by the College.

▲ FELIX ARMSTRONG

Colleges discourage students from reporting sexual assault

Colleges were found to have "actively discouraged" students from reporting serious sexual assault allegations to the police following a *Varsity* investigation. One victim approached her college for support to find they were "adamant" to avoid police involvement, though another student was certain that their stalking would have "stopped much sooner" had they reported it officially.

JANUARY

Unbuilt pool could cost University £600,000

Activists occupy Barclays over fossil fuel and Israel links

Students and local campaigners staged a sit-in at Barclays' St Andrew's Street branch, calling for the bank to cut funding from the fossil fuel industry and Israel's operations in Gaza. The University had recently begun looking for a new banking partner, putting its centuries-long ties with the bank under threat. In December, Oxbridge students had committed to boycotting employment at Barclays.



▲ FELIX ARMSTRONG

'Race-realist' fellow's blog post provokes outrage

A free speech row erupted after philosophy academic Nathan Cofnas wrote in a blog post that Black people would "disappear from almost all high-profile positions outside of sports and entertainment in a meritocracy." Cofnas claimed that the University was "aware" of his "controversial interests" before hiring him, while pro-vice-chancellor Bhaskar Vira admitted that there were "failures" in employing the academic. Students gathered on Sidgwick site to call for Cofnas' dismissal before marching to the student services building to lodge complaints in person. In a town hall hosted by the master of Emmanuel, where Cofnas was employed, Homerton Principal Simon Woolley said: "There is no place for bigots in institutions like this."



▲ DANIEL HILTON

FEBRUARY

Clare don attacks 'gender zealots'

Professor Douglas Hedley, a Divinity professor, described people who use they/them pronouns as "zealots" during a Eucharist service, with his comments described as "archaic" and "antagonistic" by members of the college choir. Hedley had already found headlines in October for calling for a painting of a Governor-General of British colonial rule to be rehung in Clare college.



▲ JIM LINWOOD CC <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en>

Uni defends £20m oil tycoon donation

Cambridge was accused of "persistently sidelining ethical considerations" in favour of taking donor cash by a member of its University Council after defending its decision to take £20 million from the CEO of the Middle East's largest private oil and gas company. Majid Jafar, a Cambridge alum, made the donation for a children's hospital development, but had previously defended fossil fuels, saying at COP28 that "blaming the producers of oil and gas for climate change is like blaming farmers for obesity."

John's athletes hit with community service after Oxford sports swap frenzy

John's axes mixed gender choir

The College's decision to shut down St John's Voices (SJV) was met with widespread anger, provoking a petition with signatories including Rowan Williams, Gareth Malone, and Anna Lapwood. The letter alleged that the move constitutes the "destruction of choral opportunities for female and non-binary singers," due to the low engagement of female and non-binary students in the College's chapel choir, which began admitting women in 2022. The decision would reportedly allow the College to redirect SJV's "significant resources" towards the chapel choir, while *Varsity* found in April that John's spent over a million on this last year and only £58,667 on SJV in the same period.

◀ HANNAH MAWARDI

University Instagram
disables comments
on Passover post
after abuse

Sarah
Anderson
wins SU
undergrad
presidency



◀ DANIEL HILTON

Fitz houskeeping shames students for messy rooms

Fitzwilliam College apologised to students after housekeeping staff emailed photos of the inside of messy rooms to the entire college with the caption: "An illustration of what housekeeping DO NOT want to see on their weekly visits."

Lucy Cav students threaten rent strike

MARCH

Students hit by flying chair in sports swap pub frenzy

Vigil commemorates two-year anniversary of invasion of Ukraine

Pro-Palestine activist slashes Trinity painting



A masked activist made worldwide headlines after targeting a painting outside Trinity's library which depicted Lord Balfour, a former Prime Minister whose famous declaration supported the establishment of a home "for the Jewish people" in Palestine. This action "began the ethnic cleansing of Palestine by promising the land away," claimed Palestine Action, the group behind the protest, which the British "never had the right to do". Balfour's great-great nephew, the Earl of Balfour, described the protest as "woke nonsense".

◀ PALESTINE ACTION

Cambridge scraps state school targets

University representatives stated in an online meeting that there's "no proposal to have a formal target against school type" from the academic year 2025-26, as the Office for Students is now "more interested" in individual factors.

Hundred of private school students benefit from 'widening participation' measures

Almost 300 private schools were found to have benefitted from the University's "widening participation" scheme which was designed to aid those from deprived backgrounds in Cambridge applications. Among the schools that benefitted was Gordonstoun, the King's former school. Another, Stonar School, offers students the opportunity to loan a horse each term for an extra £1,260. Of students that benefited from the measures, 19% of them were privately educated, despite only 6% of students in the UK going to private schools.



LOUIS ASHWORTH ▶

Cambridge for Palestine sets up camp outside King's

Cambridge students set up an encampment outside King's College, calling for the University to cut its investments in "genocide" and demanding a meeting with the vice-chancellor. Activists called for the University to disclose its investments, divest from companies associated with the Israeli military campaign in Gaza, reinvest in Palestinian universities and protect Palestinian students, becoming a university of sanctuary. The encampment was launched in collaboration with others at universities such as Oxford. Cambridge for Palestine, the group behind the action, then set up a second camp on Senate House lawn, which was dismantled a few days later once the University agreed to negotiations.



CHRISTOPHER LORDE

Copypat don caught again

Serial plagiarist William O'Reilly faced fresh allegations of passing off copied work as his own. Having previously kept his job despite "accidentally" copying a student's essays, O'Reilly was caught in a fresh scandal after an investigation revealed a pattern of verbatim plagiarism.

Emmanuel cuts ties with Nathan Cofnas

APRIL

SU Women's and Welfare Officers resign

Suella Braverman visits encampments

RUYYING YANG

The former Home Secretary, accompanied by GB News, attempted to speak to student activists and onlookers at the King's and Senate House camps, but all refused.



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Cambridge's hidden costs

ELLA HOWARD

Students across the University are paying hundreds of pounds a term towards “unclear and confusing” charges in their college bills.

A *Varsity* investigation has revealed the extent of these charges at different colleges. The most common was the Facilities Charge, with the Kitchen Fixed Charge (KFC), Minimum Meal Charge, and Establishment Charge also being included in *Varsity*'s Freedom of Information statistics.

The KFC is, according to Fitzwilliam College, a “contribution to the overhead costs of the College catering operation”. At Fitzwilliam, this is calculated at £369 per year. This is similar to Newnham, which requires students to pay a KFC of £387 if they do not wish to use the college's pre-pay food plan.

Lucy Cavendish describes their Facilities Charge as necessary to “cover IT support,” the “use of library facilities,” and “to help support the provision of College Catering”.

This charge can range significantly, from £138 a year at Lucy Cav, to £101 a term at Girton.

Many colleges also include a Minimum Dining Requirement (MDR) in termly bills, where students must pre-pay for their meals at the start of term.

At Gonville & Caius, this charge amounts to £589.68 a year, compared to £300 at Fitzwilliam

and £155 at St Edmund's.

One Newnham student told *Varsity* they were “not aware of how much I would be spending at the buttry, and I have ended up using the kitchen less than I thought, and yet I still am expected to pay the KFC”. The student has been unable to change this in between terms and is now “being charged for something (they) do not use”. The student criticised the College for making students “estimate something we couldn't predict and now I am losing money because of it every term”.

Caius also demands a termly Establishment Charge of £786.51, said to be a “contribution to the cost of non-academic facilities” that are “free at the point of use” to students.

Certain colleges include other hidden charges for students, such as for laundry, which is £2.20 a week at Fitzwilliam and £22.69 annually at Girton.

Yet another additional charge at Fitzwilliam is the annual £5 travel fund, used to help students that may require a taxi in an emergency.

Both Downing and Fitzwilliam require students to pay to be members of their alumni societies, either in a one-off payment of £36 or £8 per term respectively.

However, Downing will not continue this charge next year, matching a growing trend of colleges abandoning their hidden costs. For example, Jesus, Peterhouse, and Christ's all scrapped their KFCs in the past five years.

Students welcome these changes, with one

Christ's student saying they “like that there iare no hidden charges, because it is very predictable what the bill would be each term so you can budget beforehand”.

Sarah Anderson, president-elect of the Student Union and current member of Fitzwilliam College, told *Varsity* about her concerns about the “confusing and unclear” purpose of hidden charges, especially what she described as the “vague” KFCs.

Anderson expressed how colleges “make it difficult to budget for the term as you may have missed one of the charges or be hit with a new one”.

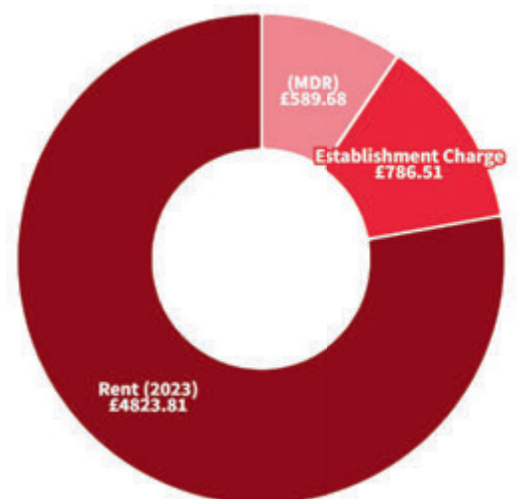
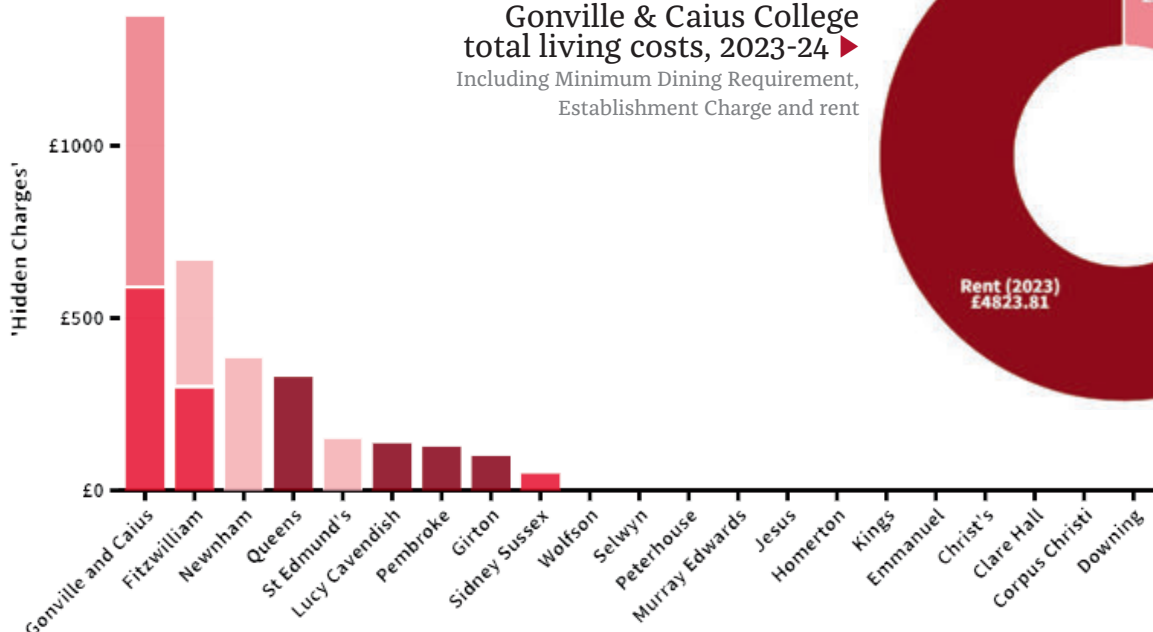
“It would be fairest for colleges to roll all these charges into rent,” as this would allow students to “negotiate better rents with our colleges,” she added.

Anderson acknowledged this would be a “really difficult change to communicate” as “no one wants to be the JCR president who allows rent to appear to increase dramatically”.

A Newnham College spokesperson told *Varsity*: “Until this year the College has operated a mixed model of a Kitchen Fixed Charge and a Buttry Pre-paid Meal Plan. We are ending that model this year, and replacing it with a much more straightforward system of credit whereby any unspent credit is returned to the student.”

Gonville & Caius and Fitwilliam colleges were also contacted for comment.

■ Meal Charges
■ KFC
■ Establishment Charge
■ Facilities Charge



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“We can see a better world and a better University”: Cambridge’s protesters on being seen and heard

MAKING ART FROM ACTIVISM

Alice Mainwood

Flags, placards, 200 students marching down King’s Parade, drums, fake blood. Smashed windows are countered by Gothic architecture splattered with brightly coloured paint. Protest is inevitably constant in Cambridge. Activist groups in Cambridge are increasing in number, activity, and energy, as the student body becomes progressively more engaged with the link between Cambridge and international crises.

Amnesty International stage an annual protest on the green outside King’s College, seeing a member of the society entrap themselves in a wooden cage, intended to symbolise the plight of different groups suffering under oppressive regimes globally. One who was involved speaks to me about how staging a protest so vehemently engaged with visual performance requires a certain commitment to engaging with University bureaucracy. They tell me how members of the society devoted themselves to constructing the cage, seeking permission from King’s College to access the lawn for the protest, and a plethora of other “institutional barriers”.

The cage protest is an enduring concept; the visual performance involved, and the attention



▲ FELIX ARMSTRONG

it attracts, have proven to generate the society much media attention. Whether or not to co-ordinate the protest for another year was never in question for the society, rather the very people the protest would be in favour of.

“We contacted the Sudanese society, and a few Sudanese students we knew, and they were pleased for us to take on this project. It felt really important to shed light on the Sudanese [refugee] crisis as it seems to be slipping through the mainstream cracks,” they tell me.

The cage alone, however, is not always enough to attract the attention of passers by. They recount how they and their fellow protesters had to pair the visual aspect of their claim with “frantic claims” for the attention of passers by. They likewise tell me about the plights of the English rain, the demands of shift-work for such protests, and the constant need to re-explain these humanitarian crises to

potential signatories.

These frantic claims and ambivalent passers-by linger in my mind. I had previously wondered what was motivating the shift towards more visual-oriented protests that Cambridge

has borne witness to over the last few years, but their recollections affirmed that protest has been forced to become art simply to stand out. It makes sense; in my two years at Cambridge, I cannot remember many times I have walked down an entirely uninterrupted King’s Parade. For better or for worse, a march often doesn’t attract the same attention from the public as it might have done five years ago. Protests are having to undergo a process of

performance.

I spoke to Chiara Sarti, the King’s student who, last October, splattered the outside of the College with orange paint in the name of Just Stop Oil. Chiara doesn’t call what she did

a protest, rather finding a more fitting term in calling it an act of civil disobedience. When I asked why she thought we were starting to see this growing intersection between activism and art, she told me that it’s because protesters feel the need to visually transform the institutions that they demand changes from, tarnishing an otherwise esteemed piece of architecture into something damaged, or spoiled. “It’s a place a lot of us can connect to. Most of us have sat and eaten lunch on those walls,” Chiara says.

Visual protest makes it possible to “create an emotional connection” with the places we know, combining that sentimentality with students’ demands for the institutions they criticise. Similar protests performed outside Trinity College, on Cambridge’s West Site, and outside Cambridge Labour’s head offices by activist group This Is Not A Drill seem to reflect the same values.

Chiara was arrested for this act. There’s a growing tendency for visual protest – that which damages the physical holdings of the institutions that are protested against – to entwine itself with breaking the law. Chiara was not surprised when she was arrested; she tells me about the hours she spent training for the likely response that this sort of visual protest would attract. The act of civil disobedience not only provoked action from the police, but

“Protests are having to undergo a process of performance”



▲FELIX ARMSTRONG

also attracted huge media attention. Chiara admitted she couldn't count how many times she'd been named in the *Daily Mail* since last December.

That is the point, though, she explains. We talk about how keen major media outlets can be to put a picture of King's College on the front page; Cambridge is, after all, an unusual hybrid between tradition and modernity. Cover a college in orange paint, and a mass of media attention is sure to follow. Visual protest equals visual content, and Chiara and her peers are all too aware of the need to bombard the public with striking visuals in order to encourage engagement and action.

The attention that an act of protest outside King's College can attract is a tool that many have utilised over the last year – from Amnesty International to Just Stop Oil, and most recently Cambridge For Palestine's encampment de-

manding the University to disclose and divest from investments in companies supplying the Israeli military.

Any time I have walked down King's Parade in the last week, I have been struck by how the encampment has changed, even if only slightly, whenever I pass by. A plethora of banners, hung from the walls of King's College, are accompanied by kites illustrated with poems by Palestinian authors, and cardboard signs trailing the walls, each painted with white, red, and green mantras and chants. A media spokesperson told me that, despite how artwork is coming to life alongside the encampment, and how the lawn has become a living space for protesters, artwork is not being utilised to create a sense of home. "We're not doing this to have fun," he tells me. They are instead trying to catch the attention of passers-by, spotlighting Palestinian art.

I was reminded of another walk I'd taken down King's Parade last September. Turning the corner from Market Square, I was met by a dystopian image: a parade of protesters dressed from head to toe in red cloaks, faces painted white, walking in a solemn procession past Senate House. They were flanked by protesters holding signs far bigger than themselves, and a number of other protesters lying calmly on the ground.

One participant in this protest told me how aware he was of protesters' reputation for being "full of doom and gloom," and how he had leant into this perspective in order to highlight their feelings of negativity towards the world as it currently is. He went on to tell me about a protest he took part in where he and other representatives of Cambridge Climate Justice sang and danced to a parodic rendition of ABBA's 'Money, Money Money' to protest the University's delayed action on climate change. The breadth of his action shocked me; just within the space of three months he had taken part

in both one of the gloomiest, and one of the most joyous embodiments of protest we've seen in Cambridge this past year. Recollecting his experience in the flashmob, the student told me that he and his fellow protesters wanted to create a vision of a happier society, free from the bureaucracy that fumbles and mitigates positive climate action. "We can see a better world and a better University," he professes.



▲HANNAH MAWARDI

No matter how each activist uses art, they each hold closely to one single sentiment: Cambridge's protests are becoming increasingly reliant on variation, on visually eye-catching movements, and on finding a voice in the space between activism and art.





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Illustration by Richard Briggs

SOPHIE DENNY

It may be because I've grown up seeing him on television, but there is an instant feeling of familiarity when Stephen Fry joins the Zoom call, immediately greeting me with a cheery, "Hello there!". In the background there is, as you might expect, a wall of bookcases filled to the brim alongside a big television – I can't help but think this perfectly sums up Fry's diverse career, being at once an actor, comedian, broadcaster, narrator, director, and writer. We exchange the typical British pleasantries about the weather, with Fry noting how "everybody's lifted by the sun," before we dive into his time at Cambridge.

Fry was certainly unique among his cohort, having spent a few months in prison after he "stole some credit cards and went ape, at the age of 17, around the country". In fact, he was still on probation when he started his degree. The professors "had no idea because it's not a question they ask," he chuckles. "I hadn't lied, I'd just simply withheld a particular truth." He remembers going up to one of his tutors at the end of his first year and saying: "I'm very happy today, Dr. Holland, because today I'm off probation."

This was met with a startled response when his Tutor discovered that he did not in fact mean some sort of academic probation, but "actual, genuine, judicial probation". Following his time in prison, having "flunked everything" and been "expelled from a number of schools," Fry was admitted to a college in Norwich to complete his A-Levels, where he then paid to sit the Cambridge entrance exam. Despite his unconventional route here, with prison being "quite violent and unpleasant," it

“I hadn't lied, I'd just simply withheld a certain truth

Stephen

The Cambridge alumnus in prison, performing and in

did stand him in good stead for having to fend for himself upon arrival: "All the issues that might have struck a young person arriving in a place like me for the first time were nothing to me; it was a breeze if you like."

He quickly adds that he did feel the inevitable Impost-

er Syndrome all students experience at some point during their degree. There are "real issues with competence and happiness and mental health at Cambridge," with many undergraduates finding it "a fearsome place" when they first arrive, he reflects. To him, it initially

EMILY LAWSON-TODD

Fry

discusses imperfection

seemed that “everybody I bumped into could speak six languages, and had read every Russian novel and every German poet, and that I would be exposed as an ignoramus and Philistine and a barbarian, and unworthy of the sacred cloisters and courts”. This feeling soon faded as he realised that “it’s very exciting to be with smart people smarter than you,” as this only helps you to improve. “They didn’t

make me feel a fool, but they made me feel that I had a long way to go,” he tells me, referencing his friend Christopher Hitchens, who said that “the definition of education is to discover the limits of your knowledge. An

educated mind knows how much it doesn’t know”. Although one should never “believe oneself unworthy,” he thinks that it is necessary to know your imperfections. For Fry, a true university education is not about believing “one’s got to the shining golden hill of knowledge and enlightenment,” but understanding that there are limits to your knowledge and education. “To learn how stupid you are is one of the great passageways into education and understanding,” he says: “I know how stupid I am in all kinds of areas.”

It only takes Fry five minutes to mention Oscar Wilde, quoting a letter he wrote to Lord Alfred Douglas to further explain his ideas about what “a good university education is”.

ideas” – something he believes is facilitated by the plethora of extra-curricular opportunities in Cambridge which “contribute enormously to one’s sense of understanding the world”. He remembers how “there was absolutely no compunction to work,” instead

throwing himself into drama: “I think I did nine plays in my second term.” Telling me that “you’d just shove a note into your supervisor’s pigeonhole saying, ‘Oh, unfortunately I’ve been thinking very hard about Edmund Spenser, but I haven’t yet got an essay,’” his time at Cambridge was filled with running to and from rehearsals. Fry had received a scholarship to study English Literature at Queens’ College, and so there was a certain amount of expectation for him “to do well and get a first and stay on and research, but it soon became pretty clear that was not my ambition”. Although he toyed with the idea of becoming an academic, “getting rooms in a cloister somewhere and gladly brewing tweed and giving supervisions and writing little pamphlets and then books on Shakespeare,” ultimately, “I knew it wasn’t me”.

Comedy and performance were Fry’s passions; growing up, he was “an absolutely fanatic fan of comedy,” buying records of various comedians rather than popular bands. At Cambridge, he began to pursue his enthusiasm for entertaining, spending his first two years doing lots of theatre alongside his close friend Emma Thompson. “I just went insane,” he says: “I just fell in love with it completely and went to every audition.” It was Thompson who encouraged him to join the Footlights in their third year, introducing him to the president: Hugh Laurie. Fry remembers how “she took me around to Hugh’s rooms in Selwyn and we just fell in love. Not in a homoerotic way, but in a sort of bromance, work way and in a comedy way”. Imitating Laurie, he recounts their first interaction, which entailed him helping Laurie finish writing a song: “We just simply fell into it. And we carried on like that for the rest of our year.” That summer of 1981, he and the Footlights went to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and won – against all expectations – the inaugural Perrier Comedy Award, being presented with it by none other than Rowan Atkinson. He impersonates Atkinson while describing the moment “the cheering went insane” when he stepped onstage behind them. As a result, they got the opportunity to tour around Australia, with the BBC putting their show on television: “This is really a story of outrageous luck that would make people want to punch us in the face because it just seemed to fall into our laps,

I can’t deny it.”

Reflecting on the Footlights’ success, Fry attributes this to their innovation, believing they “touched the right nerves”. Unlike the previous year, which had “been full of tap dancing and show tunes,” they stuck to simple sketches. It was “kind of like 50s jazz,” he explains, suspecting that people “liked the atmosphere of it”. They experimented with a humour that wasn’t widely popular at the time, incorporating lots of verbal comedy into their sketches: “I can’t help it, but I just run away with language because I love it so much. And I love playing with it.” For their audiences, the Footlights’ innovation “was a bit like being tickled in a place that hadn’t been tickled for some time,” he says. “One of the things that you need to offer when you’re starting out in comedy is to find a new place to tickle people.”

This need for novelty is reflected in Fry’s own lifelong thirst for knowledge, appearing on University Challenge while at Cambridge and later presenting the BBC’s *QI* for 13 years. He likens himself to Autolycus from *The Winter’s Tale*, “who was a snapper up of unconsidered trifles,” attributing this love of learning to “seeking attention as a child” and being “so hopeless at all the things that I wished I was good at,” including sport and music. “I was all prepared to believe that I was just a dunce and hopeless, but I discovered that I had this facility for language,” he tells me. This discovery led to him spending his evenings in the dormitories at school reading and telling stories, giving

him “a security amongst the other boys”.

“They forgave me for the fact that I couldn’t catch a ball” and that “I sang flat in hymns,” Fry explains. Accumulating knowledge allows him to express “a sort of competitiveness that I can’t express on the sports field, so I express in the arena of fact.”

Throughout our conversation, Fry’s fondness for his university days has been clear, sending “love to Cambridge” as we draw

to a close. While other moments of your life “disappear in the rear-view mirror,” becoming smaller as time wears on, “actually a place like Cambridge never really becomes small because there’s so much packed into those three years.” The significance of his time here is such that our discussion never truly strays away from it, much as with Fry himself, who has a house in Norfolk only half an hour away from the city. “Maybe you’ll see me striding along,” he tells me; “I sometimes go into Heffers and pile up on books, or into the University Library.” With this casual remark, our conversation ends in that same familiar tone with which it started: “I’ll see you anyway. Nice to have chatted.”

“This is a story of outrageous luck that would make people want to punch us in the face

What was the SU's Women's Handbook?

The rise and fall of the SU's discontinued guide to being a female student in Cambridge

“D HEIDI ATKINS

id you know there used to be a *Women's Handbook*? I've been asking all of my friends this for the last few months, and everyone has said no. I'd heard about it during an interview, and been told it was a book the Students' Union (SU) used to publish annually to help women when they came to Cambridge. It would get stuck in every woman's pidge on her first day here. But online, there is no record. I expected a few funny cartoons and some writing on supervisors that perhaps ran for half a decade at most. But *The Women's Handbook* I found was enormous, decidedly political, and it ran for over two decades. So, what happened to it?

My search started in an SU stockroom. I'd scoured iDiscover to little avail: a reference entry in Peterhouse, one copy in Murry Edwards, a couple in the UL I could order from their Ely warehouse. A filing cabinet seemed promising, but the draw marked 'W' held only dusty bottles of Sainsbury's own wine. I hit a treasure trove of old SU zines hidden behind one of the posters I'd seen at the Freshers' Fairs. There were far more documents than I expected: a monthly magazine dedicated to helping FTM people feel comfortable in their transition dated back to 2006; copies of *No Definition* from 2009 gave voices to queer people; 'The little red book' had blue, green, and black siblings, some with advice on sexual health, and safe drug use.

The SU store room, borderline falling apart, was rich with political history the SU had funded. Politics that was student-led and actively worked to assist and orient students during their time here, was now hidden under a stack of posters. Pages and pages of evidence of a discursive political atmosphere that had been present in Cambridge for decades; now, entirely alien to me. But still no *Women's Handbook*.

I did find though, *A Women's Guide to Cambridge*, written in 1983 by Dr. Sue Oosthuizen

“She worries about my generation, fearing we're not engaged enough with activism

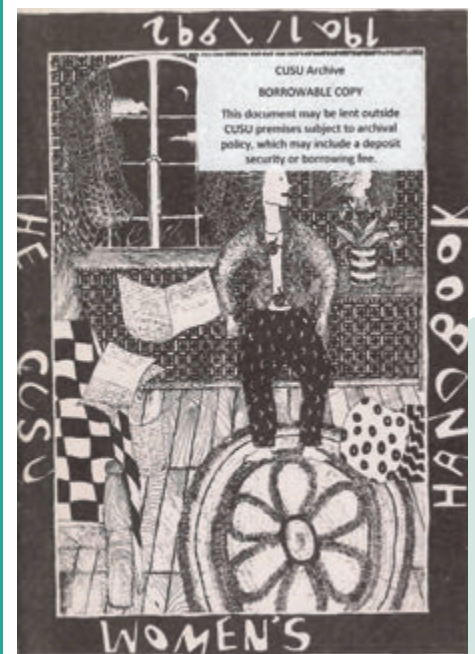


while she studied at Darwin. This was not the handbook I was hunting for, but it was something. A *Women's Guide* is a historical account of women in Cambridge, it takes you on a walk through the town, and tells you the stories of the women who have lived here. Sue told me it took her hours of research, the actual printing done on a long-dead socialist printer on Mill Road. "It was about situating yourself in a political context as a woman." She worries about my generation, fearing we're not engaged enough with activism. A *Women's Guide* foregrounds our existence here; it evidences the long road we've travelled.

Eventually, I got my hands on the copies of the *Women's Handbook*. They'd been moved out of the stockroom by recently resigned SU Women's Officer Rosie Freeman, and sat in boxes next to her desk along with piles of old Women's Campaign work.

A hand-drawn 'Hello!' is a reader's introduction to the first ever *Women's Handbook*, produced by Helen Fox and Maggie Hammond in 1987. "This is the first ever Cambridge Women's

Handbook produced for and by women (and may there be many more)," the pair wrote. These editions were produced in collaboration between Anglia Ruskin and Cambridge University. The aim, as the *Handbook* recounts, was "to work together on issues that affect us all". Coming together seems to be the governing principle





for these early editions, with academics and students producing the book together. Dr Lisa Jardine, Jesus College's first female fellow, wrote an article called 'Problems with Studying in a Male Dominated Environment'. Her main piece of advice is that female academics will have your back: "Go to a friendly senior member [...] she can, and almost certainly always will help". There seemed to be a different culture of female solidarity then.

The Handbook records articles written by a variety of academics. "Everything that we were doing on contraception and sexual health, many people just didn't know," Liz Stanley, the editor of the publication from 1990 to 1992, told me. "What we were trying to do on that practical level was to get over the barrier for women getting this information. *The Handbook* would be in your pigeon hole on your first day, so if you needed it, it was there."

But *The Handbooks* were not just spaces for advice. National campaigns stemming from NUS conferences turned *The Handbook* into a space to not only educate, but also advocate for political action. For Liz, the publication was a "recognition that we are marginalised, and the culture of this University can be really hostile; it was about collective action". She told me about the national campaign to get pornography banned from WHSmith: "The NUS' direct action plan told us to go into Smiths, take some porn mags off the shelf and demand we speak to a manager," Liz recalled, "but honestly, I think most of us were too anxious to do that. Instead, we went in as a collective." A photo from a 1991 edition of *The Cambridge Evening Press* shows Liz handing over the petition to remove porn from WHSmith. She still remembers being told

to "smile" for the picture by the male photographer. Thankfully, she didn't.

When I remarked about how different feminism in Cambridge seems to be now, Liz warned me about the dangers of putting the past on a pedestal: "Before you get too rosy a view of it, there were a lot of women who hated us. I remember one woman saying that we were just not getting enough sex. A lot of people thought that; we were not massively popular." She was keen to remind me, as was Sue Oosthuizen, that the women who worked on the projects are not so different from myself.

Through the 90s, the publication retained its discursive politics and featured a section of literary writing on Feminist issues. Eventually, this was taken out of *The Handbook* and put into a separate publication, *Gender Agenda*. The politics of early editions waned in the 2000s as JP Morgan sponsorships lined the footer of the pages; the last edition in the SU archives is from 2009 to 2010 and it was full of notes from that year's Women's Officer, one reading "TOO MUCH! Should be online".

College student unions slowly disaffiliated from the SU, and with them went their funding. CUSU had been reliant on money from colleges to print *The Women's Handbook*: in 1987, Sian Griffiths spoke to *Varsity* about *The Handbook*'s struggles with money: "We'll still have to rely on getting a lot of money from colleges." We don't receive a *Women's Handbook* any longer, and there is no concrete record of its demise, but it seems the publication fell victim to death by a thousand papercuts.

Back in the SU offices, I tried to see if Rosie knew anything concrete, but I left empty handed. This was not

a documented death. I told Rosie what I'd found out about *The Handbook*, about the marches and petitions, as well as the direct action and policy changes that went along with it. We were both left upset about what Feminism has become today: "We need a Feminist renaissance. We need people who aren't afraid," she said.



But Rosie didn't seem afraid. In her time as Women's Officer, she was active in getting publications up and running and she helped porters get trained in spiking prevention at Caius. Compared to what Liz Stanley told me was "a team of officers, one from every college" with funding coming from the colleges themselves, the Women's Campaign is a shell of its former self with only a small number of officers, the majority of whom are co-opted in.

"I am the last Women's Officer left," Rosie told me. The National Union of Students have got rid of the position of a full-time Women's Officer, a position the editors of the first ever *Handbook* stoically campaigned for in the '87 edition. "Women's Officers are now part-time roles," she said, "it's all been integrated into an Equality and Liberation Officer. You don't necessarily have to integrate as much liberation work into your Student Union if it is just one person; it's quite easy to ignore one person."

I can't tell you exactly what killed *The Women's Handbook*, or where the political organisation of the women I spoke to went. The last mention of the Women's Handbook on the CUSU website is from 2012, even here only mentioning "events for 2008-2009". While there is nothing concrete about the death of the publication, it is one which reflects the culture of apathy that now surrounds student politics. If you mention the SU to anyone now, they will probably tell you that it does nothing. But it used to do a lot; there used to be a lot of people who turned up to help create it. There used to be a *Women's Handbook*.

“We need a Feminist renaissance; we need people who aren't afraid



Stories from a Stormzy scholar

The scheme's first ever recipient discusses breaking barriers and meeting the man

JUDE CRAWLEY

Cambridge is home to many secret societies, most of them drinking clubs occupied by curtain-donning men called Hugo, admitted on the basis of the school badge that sits on their LinkedIn profile. One, more exclusive than the rest, meets once a year in a marquee with Stormzy. These students are gathered not because of their school, but through their successful applications to one of the most famous scholarships in the world. This is the group of past and present Stormzy scholars.

The Stormzy scholarship financially supports a group of black and mixed heritage Cambridge students throughout their university journeys. When the scheme started in 2018, there were only two scholarships awarded by Stormzy's charitable organisation, the #Merky Foundation.

Soon Stormzy funded another ten. In July 2023, HSBC pledged a further £2 million, allowing the scheme to be expanded to 22 places this coming year.

One of the first two students to receive the scholarship in 2019 was Joseph Vambe.

Having had the offer hanging over him since January, he confessed that A-Level results day was "not even a celebration," but "just relief". Receiving the grades he needed in his Politics, Economics, and Religious Studies A-Levels to meet his UCAS offer, Joseph was granted a place to study HSPS at King's College, Cambridge.

Overjoyed, his Politics teacher approached him with an idea that would change his life: "I don't know if you've heard, but there's this Stormzy scholarship for black kids that have been accepted into Cambridge - I think you should apply."

Telling me about getting the phone call that followed, which confirmed that he had just become one of the first ever Stormzy scholars, "I just started jumping on my bed like a little kid," he recalls.

Being awarded the scholarship helped to chase away feelings of Imposter Syndrome in his early days at Cambridge. Describing arriving at the University, Joseph suddenly felt as though he was "hit with all these talented people," all seeming like they knew each other: "You just know you are surrounded by the best of the best."

For Joseph,

the scholarship was more than just the financial benefit - "it was that kind of self confidence of 'no, you're supposed to be here'."

Today, Joseph is a Labour Councillor for Southwark Council in London, alongside working for various charities such as global poverty organisation Christian Aid. The opportunity to stand for local election came along while he was completing his Master's in Politics, which he started immediately after completing his undergraduate degree. "I always knew, coming to Cambridge, that the route I wanted to get involved in was politics."

Despite feeling pressure to join The Union, Cambridge University Labour Club or

King's Politics, Joseph was far more interested in playing college football. This provided him with some of his fondest memories of his time as an undergrad: "Our football matches against John's were some of the most toxic, aggressive football matches I have ever been a part of."

The connection between the scholars and Stormzy is more than just financial. Once a year, Stormzy comes to visit Cambridge to meet the students. Each time, the initial nerves quickly subside, and friendly chat commences. "He honestly just wants to know about your story of coming to Cambridge," Joseph says. "He has an innate passion for education, because he loves English."

Yet Stormzy's impact has reached far beyond just the foundation's scholars: the so-called 'Stormzy effect' has seen Cambridge applications from Black students increase by 131% since the scheme was set up.

Having met Stormzy a series of times, Joseph says he's got to know the artist fairly well. "If we were walking on the street in a random location, he wouldn't walk past me without saying 'Oh Joseph, how you doing?', which

is amazing."

To avoid unwanted attention, the Stormzy scholars are told to be discrete during their time at Cambridge, so Joseph cautiously waited a few months before telling his close university friends about being a recipient of the foundation's funding.

This subtlety even extends to the name of the group chat, which includes all current and former participants on the programme. "We have an anonymous group - it's not named Stormzy scholars," Joseph chuckles.

Stormzy's visits to Cambridge to meet the scholars are similarly kept strictly under wraps. His drop-ins are arranged solely through the University and the relevant colleges, only noticed by the rare observant student. Joseph tells me how, on one occasion when the get-together was held in Trinity, "students were just walking past [him]".

By 2026, there will be 81 Stormzy scholars, with the next round of applicants set to be confirmed this August. Joseph's message to anyone thinking of applying? "If you have had a hard upbringing or a difficult upbringing, Stormzy is telling you, 'I'm going to look after you so you can focus on your studies.'"

“We have an anonymous group – it’s not named Stormzy scholars”



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SCAN ME

Is co-ed the answer?

Do 'women's colleges' have a place in the 21st century? **Matthew Taylor** speaks to those who have been shaped by all-female learning environments

As the second quarter of the 21st century approaches, are so-called women's colleges a remnant of an educational atmosphere which no longer exists, or do they offer something unique that ought to be protected?

The history of women's education at Cambridge is riddled with superlatives. Some depict the University as radical – Girton, for example, was the first residential higher education college for women in Britain, opening in 1869. Others portray a real resistance to the cause and an affinity for tradition – the University was the last in the UK to offer full degrees to women. Since 2008, all Oxford colleges have admitted women, leaving Cambridge as the only higher education institution that has clung to its women's spaces. This begs the question: is the survival of Newnham and Murray Edwards in their single-sex form the result of traditional sentiment waiting to be overturned, or of a radical reinterpretation of their importance in the modern day one would only expect to find at Cambridge?

In 2009, *Varsity* published a defence of women's colleges a year after St Hilda's College, Oxford moved to co-education in 2008. The College essentially had its hand forced as University funding required staff appointments to be open to both sexes. Cantabrigians sought to protect their women's colleges from a similar fate. This article argues that the importance of women's colleges is establishing a culture which "is curious about women," and which "allow[s] that curiosity to form the basis for research and

analysis".

This point holds today, but it is not as if the defenders of women's colleges have not had to face new challenges. In 2021, Lucy Cavendish became mixed-gender. Luke, Lucy Cavendish's JCR President in 2022, called this the "next step" in the "founding vision of the college".

Lucy Cavendish's mission had never been about women in particular but rather providing opportunities to those from under-represented backgrounds and as such this move makes sense. The reality is, now that just as many women populate the student body as men, many feel that the presence of Newnham and Murray Edwards lets colleges like Trinity off the hook when it so disproportionately accepts the latter.

The reality is, now that just as many women populate the student body as men, many feel that the presence of Newnham and Murray Edwards lets colleges like Trinity off the hook when it so disproportionately accepts the latter.

Speaking to students at mixed colleges with experiences of an all-girls secondary education, I have been told of a sense of relief to discover they had not been pooled to Newnham or Murray Edwards. Many people do choose to make these colleges their first choice, a particularly important option for those from certain religious communities, but the pooled experience is that of many – in 2023, only 34% of Murray Edwards offers went to students who had applied di-

rectly to the college, but more than half of these individuals had also made an open application.

Ultimately, these students who described this sense of relief tend to think the value of the option outweighs the costs that come with being pooled to a women's college against one's personal preference. And so, though it is often put forward as such, this doesn't seem to be the strongest case against them.

Matthew Taylor

When I told my home friends I was applying not just to Cambridge, but to a women's (and other genders') college, they pretty much all had one response: calling me a hopeless lesbian. In all honesty, that wasn't a huge factor in my decision (not insignificant, admittedly, but it wasn't my sole reason). However, since coming to college, the sense of queer community created by a 'women's' college like Newnham has been one of the best things about my uni experience. It's something that I feel so lucky to be a part of, has really widened my idea of what queerness looks like, means you rarely have to explain yourself or your identity, and is something the likes of which I know I'll never

experience anything like again. That being said, I believe there's a desire from Newnham staff for the college not to be seen (and certainly not marketed as) a queer college – understandable, since there are also lots of non-queer students, and other reasons for coming to Newnham. Additionally, the title of 'women's' college seems like it might need re-examining, given the large population of trans/non-binary students in college, though I absolutely don't think going co-ed is the solution.

Molly Scales



Having been at an all-girls school for seven years I was certain I wanted a change, so receiving an offer from Newnham was bittersweet for me. The gender aspect really discouraged me and I seriously considered going to my insurance university instead. It seems so silly to me now that I even considered colleges' gender policies as a factor, and I would encourage anyone to accept a Newnham offer regardless; being at uni makes it so easy to make friends of every gender, and so it is not a barrier to socialising

in mixed groups at all. I do think Newnham has a different feel, as all colleges do to one another, but a very positive one. The college creates a liberal and open environment which is largely a result of the strong role the college played, and still does play, in women's education at Cambridge; a history of which we are very proud. I speak on behalf of many Newnham students in saying I feel very proud to be a Newnham girl.

Poppy Sugden

My college doesn't get a whole lot of direct applicants so like most people I was pooled. Murray Edwards had already had an established Trans and Non-Binary Officer JCR role for a couple of years before I got there and having that role definitely helped to spread acceptance

around college. But I don't think that always helps with feeling comfortable as a trans person if you fundamentally feel that you're in the wrong environment. You can get accepted to an all-women's college as long as you're legally female, and for trans and non-binary people that can be very strange regardless of how accepting the people in that environment are. For trans women it also means that to be accepted into an all-women's college you either must be legally female, or you have to have 'sufficient evidence' that you've been living as a woman, which is vague and can be very subjective. Being a transmasculine person I don't want to speak over women; I do know people in my college who appreciate having an all-female environment, but I think in a time where we're (hopefully) working towards viewing gender as not so binary and sex-based that women's colleges could become a little redundant.

Stevie Harding

After planning to dodge choosing a college with an open application, I quickly changed my mind after realising I could be shipped off to a 'women's college'. Spending seven years in an all-girls' school and deciding it was finally time to make some friends among the rest of society, I ironically ended up (unwittingly) applying to the last Oxbridge college to accept women. Thankfully, Magdalene men no longer display their animosity by donning black armbands and carrying academia in a coffin to its grave (still the most dramatic act of misogyny ever). Yet punters asking tourists "guess when *this* college let women in?" as they glide past every day – cue gawking at female students in their *unnatural* habitat as they're hit with "1988" as the punchline – isn't the only time I'm reminded that any guarantee that women will receive the same quality of education as men is far too recent, and still not universally accepted. The College's history still makes itself felt, traceable in the sexism behind spiteful Magdfess comments, horror

Fourteen years spent surrounded exclusively by women from 8am to 3pm, 5 days a week, teaches you many things and affords you many graces. Until I was 18, I'd never been the only woman in a room, nor had I ever had to think about speaking louder to be heard, or toning down any aspect of my Feminism to be tolerated by uncomfortable men. I learnt how to count and use a semicolon at the same time as learning to speak confidently. I didn't have to learn what it really meant to be a girl in education, because I was simply learning. Majority-female institutions are not representative of the real world. But one of the main reasons for that is because they remove some of the systematic forces that constrain girls and women, and allow a freer, more genuine learning experience. I spent the most formative years of my childhood surrounded by women who inspired me and loved education, and it is those women, and the educational spaces that fostered that environment, that gave me much of the confidence I tackled moving to university with. That being said, that enduring confidence and comfort is not natural, and while I loved the atmosphere it nurtured, I knew that when choosing a college, another three years in single-sex educational institutions wasn't going to be right for me. I'm glad I attend a mixed-sex college now, but I wouldn't change my childhood spent learning, growing, and maturing around women for anything.

Alice Mainwood

stories casually shared between friends, petty society politics and the lack of female alumni (ensuring our netball team, one of Magdalene's highest performing, suffers from receiving far fewer donations than their male counterparts). Not only do girls in single-sex schools perform better in exams, take more risks, become better leaders and access better careers, but being immersed in an environment in which my right to pursue higher education was never questioned, only emphatically encouraged, is something I certainly took for granted. Even if expressions of overt misogyny now predominantly occur anonymously, the alarmingly recent memory of Magdalene students' resistance to accepting women, and the remnants of such attitudes still lurking around academia today, are powerful reminders that carving out spaces just for women to live, socialise and, most importantly, learn must still remain an option. While I'm relieved I didn't end up at Newnham or Medwards, I'm even more relieved that they still exist for those who wish to choose them.

Grace Cobb



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Ballcrashing 101

Breaking into May Balls, according to the *Varsity* archives

ALEX MYALL

Earlier this term, Homerton's May Ball Committee warned guests of the dire consequences of gate-crashing, in a tone so stern that it verges on ridiculousness (anyone caught will seemingly be sent to the International Criminal Court in The Hague). This intrepid archivist feels the need to provide the students of Cambridge with some top tips for illicit May Ball entrance, drawn from the experience of past crashers.

A bow-tied reveller wishing to go to every May Week event in 1964 would have been set back 109 pounds and 8 shillings. This sounds good, affording you access to 12 May Balls, 15 concerts, three revues and two operas. Although the inflation-adjusted figure stands at something more like £2260 today.

In June 1964, *Varsity* recommends that, to look better than the other "chaps" at your May Ball, you must equip yourself with a starched collar, a self-tied bow tie, and well-polished shoes. Additionally, a man and woman duo is heavily recommended for gate-crashing, so key tools can be carried in a handbag. Rather than taking up valuable space with a smuggled champagne glass, this issue urges you to pack pliers, crowbar, wire cutters, a master key, lock picks, and a torch.

Once inside the gates, you must take pains to enamour yourself with your fellow ball-goers, else you be spotted as an outsider. Even if you are rumbled, you must be able to count on your new-found friends to rally round you. So, this issue writes, you must be ready to serve your pals for the night with a lighter and a corkscrew. The 1964 edition also recommends picking up a discarded invitation from the ground and using it to get a program. The tell-tale clues of a gatecrasher which this guide urges you to avoid include bringing a coat, giving your real name or college, and running away if a "servant" or porter appears.

More recently, *Varsity* has found some students to waltz into balls without a hitch. In 2007, seven ladies simply walked into a Clare may event. Their secret: a friend to hold open the door for them.

In one of June 2010's daily *Varsity* editions, a writer offers their top tip for gatecrashing: hiding in a laundry cupboard on the morning of the ball, waiting it out while resisting the urge to nap, and emerging only once the party is well underway. The pro-crashers of 2010 claim that the art of breaking in is "about misdirection, like Derren Brown".

"By aligning tiny principles of behaviour and reaction you can achieve the most unlikely outcomes," they say. I will let the reader come to their own conclusion as to whether stuffing yourself in a cupboard for an afternoon is at one with the illusionist principles of Derren Brown.

Continuing through the archives, I learn of a 2012 Peterhouse student who scaled the walls of Pembroke and tiptoed past sleeping committee members into the ball.

The same year, a Jesus undergrad and successful Robinson gatecrasher offers the following plan of attack: steal a walkie-talkie, buy an earpiece on eBay, berate security

tearing your tux in the crotch region.

Another tried and tested (and failed) method is to claim that you are delivering a last-minute stash of drinks, as one group of girls attempted at John's 2003. This trick was foiled by ingenious guards, who discovered that the box contained three more girls in full ball attire, rather than the promised smoothies.

On a lighter note, 2004's edition comes with a satirical crasher's guide including the

following mantra: "Hide in a portaloos in black tie the night before. Stave off the boredom with a bottle of vodka. You may find yourself having so much fun that you won't bother joining the ball." Another top tip is to leave your wristbands on your wrists for years to come. After all, "in a couple of years the same design is bound to come up".

“Key tools can be carried in a handbag

“The box contained three more girls in full ball attire

guards with porkies of a break-in on the other side of college, and walk right through the main entrance.

If this all seems a little too easy, let me provide you with some tales of caution from early 2000s crashing attempts.

During Robinson May Ball 2005, one unfortunate crasher was "dragged through the ball screaming by misguided security guards putting a dampener on the atmosphere for many."

In 2006, a John's security guard allegedly "threw himself on a girl emerging from the river like he was trying to stop an assassination," reportedly causing minor injury to the crasher. This edition also warns against the pitfalls of jumping from too great a height, or else risk



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U FELIX ARMSTRONG

shering me quickly through Magdalene's dark green dining hall, Simon Stoddart, the College's 'keeper of pictures', pulls at a dull iron handle behind the high table, pulling back a wall panel to reveal a musky stone chamber. This is where the fellows gather to enter formal, he explains, before turning back towards the hall and throwing open the door, exclaiming: "Hall is theatre. Theatre is art." After emailing Stoddart about my project on dining hall art, he insisted we speak in person and, given his effusive passion for this space, I understand why. Given that many like Stoddart take such pride in their dining halls and the figures that hang on them, I want to understand where this passion comes from, and how this theatre is directed.

Upon entering any college's dining hall, I cannot help but take in the menagerie of faces which hang on its walls. Each student must sit eye-to-eye with their predecessors, sharing their meals with a stage-managed history of the college.

I enter Trinity Hall's duckegg dining hall with Alexander Marr, the College's picture steward. He tells me that dining hall art should at once represent "the history of the college" and "speak to current students, fellows, and staff," and the way they perceive their institution. The first point on Marr's to-do list, when he took the role in 2012, was to introduce female faces to an all-male collection. When showing his daughter (then four years old) around his new place of work, she stepped into the dining hall and exclaimed: "Daddy, where are all the mummies?". It's a memory that has stayed with him: "That's one of the reasons it's important to think about who is on the walls." The first portrait of women in the hall has since been introduced, of the College's first two female fellows, Dr Kareen Thorne and Dr Sandra Raban, but more are on the way, Marr says.

The position of female figures in these spaces is an uneasy one. Speaking to two friends at Caius and John's, they report shockingly similar memories of when female Masters' portraits were mounted in their dining halls. The criti-

cisms were apparently because these Masters are still in post, and so breaking an unspoken tradition of fellows only being given a portrait after leaving the College, but are no doubt grounded in gender. "What's this woman doing on the wall with all these old men?" was apparently the sentiment among some at John's.

The aura of the dining halls themselves is a testament to the insistence of many of the people I have spoken to that they represent not just an aesthetic representation of the college's image, but are by-products of a college's storied history and its key players. These portraits, then, appear to drip down from the ceilings, in red and gold, a fact of life here, accumulating slowly like driftwood on the shore of the Cam.

But perhaps not all change is easily captured in a simile. Can we shift the status of dining hall portraits through our reception of them, even if the portraits themselves remain mounted? We shouldn't have to, says Trinity Hall alum and artist Sophie Mei Birkin. "I don't think the onus should be on the viewers to have to change. I think there should be an openness to thinking about what we put on the walls and what that communicates," Birkin believes.

A 17th-century painting of a fowl market was thrown out of Hughes Hall because it was "put-

“All paintings discolour and age; nothing is eternal”

▲ LOKE YUNG WAI, FELLOW, BY ANNA PAIR, 2023, COURTESY OF KING'S COLLEGE



ting vegans off their food," reads a 2019 *Daily Mail* headline. The painting was returned to the Fitzwilliam to show "sensitivity" to students who found the work, 'The Fowl Market', to be



RUYYING YANG ▲

"slightly repulsive". That the *Mail's* anti-woke crusade turned on those asking politely for a painting to be taken down proves that to simply unhang an artwork is seen as tantamount to dismantling the building brick by brick.

Discussing my project with friends, my suspicion is confirmed that art is seen as a permanent part of a dining hall's walls, as fixed and unimpeachable as the wallpaper. To consider the art as something that could be moved around and commented on, as something that was once hung up rather than which just materialised, is seen as odd and rather futile. "There's basically nothing there other than a huge picture of Henry VIII, and we were founded by Henry VII," one friend remarks of her college, Jesus.

Where art at Jesus is viewed as arbitrary, the selection process at my own college, Homerton, is seen to be totally at odds with its students' wishes. There is a legend here that the principal was given the choice between building a swimming pool and buying a new painting, and he chose the painting. "A Florentine Procession" is a grand, metres-long painting depicting dozens of lavishly-dressed worshipers marching from right to left. It now squats behind a thick red curtain in our rarely used old dining hall, which now hosts more silent disco bops than formal dinners.

And if students are ambivalent towards their dining hall art at Jesus, resentful at Homerton, then they are downright aggressive at Downing, at least according to rumour. The many paintings in the College's grand red dining hall, so the story goes, were locked away from the hands and forks of drunken students who couldn't resist flinging scraps of their dinner at the faces of their former masters.

REFRAMING TRADITION

Tracing the uneven pace of modernity through college dining hall art

▼ IMAGES COURTESY OF GONVILLE & CAIUS COLLEGE, KING'S COLLEGE, AND TRINITY HALL



At King's, Nicky Zeeman, the College's keeper of collections describes the collection of paintings she has introduced, mostly of members of the Bloomsbury group: "My two criteria," in introducing this new collection to a space which had been dominated by traditional portraiture, "were paintings that are beautiful and have interest in themselves, but also paintings where the sitter is an interesting person, part of the history of the college or Cambridge more generally". Suddenly, two large, wall-height paintings at either side of the display catch our eye, clearly out of place in this celebration of a recent intellectual history of King's. "We still need to work out what to do with our really big 18th century guys," Zeeman says, waving a mock-exasperated hand.

“Hall is theatre; theatre is art

Later, she takes me to a smaller collection of portraits of current students and fellows of the College, a proud reminder of common sense prevailing over tradition: "Previously there was a rule that there couldn't be any portraits in here that weren't of former members, which by definition meant that they were all guys." As I gesture towards another cluster of older portraits in the corner of the room, Zeeman nods. "In my view, these guys are all placeholders," soon to be replaced by a full collection of contemporary pieces, she says.

Zeeman's awareness of portraits as static moments in time is refreshing. She admits of the collection of Bloomsbury paintings: "What this obviously doesn't do is reflect King's now we're 100 years on." But, this is an improvement on the hall's previous iteration, she says, which "reflected a picture back at ourselves which stopped sometime in 1860". "It's a slow process," she says, but one which is constantly in progress.

In Magdalene, Stoddart takes me through the newer additions to Magdalene's hall, keen to emphasise that these are living spaces: "This is obviously a traditional college, but tradition needs to be reheated. Tradition develops. Tradition is not static, otherwise it dies."

Similarly, Gonville & Caius' art attempts to connect with its identity more meaningfully than just by putting frames around each of its past masters. A large portrait of Stephen Hawking, which noticeably celebrates rather than masks his disability, is centre stage, framed by

stained glass above him on either side. These geometric shapes playfully balance between ecclesiastical tradition and the cutting edge research that Cambridge is known for.

One of Marr's introductions to Trinity Hall was Birkin's *The Willow Will Submerge in Time*,

▲ SIR PROFESSOR STEPHEN HAWKING © PAUL GOPAL-CHOWDHURY, REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE MASTER AND FELLOWS OF GONVILLE AND CAIUS COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE



an abstract piece made entirely from biological materials collected from the Cam. While "portraits are about human achievement," Birkin says, she wanted to take a "radical" approach to reflect a cumulative, multifaceted image of Cambridge. Both Marr and Birkin tell me that the piece was in part inspired by Xu Zhi Mo's 'On Leaving Cambridge', which presents the city as a "changeable" place. Though her own work is particularly likely to degrade over time due to its materials, Birkin emphasises that all

▲ THE WILLOW WILL SUBMERGE IN TIME BY SOPHIE MAY BIRKIN, BY PERMISSION OF THE MASTER AND FELLOWS OF TRINITY HALL, CAMBRIDGE



paintings "discolour and age, nothing is eternal, nothing is fixed".

But despite the efforts of art experts like Stoddart and Zeeman, some colleges are moving faster than others. In Corpus Christi, few traditional portraits still hang, as the walls are now filled with photographic portraits of dozens of its female staff and academics. Each of the picture keepers I met are intensely proud of their colleges' traditions, but also intensely eager to add to their chronology. But waiting for tradition to wash away, they seem to acknowledge, can be a lot like watching paint dry.

▲ LYDIA LOPKOVA BY DUNCAN GRANT, 1923, COURTESY OF KING'S COLLEGE



T ALICE MAINWOOD

he offices of the Master of Gonville & Caius College are nestled between the college chapel, Senate House, and the boxy supervision room where I was first introduced to Kantian philosophy. Concealed behind the College's ominously aged dark-wood architecture, and within the silence that has descended on the three courts for Easter term, her offices neatly symbolise the fusion between the College's traditionalism and age, and the requirement for it to remain active and agile.

Professor Pippa Rogerson shuffles a few pages around on her desk, moves an emptied coffee mug that reads "Isle of Wight" to the shelves behind her, and quickly familiarises herself with the post-it notes stuck around her monitor screen. I'd left my own desk in a very similar state. As my eyes skip across her mantelpiece, I find photographs of her five daughters next to one from her own Matriculation, sat beside a menu from a formal at Clare Hall last week. She chooses which of her to-do lists might be the most up to date, before settling behind her desk for our photographer to take her portrait. Pippa recently announced her decision to retire at the end of the next academic year, and I couldn't help but wonder if she was going to miss this quiet, everyday sort of chaos.

Upon her appointment as Master of the College in 2018, Pippa inherited a college as it turned 668 years old, one with an enduring ethos. "Education, religion, learning and research," she tells me, "that's what we do". The College's mission is unchanged in spite of an ever-changing climate. "I see myself as supportive of that," Pippa says. "It's been, in a very clichéd way, an honour and a privilege, to have some years supporting, facilitating, and guiding the college" as it undertakes the challenge of pulling its age-old mission into a new era, defined by a pandemic whose trace we can't quite shake, and a discourse around freedom of expression that is only due to get more complex.

When I ask what the highlight of her time as Master has been, she simply tells me that "the highlights are quotidian". "The very immediate and direct access to every new generation of young people," seen in the slightest of moments throughout the year, are what make the job worthwhile. "Matriculation, people coming back in October, that enormous wave of enthusiasm and excitement and curiosity and all those wonderful things, graduation at the end of the year, getting through that gate of honour [leading Caius graduands to Senate House], seeing the pride and success and joy, and yes maybe regret, but the moving forwards, and getting to see that every year. Every year new people, new ideas, new challenges, new opportunities," she says. Sitting still isn't an option for the College, nor is it for any of the other thirty.

These moments of insight, however, are not the day job. Pippa tells me how one of the core

Pippa

aspects of her role is chairing the College's many committees. Her job is to "help the committee arrive at a decision," and in doing so she has found "very very little scope for making decisions oneself". The College is managed "a bit like a democracy"; "you sort of go along with a consensus" based on "whoever is in the room at the time". Committees vote on what the "expression of will of the College" will be. Pippa describes how most of the time, the "will of the College" is rather "an expression of the will of the people who are in the room at the time," and "all one can do is sketch out the options". From this I gather that college bureaucracy has the capacity to bowl over any one individual's aspirations. "The expectations, the hopes, the fears, the external views do not fit with what actually has to happen," Pippa says.

From our conversation, I ascertain that being the Master of a college comes with far less sway than I might have previously imagined. "My personal views are no more important than anyone else's," Pippa posits. The entire College appears to be run by a plethora of committees which Pippa chairs, leading to her very often having to defend decisions that she doesn't personally agree with. "That can be very jarring," she tells me, but is a sacrifice one has to

make in order to secure what the committee in question deems to be "the best interest of the College". "My loadstone is always what I think is in the best interest of the College," she says. That is "not personal or self-interested," but rather must be done "with a sense for the present and the future," for the "very, very different groups" that the College is composed of, and with simple acceptance of the fact that "you can't keep everyone happy all the time". Pippa identifies one of the core skills required to run a college is the capacity to "be pragmatic about it". She confesses that she doesn't particularly like using "battle technology" to describe the job, but that "sometimes you do lose battles" in the hope that "in the longer term, things go in a better direction".

I couldn't help wondering what that direction was. Caius is a College with a long and at times painful history, and one that has faced rather significant scrutiny under Pippa's tenure. There are plenty of things wrong with most of Cambridge's colleges, after all. Pippa tells me how

one of her primary missions was to diversify the fellowship at Caius, and, in turn, how her "greatest disappointment is that [she's] been unable to bring more women into the fellowship. We've actually diversified in a lot of other ways, such as sexuality and race, but we haven't been able to find a lot of women, and that's a matter of some regret."

"We've looked," she admits, almost laughingly, but a distinct gender disparity continues to pervade the College's fellowship.

Over the past two years, the three courts of Gonville & Caius have become almost synonymous with the setting for some of Cambridge's most contentious debates surrounding freedom of speech and expression. I was struck by Pippa's openness when

"It never occurred to me that women couldn't do things"

I asked about events such as ex-fellow Arif Ahmed's invitation to Helen Joyce to speak at the College in 2022. Pippa unwaveringly tells me that she "absolutely upholds freedom of speech," and that when the matter of Helen Joyce speaking in College was discussed, she simply "could not say no". Helen Joyce's history of transphobic hate speech left many College members feeling unhappy and unsafe, and Pippa understands that "members of our own community felt under threat".

She counters by saying that "any student can ask a speaker," and that "it's not a College event merely because it's held in College," but also feels the necessity for protest, and the needs for students to learn "how lawful protest works". As Master of the College, she tells me that "a silent protest would be better," preventing her students from facing legal action against them. My mind slips back to the protests that took place outside the College when Helen Joyce was speaking, and I remembered how valuable noise was to protesters as they attempted to disrupt the speech. I can't help but feel that a desire for "silent protest," while the College Pippa represents fails to hold individuals accountable for which voices they platform, is unfair. Voices must be countered with voices.

Pippa's perspective, however, came from a genuine desire to protect her students from the legal implications of modern-day protest. When questioned about the changing laws around freedom of speech, par-

"The College's mission is unchanged in spite of an ever-changing climate"

Rogerson

The outgoing Master of Gonville & Caius discusses free speech, Feminism, and saying farewell

ticularly those set to come into effect in August that make academic institutions financially liable for any infringements on freedom of speech, Pippa confesses to being “terribly worried about it”. Really, all she feels she can do is wish her successor luck with managing them.

Although an awful lot might have changed in Cambridge since Pippa arrived here in 1980, Cambridge continues to be defined by disparity. As our conversation flits onto the advantages that a modern Cambridge can offer students, she begins to recollect how Cambridge gradually came to admit women. Tales of male Magdalene students wearing black armbands to mourn their College after it voted to admit women in 1988 mingle with stories of horrific racial abuse as recently as 2018.

Cambridge, and Caius, remain a great leap away from being equal. Pippa lauds majority-female settings such as Newnham, where she was an undergraduate, saying it was “always a refuge to go home to,” and the all-female leadership offered all-important “representation”. “Every picture hanging on the wall was of a woman,” she recollects; “it never occurred to me that women couldn’t do things”.

Caius, like most colleges, doesn’t have a history of such acceptance. And, as Pippa summarises, Caius is a college with “a memory and conscience that goes back a long way”. In spite of Cambridge’s universal memory and conscience, I do feel convinced by Pippa’s sentiment that time can heal old wounds.

As I pack up my notes and follow Pippa to her office door, I again fall to wondering about whether she’ll miss this haven of both passion and bureaucracy after her resignation. “Refreshment of everybody is very important,” she had previously told me. And yet, the College’s ethos stands firmly in the face of constantly refreshed staff: “Education, learning, religion and research”.

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Smoking area

QUICK:

ACROSS

- 6 _____ Jackson, US president (6)
 7 Symbol of industry and co-operation (7)
 10 To wed (3,3,4)
 11 Take advantage of a situation (4)
 12 Yvonne _____, former mayor of Birmingham (8)
 14 How a roulade is made (6)
 15 She can fix him (no really she can) (6,5)
 19 10th most populous country (6)
 20 Internal conflict (5,3)
 22 Lively (4)
 23 Tree nuts, say, or shellfish for some (10)
 25 Namesake of New York airport (7)
 26 Former female student (6)

DOWN

- 1 Seat of the US congress (7)
 2 Revise (4)
 3 From Sana'a (6)
 4 Formerly called London Airport (8)
 5 About 5ml at very tops! (10)
 8 Every _____ shall be exalted! (6)
 9 Erroneously (11)
 13 Saturday afternoon of an F1 weekend (10)
 16 Leader of the Ninja Turtles (8)
 17 Angkor Wat, for example (6)
 18 Bern to Switzerland (7)
 21 Macho (6)
 24 Miss Woodhouse, 'handsome, clever and rich' (4)

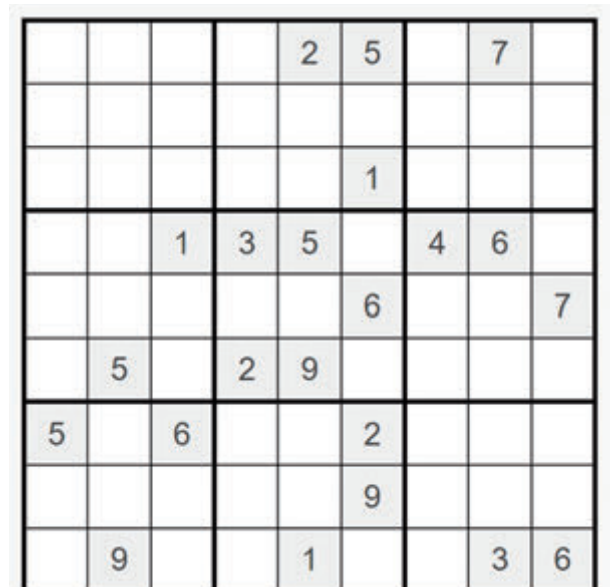
CRYPTIC:

ACROSS

- 6 Tortured lover I twist (6)
 7 Earthlings need to put time into ethics (7)
 10 Maelstrom rips hollow at sea (10)
 11 Exclusionary slang heard on ship (4)
 12 Disagreement caused by frying in butter, with 150 mixed in (8)
 14 Five lost in reckless evening drive (6)
 15 Charles Webb's a certain Master's student (3,8)
 19 Hand out gold shooting star (6)
 20 Moths quietly flap about on Emma, say (8)
 22 Must wash, even in that state (4)
 23 Morse's reportedly in ghosts (10)
 25 Tactile writing is liberal in error (7)
 26 Capacity for hesitation in messed-up love (6)

DOWN

- 1 The Earl of Loxley as a youth? (7)
 2 Phoney rail going north (4)
 3 Oracle found in Philadelphia (6)
 4 Father of amour de soi might drunkenly arouse us (8)
 5 Honestly, this is neat! (8,2)
 8 Epic ankle! (6)
 9 Spanish for characteristic is tonto, initially like Picasso (11)
 13 Fair teen confused about Holyhead Scale (10)
 16 US President who likes lasagne (8)
 17 Headless settler confuses message (6)
 18 Odyssey to get remains contained inside baby kangaroo (7)
 21 Fairy king broke up Borneo (6)
 24 Indeed, take drug after crazed rut (4)



PUZZLES BY SOPHOCLES

Self-rearing

Self-rearing

On arrival I look
For lambs to kneel on
Woolly things that can
Nudge my city limbs
Oil their mechanisms
Tune their muscles
To the familiar non-song
of rural March
To the virgin sky
And its sterile silence
I open myself; let wet,
silver heaven tickle
My throat, a dead
World pullulating
In my living mouth –
Now I bleat philosophy.

Alice Weatherley

Yellow Scarf

The boys gave me the yellow scarf
When I turned sixteen.
It's threadbare now, its colour worn,
And nowhere as pristine.
You can still tell that it's yellow,
Although that's mostly a guess.
It's become an outfit staple –
Without it, I feel undressed.
And although the ends are fraying,
And it's nearly six years old,
I will continue to wear it
'til the stitches cease to hold.

Esther Arthurson

A Biblical Prescription: To Be Taken with Water Twice a Day

Nail my brain to a cross above canvas
And let it seep dry.
I will wait for the
Drip, drip, thick,
inky words that splatter and glob onto text-
books below.
Wring out the pale fleshy mass until it's all
in front of me:
Something I can read.
If I still can't see, skewer my eyes to a thorny crown
And mount it on a traveller's head.
Dry hazel irises out in Saharan winds
Then freeze them blind at the poles that
pierced them.
Show them light and let it enlighten me.
By all means, slice my tongue,
Strike the muscle.
See if it has anything to say.
Let it fold on itself, flop wetly onto paper
you hold beneath my chin.
Salivate in the tastes
That it paints
On the page.
Aren't feelings trapped in the senses?

Esme Thomas

Haiku

mountains. the world ends;
white layers, milky paint spilled
— by God's mistake

Solomon Tsai

Dogs & Stars

B*ll*cks, and then I felt so stupid
shrouded under, the tiny-quilted stars. I
remember they burst like moth holes, un-
threading my shadows, circling away into
the path.
Anyways, I'm on the pavement, and I
should've stayed there, cool for a minute.
When the two Caius students screamed.
But I am not one for spectacles. I couldn't
sit there. The waiting time in Addenbrookes
isn't for me.
So, where orgasm bridge stretches over,
and the streetlights matter, I gathered up
my bicycle,
snapped it shut,
and that little black dog I turned away!
To all the (ginger male) cyclists in Cam: stick
to the left,
I felt my body must've folded, must've spar-
kled,
like a napkin on a child's plate.

Lucy Ansell

The Conference Cupboard

Ed says
the Conference Cupboard
is for conferring, red
oak piston, reticent
spacecraft, last night
I walked in on
each of our faces
spitting azaleas steadily
into the courtyard

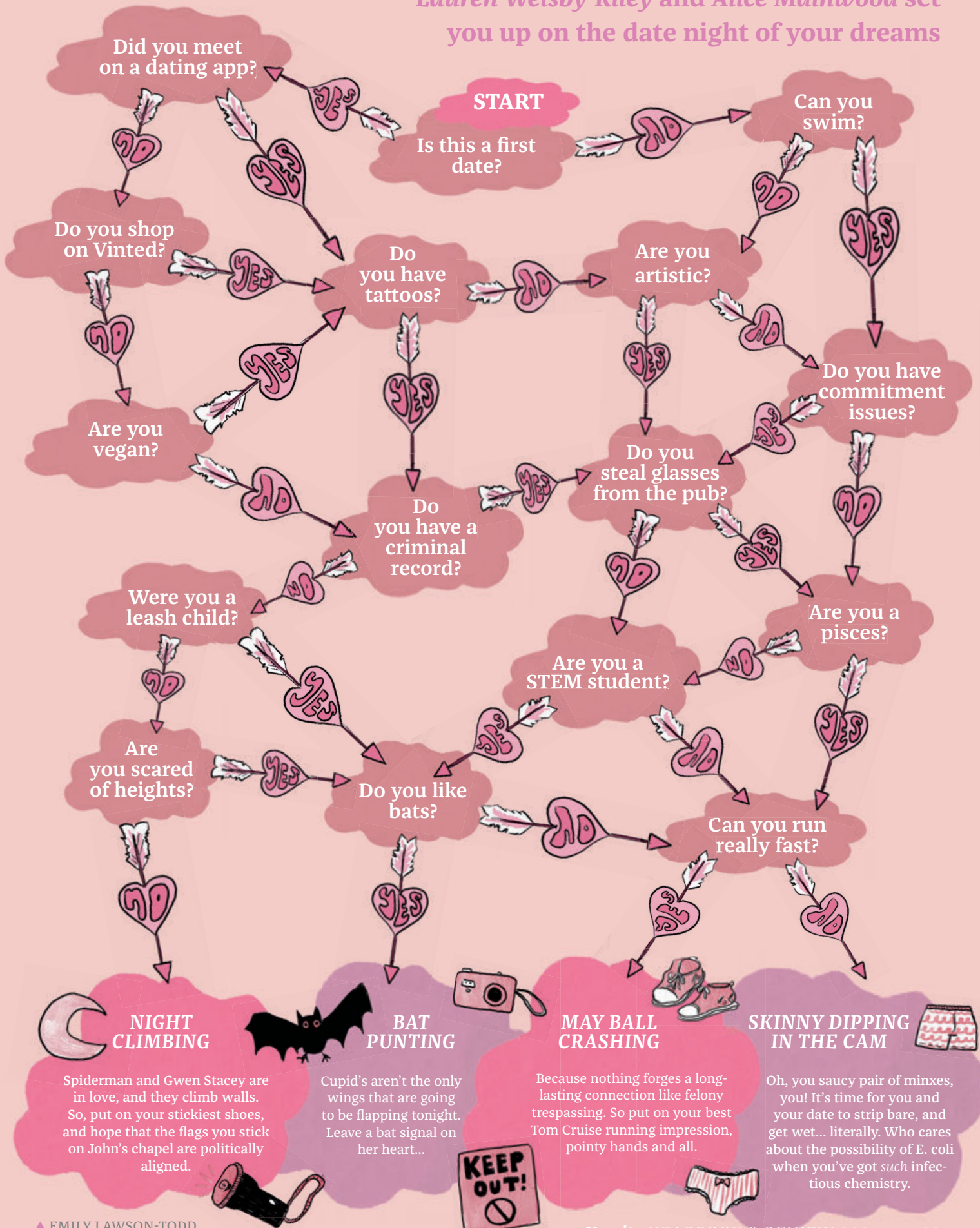
Leo Kang



▲ EMILY LAWSON-TODD

Cam you feel the love tonight?

Lauren Welsby-Riley and Alice Mainwood set you up on the date night of your dreams



Bursting the Cambridge bubble



Should more students have the opportunity to go overseas for a year?

the absurdity of how students are technically “contractually obliged to stay in Cambridge for the entirety of term,” contrasting greatly with his experience in Portugal of most students leaving to spend the weekends at home with their families. Despite Cambridge students spending the majority, if not all, of the term in the city, there is still a paradoxical disconnect between the students and the city itself, hence the ingrained ‘town versus gown’ tension. Upon returning from her year abroad in Paris, Katie also felt “less aware of what is going on outside Cambridge,” being absorbed back into the insularity of the Cambridge term.

This disconnect is inherently tied to the academic rigour of terms; students are so focused on meeting deadlines and preparing for supervisions that it becomes difficult to spend time thinking about much else. Jam explained how they “feel like a ‘Leipziger’ here [in Germany] – both a resident of the city and a student, but in Cambridge, my connection to the city is entirely around me studying there”. While in Cambridge we may feel connected to the University and our colleges, we don’t have this same affinity with the city itself. King’s Parade becomes something we hurry down on the way to a lecture and Grand Arcade somewhere we go for a bit of retail therapy after a tough supervision – it’s easy to forget that there is more to the city than just the University. Cambridge is home for many.

One of the most noticeable elements of Cambridge’s bubble is how time functions so differently. Andrew, who intermitted after his first year to study in Italy, described Cambridge as “a time warp” in which eight weeks suddenly flash by. Days drag out while weeks go by in an instant, and it is only once you leave that you can properly appreciate just how warped the passing of time here is. “It is very hard to keep track of time in Cambridge when you are abroad,” one student (who wished to remain anonymous) noted, with many of those

I spoke to saying they use platforms such as CamFess to keep up-to-date. While on his year abroad, Will realised that Cambridge’s rigid structure means “we start measuring our time by it,” to the extent that it is possible to predict CamFess posts based on the time of year, further perpetuating the insularity of the Cambridge experience.

Nearly everyone recounted the difficulty of explaining the eight-week terms to their friends abroad. “Once you leave and come back the length and intensity of each term is very striking,” one student remarked, with Jam and Will both reiterating how shocked people have been at hearing how much is packed into two months.

“It is very hard to keep track of time in Cambridge when you are abroad

SOPHIE DENNY

Cambridge is full of strange traditions and eccentricities. From formal halls to May Balls (in June), starting our weeks on a Thursday and celebrating Bridgemas, these tradi-

tions often make little sense to the students studying here, let alone those observing it from the outside. Although we get a flavour of what it’s like to spend time outside of this bubble when we leave during the holidays, only a few students actually experience what it is to spend a year without all of these bizarre yet familiar aspects of our shared university experience. Despite embarking on the year abroad being a daunting prospect, everyone I spoke to told me of the benefits of escaping the bubble for a bit. For Jam, studying in Germany revealed to them how “it’s really easy for your Cambridge experience to be very insular,” and Will reiterated this, describing Cambridge as “a very cloistered environment”. He noted

“It’s definitely a bubble but I don’t think it’s always a bad bubble



▲LAUREN MUNGER



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It's revealing that many students will return to Cambridge a week or two before term starts to begin the acclimatisation process. "I remember feeling so stressed in Cambridge, writing essays non-stop," Will said, and so the slower pace of his year abroad has "been a nice reprieve".

While this break has been welcome for some, one student told me that they "miss the busyness of everything, when you're constantly trying to do everything at once". Katie reiterated this, explaining that while the dramatic change in pace has allowed her to "see the bigger picture of the world outside Cambridge," she misses "how much stuff there was organised in Cambridge with societies, music and sports." Although the incessant activities can at times feel overwhelming, the virtue of an eight-week term is that it is just about manageable to fit everything in before crashing as soon as term ends.

Cambridge's insularity does have its benefits, with everyone mentioning how leaving the bubble made them realise just how intimate friendships in Cambridge can be. Andrew described Cambridge as a "pressure cooker," with this intensity enabling very close friendships



to be forged.

One student was surprised that the biggest change they noticed when going abroad wasn't the lack of essay deadlines but "the sense of community". Everything "seems more personal at Cambridge" - from the pastoral care to the friendships, there is a large support network we often take for granted. Friendships are at the heart of this network, and with everything being so self-contained, especially with the collegiate system, "even if you're not actively going to socialise, you're going to walk past someone's room in college, you're going to bump into someone". For most of the students I spoke to, returning to their friends is what they are most looking forward to upon their return.

Leaving the bubble is ironically one of the best ways to learn how to make the most of it: "You can get caught up in Cambridge [...] there's always these deadlines, and sometimes



▲LAUREN MUNGER

you need to take a step back and appreciate everything". Furthermore, for someone like Andrew, spending a year abroad offered him the opportunity to reflect and work out his priorities. Despite emphasising to me that he didn't want to sound "cringe," Andrew said he "found [him]self" during his year out. He also learnt how to take care of his mental health and make time to think about what he actually wants to do after university. Katie noted a similar experience, realising that "the majority of the world does not go to Cambridge and they're fine [...] I'm just going to enjoy it and try and enjoy what I'm learning".



The revelation that work "is not the end of the world" is an important one. It is not until you take a step back that you can see just how much of a "sense of competition" there is here, forcing you to work in unsustainable ways or to forget about the myriad of other opportunities available. Jam explains that because Cambridge is so competitive, "the idea of a casual hobby" doesn't exist. Everything has to be done to a high level of commitment and intensity, Jam said, but on their year abroad they've been able to join a choir and "just show up



and sing each week for a couple of hours. It's just about having fun." Amid the stress of essays, it is easy to forget, as Andrew did, that Cambridge "is so much more than just education". You only get to experience university once, and so taking advantage of all the incredible societies on offer is just as, if not more, important than churning out eight essays a term.

There are now 1,850 undergraduate courses at 69 institutions across the UK offering a year in industry (not one is in Cambridge) and 1,081 options for an integrated year abroad. Other top universities such as Durham even have a dedicated webpage encouraging all students, no matter what they are studying, to spend a year abroad. Everyone I spoke to agreed that Cambridge should expand its provision to allow as many students as possible to experience the benefits of going abroad. While

“You need to take a bit of a step back to appreciate everything”



one student noted that it could cause you to "lose momentum" (with Katie saying that "it's not for everyone") she also described it as "a really good time to just pause" in the middle of your degree. Will explained how "the Cambridge bubble does encourage a bit of stagnation" in your development, citing how having bedders or laundry services doesn't encourage self-sufficiency but merely fosters a sheltered environment. "The only way

to solve the Cambridge bubble is to let people travel outside of Cambridge," he remarks, reiterating the need to widen students' horizons to help with their development, especially when many might go on to lead the world in some shape or form.

More than anything, escaping the Cambridge bubble for a year proves the age-old adage that absence makes the heart



grow fonder. We have all faced moments when the prospect of another term or another year of our degree seems too much to bear, and a year abroad can help reignite the passion

for our subjects that drove us towards Cambridge in the first place. A feeling of excitement pervades students' responses at the prospect of returning, having realised while abroad how lucky they are to experience a Cambridge education - a feeling that can easily be forgotten on a rainy week five day. Following a year away, everyone I spoke to was "quite excited to get down to work again" and "be nerdy about the subject [they] love".

"It's definitely a bubble but I don't think it's always a bad bubble," one student tells me. It certainly has its eccentricities, including the belief that seeing BeReals of people in the library at 4am is "normal" or that worrying about how

to ask bedders for more bin bags is a major issue. However, despite these drawbacks, the Cambridge bubble is a unique, once-in-a-lifetime experience which should be appreciated for the incredible opportunity that

it is. If escaping it for a year is the key to figuring out how to make the most of it, then perhaps the University should seriously consider providing more students the opportunity to venture beyond the bubble - even if it is just to return and be absorbed right back in.



Wes Streeting: from student campaigner to cabinet minister?

MICHAEL HENNESSEY

In March 2004, a full page photo on the cover of *Varsity* crowned a bright-eyed Wes Streeting as the new president of Cambridge University Students' Union, winning by a margin of just twenty-two votes and promising "big reforms". The image paints a picture of Streeting that has clung to him throughout his political career - of the 'professional politician' charting a path directly from student Labour clubs to the Houses of Parliament.

It is a journey that has left Streeting on the brink of becoming the first Labour Health Secretary for fourteen years. Streeting's rise in the Labour party has occurred in parallel with the Party's move away from the radicalism of the Jeremy Corbyn years, and his opposition to Corbyn's leadership has seen him become a target of vitriol for activists on the Left.

However, speaking shortly after the encampment on King's Parade in support of Palestine began, Streeting acknowledges that were he a student today, he "possibly" would have taken part himself. He says he is "fairly relaxed" about protests which are "part and parcel of student life," as long as students "are making their point respectfully and peacefully and mindfully of how the war will impact on different parts of the student body."

Weighing up every word carefully, Streeting also admits that he briefly quit the Labour Party in 2003 and attended protests at university against the Iraq war. "I totally understand why students and the public at large are protesting against the enormous number of civilian casualties in Gaza and for an end to this bloody war," he says.

A key theme of Streeting's autobiography, *One Boy, Two Bills and a Fry Up*, is an absence of feelings of imposter syndrome throughout his life - something he calls his "working class inner voice that says: Anything they can do, you can do."

Streeting encourages current students who share a similar background to him to "seize every opportunity you have". He recounts that the only time he has felt imposter syndrome was his "biggest regret" from Cambridge

when he "bottled" auditioning for the Footlights and the ADC in first year despite a background in school drama.

Coming from a working class, state-educated background, Streeting is particularly interested in discussing recent changes to Cambridge's admissions policy, arguing that the University should have a driving mission to be "academically elite without being socially elitist". Earlier this year, Cambridge scrapped formal targets for state school admissions numbers.

"Some of the progress that's been made in Cambridge admissions in terms of the state-to-private balance has been achieved by recruiting more students from high performing state schools in more affluent areas, but that hasn't necessarily meant greater diversity of admissions from lower socio-economic groups [...] so I wouldn't have a concern about the University looking more intelligently at those sorts of things," he says.

Streeting is more tentative around the topic of tuition fees and says higher education funding is a "fiendishly complicated" challenge for Shadow Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson - "I'm glad I've only got the small challenge of working out how we take the NHS from its worst crisis in history to making it fit for the future again," he jokes.

Throughout the interview, Streeting repeatedly refers to the importance of student voices in politics - a topic he admits is close to his heart due to his previous role as National Union of Students (NUS) president. So does he regret

“Protests are part and parcel of student life”

that the voices of students and young people in politics are weaker than when he was involved? "As a parliamentarian, I don't feel actively lobbied or engaged by student voices, which is a great source of sadness to me [...] I think that's largely self-inflicted," he says.

Should Labour form the next government after this year's impending general election, Streeting will become Sir Keir Starmer's Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. Health issues have recently attracted attention in Cambridge, with cases of ADHD among students having doubled in four years as the University cut funding for students seeking diagnoses. Last year, a Cambridge GP wrote a letter claiming students are "actively seeking" diagnoses to get extra time in exams.

Streeting says that further research into the issue is required: "We've got to make sure that [diagnoses] are not being abused." He continued: "I think we've got to look really carefully at rising numbers of diagnoses and ask some questions from first principles [...] I'm naturally concerned if the consequence of the University's decision is that cases are going undiagnosed, and students aren't receiving the support they need."

This issue is just one among a huge breadth of issues that Streeting will face if he is the next Health Secretary. Does he worry about being directly responsible for the NHS in a time of crisis? "The NHS is the greatest institution this country has ever built. That central principle of a national health service free at the point of use is under threat like never before [...] so I'm daunted about the scale of the challenge but also excited by the possibility of stepping out from the shadows".

Varsity's 2004 front page story stated that Streeting's Cambridge election victory was due to his "guerilla-warfare" campaign. Throughout our interview, twenty years later, Streeting's background as a student politician and his love of campaigning shines through.

He is keen to stress Labour's message for students as the interview ends: "I know that among younger progressive voters there will be areas where people disagree with Labour [...] I hope that when students go to the polls later this year, they give change a chance and give Labour the opportunity to serve."

DAVID WOOLFALL ►
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STEM *vs Arts:* *a changing centre of gravity*

Is the new Silicon Valley
leaving the humanities
behind?

▼ ANNABEL DAVIS

NICK JAMES

If you were a tourist alighting from the new electric U bus onto JJ Thomson Avenue, you wouldn't know you were in Cambridge. There would be no historical buildings, students draped in gowns, or punters along the Cam. Instead, you'd be faced with sleek, modern buildings; neatly landscaped gardens; and recently paved roads and cycle paths.

JJ Thomson Avenue is one of the main roads for the new West Cambridge Site: a STEM-focused, second campus for the University. The campus is undergoing a radical, expensive transformation including the recently completed West Hub as well as soon-to-open laboratories and buildings. With the new developments will come plenty of opportunities, innovation, and investment, but it also shifts the University's centre of gravity away from the cobbled-streets towards the futuristic west. What will this mean for the University's future?

It's no secret that Cambridge is vying to become the science capital of the UK, if not all of Europe. Mike Derbyshire, partner at the property consultancy firm Bidwell's, told me he has seen a recent "seismic change" in levels of international investment directed towards Cambridge STEM industries.

With all this appetite and ambition from external investors, it's not surprising the University's second campus is so STEM-oriented. This investment "builds up that core base of scientists and researchers, and the bigger the ecosystem [...] the better it is in terms of innovation and attracting the best staff," Derbyshire explained.

Part of that investment has gone towards constructing the Ray Dolby Centre, due to finish this year. It's a colossal, pearly-white physics centre (with a square footage similar to Edinburgh Castle) that will rehouse the entire department. The building will be filled with state-of-the-art facilities, including purpose-built labs for world-leading

research programmes and a 450-seat lecture theatre.

Unsurprisingly, physics students are eager to move in. Shams Ullah, co-chair of the University Physics Society, told me: “I am really looking forward to being able to use this new space! Alongside new lecture theatres and study spaces, I am excited to use the upgraded and recalibrated equipment to improve my own lab work. We can also expect to see more social spaces for physicists of all years, including a new cafeteria, so the Ray Dolby Centre is definitely set to take the Cavendish to new heights!”

STEM innovation and development in West Cambridge doesn't stop there. Across the road, construction has begun on the new Whittle Lab, which will be a leading centre for researching zero-carbon aviation technology. Last year, King Charles visited the site to break ground on the construction of a very futuristic design which will house new labs, a manufacturing centre and the UK National Centre for Propulsion Power. The lab has also partnered with some of the largest engineering firms in the world, including Rolls-Royce and Mitsubishi. Professor Robert Miller, director of the new lab, said: “The new Whittle Lab has been designed as a disruptive innovation laboratory targeting the critical early stages in the lifecycles of technologies, where there are windows of opportunity to translate scientific strengths into global technological and industrial leadership.”

These new buildings and facilities will open up exciting opportunities for Cambridge, ensuring it stays at the forefront of global research. However, it won't be cheap: the Ray Dolby Centre is expected to cost more than the Gherkin at £300 million (adjusted for inflation), and the new Whittle Lab over £50 million. The site marks the University's largest expansion in decades, firmly shifting the centre of gravity westwards and towards future STEM industries.

This second campus won't just offer new academic opportu-

nities, but also a new way of living and working. Alongside the faculty buildings, the site will include commercial spaces designed to provide ‘side-by-side’ collaborative working. Plazas are also being constructed to encourage more interaction with the wider community. When the site was announced in 2014, it was noted that the campus wasn't being built around a college. At the time, *Varsity* reported that Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute, said: “I do think elements of the ‘Cambridge experience’ will be missing from the site.”

There are nearby colleges like Churchill and Girton, and attempts are being made to make the site as communal as possible, with the introduction of leisure facilities, housing, restaurants and cafes. But without a college to ground the site, and the campus being so far away from the city centre, certain Cambridge eccentricities and traditions will inevitably be missing.

Another noticeable absence from the site may be arts and humanities stu-

dents, who will have little reason to visit the second campus. Although dedicated STEM and humanities sites like the New Museum Site and Sidgwick Site are nothing new, the existing sites are considerably smaller than West Cambridge. Their proximity to each other and colleges

also fosters interdisciplinary conversations which is one of the hallmarks of the Cambridge experience. The changing centre of gravity may risk isolating the disciplines and diluting the collaborative culture that so defines Cambridge.

This division may also be heightened by the inevitable comparisons which will be made between the new campus and existing sites.

Unlike the current enthusiasm STEM students have for West Cambridge, humanities students have been unimpressed with Sidgwick Site since its inception. When plans were first drawn up for Lady Mitchell Hall in 1960, they received immediate opposition from students and faculty alike. Upon reviewing the plans, one history academic said: “We seem to live under a kind of architects’ despotism.”

Sidgwick site didn't just face aesthetic problems during its original development: the History faculty's opening in 1968 was delayed by weeks due to heavy flooding, which the architects blamed on the “unusual, almost revolutionary style of the building”.

Humanities students continue to bemoan the site today. One historian told me the Seeley Library is “arctic in winter and Saharan in summer,” and that, he “imagined studying at Cambridge would involve curling up in snug corners of old libraries, not searching for a working plug socket in a greenhouse.” A philosopher remarked: “The Raised Faculty Building is about as drab and utilitarian as its name suggests.”

Part of what makes Cambridge such an exceptional university is the continual intermingling of people and ideas across a variety of disciplines, stoking creativity, imagination and collaboration. This mixing is encouraged by faculties being in such close proximity to each other and colleges housing students and fellows from a variety of subjects. The development of West Cambridge is changing the University's centre of gravity, and risks creating a wider divide between subjects. As the University takes advantage of the amazing opportunities the new campus will offer, it's important that measures are taken to

ensure Cambridge continues to act as one cohesive University.

“Cambridge is vying to become the UK's science capital”

Dear Aunty Maddy

In her curtain call as your spiritual guide, let Agony Aunt Maddy Sanderson solve all your May Week woes...

I've just gotten into a new situation but we're about to go home for the summer. I don't want things to end, but we're not officially together - what should I do?

Run. Run for the hills. You think being left on delivered hurts during term time? Try waiting for that sweet, sweet dopamine hit from a text back when the two of you are cities, nay, possibly even countries apart, and you're trying to reassure yourself that the hot young thang on their arm on their story who looks suspiciously like you is obviously just a really close friend from home. You poor, sweet angel - is it really a holiday for you if 99% of it is spent pining over someone with an avoidant-attachment style who, like most of the freaks at this University (let's not kid ourselves, nobody here should be allowed in society), has a) crippling mummy/daddy issues, b) a God/martyr complex, or c) some sort of obscure, unheard-of sexual fetish that can only be explained by encounters with Nietzsche at a critical point during their adolescence. Baby, it's summer! If it's tough times you're after, you may as well be back in the library stupified by your own illiteracy, not going square-eyed glued to your empty phone screen while your long-suffering mates are trying to drag you away to hang ten. I could rattle off some spiel about loving and letting go, but honestly, when you're one or two summer holidays away from the rest of your life, why waste precious time devoting yourself to a situation where the only souvenir they'll bring you back from their illustrious travels is the clap?

Last year, I infiltrated a May Ball by swimming across the Cam and promptly came down with Weil's disease days later. How can I avoid the same from happening this year when I try to sneak in again?

Nice try, Fed. I wouldn't give away my top-secret plans to anyone, let alone some snotty-nosed weakling who can't make it across the length of a glorified kiddie pool without being struck down by some obscure Medieval-sounding ail-

ment. Anyway, didn't you get the memo? E. coli's all the rage right now, dahling. It's so popular, they even made it the face of the Thames boat races this year! Anyway, if you fear your delicate constitution won't be able to handle another dip in those velvety murky-brown waters, don't think I'm going to be handing out any free advice (you hear that, *Varsity*?! I'm still waiting on my cheque...). Outside of seducing the bouncers, extorting one of the less senior (see: easily malleable) members of committee, or straight-up becoming a kind of medicine-man figure for one of the bands onstage that night (in which case, I want advertising commission), it's gonna take some pretty nifty thinking for you to wrangle this one. Have you ever considered sacking it off for something cheaper, and let's face it, probably infinitely more fun? I hear Ryanair flights to Ibiza are pretty cheap at this time of year, or, failing that, how about a bottle of supermarket-brand vodka, a packet of Marlboro Reds and a trip to Ely Cathedral? It's got all the glamour, and none of the boat-club-freshers-chunning-into-a-bush vibes.

I'm a finalist. All of my friends have secured grad jobs with eye-watering starter salaries in the city, meanwhile, I'm going back to the same old small town and living with my parents. How do I avoid losing all hope?

Do you ever wake up in the morning with the overwhelming urge to kick the living shit out of

something? To square up to a stranger, slap yourself in the face, go completely doo-lally and nab a big hat and sunglasses and just bugger off somewhere, anywhere, other than here? Those three years of pent-up energy, my friend, are what's gonna keep you from falling flat on your arse once we stop playing pretend-adulthood and get spat out into the real world like a stale sausage roll. You can fail the year or do a panic Master's, but honey, you can't put off growing up forever. People who have a lot of money tend to be very happy about it. And can you blame them? Better to be crying at the wheel of a spanking new beamer than at the back of my abysmal village bus service, having an asthma attack, trying not to breathe in the mould from the seats. Take all of your pent-up energy and get yourself out of your room-turned-hoarding-space back at mum and dad's. Join a pyramid scheme! Betray your country and become a sleeper cell for an enemy state! Sell your organs on the dark web! To compare, I am currently blessed with a bountiful stream of rural Australian mining reels on Instagram which are looking pretty damn tasty. There's just so many wonderful things to choose from! See you geezers down the outback/ JobCentre/ debtor's prison in about five years' time!

I'm a first year and desperately want to become an agony aunt. Help me, Aunty Maddy! Show me the way to become just like you.

Come on man, don't make me responsible for how stressful your life is about to become. I don't get paid enough (see: at all) for this. But if anyone else has any bright ideas...

You're just going to leave it? Now who's got the avoidant-attachment style?

This is getting weird. I only wanted the gig for the CV fodder. Please leave me alone.

I'm pretty sure you can't sell your organs if they're virtually pickled, you know that right?

muffled screaming

At 09:00 hours the following morning, after what was later revealed to be a protracted shootout with cartel death squads over unpaid gambling debts and flagrant abuse of the Lola's smoking area, Aunty Maddy's body was found laying at the peak of Mathematical Bridge with an apple in its mouth. In unrelated news, if anyone is interested, a new slot has just opened up for a JobCentre appointment at 4pm this afternoon.

CHIARA DEPLIANO-CORDEIRO ▶

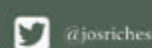
May Week horoscope: Come what May, Emily Heatherington has your horoscope sorted

| | | | | | |
|------------------|---|-----------------|---|--------------------|---|
| ARIES | May Week is a time for you to thrive socially, so take the opportunity to reconnect with old friends. You may experience difficulty with travel plans this month, so good thing Giron doesn't have a May Ball. | TAURUS | Oh, Taurus, you are the only member of your friend group who will reliably be ready in time for that pre-ball taxi. This month you should avoid excessive spending, but fortunately the may ball tickets are already paid! | GEMINI | Happy Birthday, Gemini. This month you might be tempted toward impulsive actions. I see a lot of vomit in your future: beware of swings, carousels, and mechanical bulls. |
| CANCER | After your academic weapon era this month, you may experience a series of romantic encounters. Unfortunately, you will also experience a series of heartbreaks. Time to cut off your emotionally unavailable situationship. | LEO | While the urge to take over steering the punt will be strong, your complete lack of experience, coordination, and balance will be stronger. Is that dip in the Cam really worth the momentary glory of spinning your friends around in circles? | VIRGO | After successfully using your organisational skills to just barely coordinate a group chat of shockingly uncooperative adults, your may week plans are finally set. Just don't let your perfectionist tendencies get in the way of spontaneity. |
| LIBRA | This week may be a chaotic time. When encountering problems, you may be compelled to take outside counsel, such as amateur horoscope columns. Rely on your own experiences and intuition for answers to ensure success. | SCORPIO | Avoid excessive spending and stay out of your overdraft, you fiscally responsible legend. Remember: whatever you do, do not get too drunk at your subject garden party if you want to maintain a modicum of professionalism with your DoS. | SAGITTARIUS | June will bring unexpected figures from your past. Probably that one person you met in fresher's week and never spoke to again. Let's hope they don't remember anything you said or did at that time in your life. |
| CAPRICORN | After a challenging month with a high workload, you can finally take some time to relax. This is also a good time for you to develop professional relationships. Embrace your villain arc and become a LinkedIn fiend. | AQUARIUS | This is sure to be a creative and fulfilling time for you. The stars say you might experience health problems, i.e. perpetual hangover, ruined sleep schedule and/or mysterious Cam water related sickness. However, the stars are notorious liars. | PISCES | This is a bad time to make new acquaintances. Instead, spend some time with your college family this week. I know you promised you would be a present parent and I'm sure your kids will forgive you for ignoring them since Michaelmas. |

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You May (or May

Sam Hudson and Romilly Norfolk debate the

BREAKING INTO BALLS

Cambridge is full of vagabonds and rogues. One need only look at the Union to realise that. Yet of all the petty crimes Cambridge students commit, I find the May Ball gatecrash one of the more distasteful. This is not, primarily, out of concern for those who buy their tickets honestly. Though prolific gate-crashing may make queues worse and deprive honest partygoers of parts of the May Ball experience, this tends not to be a

regular occurrence. More fundamentally, however, May Ball gatecrashers are disrespecting the students who sacrifice vast amounts of their time to run events across May Week. Having played a very minor role on Trinity Hall's June Event committee, I have seen first-hand how stressful the May Ball evenings are for those who organise them. From dealing with performers going AWOL to organising emergency plumbing (I'll spare you the details), the last thing a committee should be deal-

ing with is dishonesty from their peers. Really my central gripe is less so with individual chancers but the way in which gatecrashing is excused or even celebrated among the student body. It is often seen as an innocent bit of fun, a victimless crime, or even as some radical act of social justice. Instead of excusing those who undermine May Ball committees, we should spend more time acknowledging those who actually make the May Balls possible.

Sam

MAY BALL HEADLINERS

Much excitement in the lead up to May Week is generated by the reveal of headline performances. This is quite understandable. The prospect of going to a private(-ish) concert from a big-name artist is electrifying. Alas, all that glitters is not gold. The costs associated with fame tend to increase disproportionately. The biggest stars demand more security, better transport and accommodation,

and not to mention higher pay. May Balls which spend more obtaining big name headliners naturally will have to make substantial cuts elsewhere. In my experience, this is a compromise not worth making. Queues are the universal nemesis of May Balls and those with big headliners tend not to have the budget to mitigate them by hiring more staff. Last year's balls at John's and Trinity were indicative of this. While Trinity had Boney M (who were, admittedly, excellent),

I spent much more time stuck in queues there than I did at John's. Quantity ultimately beats out quality. Perhaps my view of May Balls is too utilitarian and consumerist. If your favourite band or singer is performing at a particular ball then it may well be worth copping a ticket. Yet this aside, I must caution against buying into the hype. Indeed, a mediocre headliner simply tends to be a sign that money has wisely been spent elsewhere.

Sam

MAY BALL THEMES

Themes at May Balls have become increasingly derivative. There seems to be an anxiety of influence among May Ball presidents pushing them to delve further into the thesaurus to find synonyms for essentially the same, broad thematic concept.

Trinity Hall June Event's theme in 2022 was 'Mirage', last year it was 'Reverie,' and this year it is the "thirteenth hour". While there are of course some minor differences between these themes, they all still fit under a broader, dream-related umbrella.

This strategy is unsurprising. If one

owns theme-related decorations from the previous year, it makes sound sense to try to reuse them. Indeed, as Churchill's apocalyptic theme-related controversy or Pembroke's unfortunately-

timed sub-nautical theme demonstrated, attempts to innovate on themes can end very badly.

None of this is to criticise the May Ball presidents, and what has become convention. So, I say we should help them out and end this tired exercise.

Sam



not) go to the Ball

pros and cons of Cambridge's biggest parties

You may feel bitter towards people who have managed to successfully sneak into a May Ball you've shelled out 200 quid for, but you have to admire them. I don't think I could ever attempt crashing a May Ball; beyond my physical disadvantage of being the height of a pool cue, I simply am too chicken to attempt anything of the sort. But instead of condemning those who do what I can't, I think I'll choose to live vicariously through these opportunistic chancers.

My opinion is that if you manage to successfully pull off crashing a May Ball, you probably deserve to be there. Ball crashers don't often ruin anyone's fun, they're just there to participate in the revelry like all the other attendees. And let's be honest, there's plenty to go round at a May Ball.

Some of the funniest parts of May Week are hearing people's elaborate schemes on how they plan to get into a May Ball without queuing for a couple hours and the important part - not

paying hundreds of pounds. How they intend to climb over walls, or swim with their clothes in bag, I don't know, but I respect those willing to go to such extremes.

In an era of May Balls costing hundreds of pounds, why shouldn't people take the opportunity to experience a quintessential Cambridge experience on a lower budget? They'll get a much better story out of it.

Romilly

Headliners are always a contentious topic in the run up to May Balls. For some they're a deciding factor on where they decide to attend, others are just hoping that the headliner is half decent so the £250 they've spent isn't completely wasted. A headliner can make or break a May Ball, but that doesn't mean they need to be a big name. The opportunity to see someone live that you never would

have otherwise. How many people can say they've seen Dick and Dom do a DJ set? All the people who went to Homerton May Ball last year can. Can they be a bit superficial? Yes. Often May Balls book people with a couple of big hits, which can end in you standing for a whole set just to hear 'Milkshake'. But sometimes committees pull it out the bag. This year we'll have the likes of The Last Dinner Party and Tinie Tempah gracing the city in May Week.

Are headliners an opportunity for May Ball committees to fluff their feathers? Quite possibly. But that doesn't mean that the quintessential, one-hit wonder headliners should go. After all, when else will you see Boney M?

Romilly

May Ball themes, often the first thing announced by a committee, can build excitement, offer a nice guessing game for a week and can sometimes surprise you.

Themes can also be the source of controversy, whether that's Titanic - related or a headache for a college confession page admin. They can also be the source of

Now I'll admit that May Ball themes can sometimes be a bit generic and samey. That can be expected for yearly events that have been theming themselves for a decade.

But sometimes you get a theme that's a little different (do I dare mention Churchill). This can be fun, giving you inspiration for an outfit, and can make for a beautiful looking ball.

misfortune. Sidney Sussex's Venice themed May Ball, for example,

apparently flooded some Jesus houses when they decided to drain the large water features they'd built.

Such incidents aside, you've got to love a theme. Without themes, May Balls might as well just be a couple of big tents and some bumper cars, a fancy summer fête if you will.

Romilly

▼ CHRISTOPHER LORDE



The hitchhiker's guide to the A24

The freedoms and foibles of hitching a ride back to university

JOSHUA SHORTMAN

If you walked to the end of Trumpington Street at the end of term in 1984, you would see something you no longer see today: a line of students stood at the end of the road, apparently queuing for nothing. Like most histories of hitchhiking, this comes to me by word of mouth – in this case, from a journalist who studied at Cambridge in the '80s. These students were waiting for rides back to London, and he was occasionally one of them. Schlebecker (one of the few academics on hitchhiking I could find) suggests that something similar was going on in America, writing that many students in the '30s "considered any other form of transportation as slightly reprehensible".

So what happened? When I've asked older generations, the standard answer is that hitchhiking isn't as safe as it used to be. My own grandmother, after hearing of my plans to hitchhike

back to Cambridge, approached me as though I'd signed up to fight in a war. The other, who hitchhiked to Yugoslavia herself when that was still geographically possible, was less horrified and more personally sceptical.

There are legitimate reasons to consider hitchhiking unsafe – I'll return to those – but no less safe than the '80s. Those hitchhikers left without mobile phones, often without paper maps. I was able to text photos of licence plates to my girlfriend, share my GPS, and use Google Maps to check the nearest train stations. If it all went wrong, I could bankrupt myself and call a taxi. It was with these reassurances that I stumbled out of my house one morning, and stuck out my thumb. Two cars passed, and the

second pulled over. My immediate feeling was mild panic: the chances of this being repeatable seemed astonishingly low, which presumably meant I was about

to be marooned on a roundabout for the rest of the day.

I talked nervously to the driver, trying to focus on stories about her brother hitchhiking to Poland in search of wild bison. He was unsuccessful: although promisingly, due more to unsociable bison than drivers.

I did have to wait for an hour at one point in suburban Bedfordshire: walking through turfed-up roundabouts and trying to stand out from roadwork signs. I'd tried hitching earlier, on a leafy street, and it was the only time I felt mad for holding up my cardboard sign. There's something immediately explicable, and pitiable, about standing

on the side of an A-road that didn't apply to the ample pavements of Great Barford or Wyboston. Not possessing a car of my own was clearly ridiculous, and (in the eyes of the few drivers I was able to catch), a little embarrassing.

But when Cathy (my first ride) dropped me off, the wait was less than 20 minutes: and except for Bedfordshire, this held true for the rest of the day. I reached Cambridge in eight and a half hours – less time than it's taken me to drive in bad traffic. All in all, I caught five lifts, with a further three drivers pulling over before discovering they were headed the wrong way.

As Allan – my third ride, driving his family in a caravan – pointed out, this raised the question of whether my premise was correct: perhaps hitchhiking wasn't dead. He didn't think so; he'd been doing it since his youth and regularly picked up hitchhikers with "trade plates" (the removable plates on cars being delivered to their owners – it's apparently common practice for drivers to save money by hitching back). Lee, a lonely traveller – in his words "just mooching about Cambridge" – who saved me from Bedfordshire and shared his cigarettes, mentioned them too.

Everyone agreed, however, that hitchhiking had seen a decline. Allan put this down largely to the introduction of dash-cams in coaches and lorries – whose bored drivers had long provided the backbone of hitchhiking. With the knowledge that their bosses could be surveilling, alongside harsher company regulations, most wouldn't risk it anymore. A coach driver himself, Allan said he'd only pick up hitch-

hikers when off the job.

It was partly for this reason that, after being dropped off in a layby near Newbury, I hesitated when a coach pulled in. There was such a disparity between the size of my thumb and the huge smooth oblong it had summoned, that it seemed easier to believe there was no connection at all; it wasn't until a hand leant out of the window and waved at me that I realised I should pick up my bags and run. After catching my breath,

“I had to wait for an hour in suburban Bedfordshire

▲ EMILY LAWSON-TODD

I asked the coach driver why he'd stopped to pick me up. "Ah," he replied: "when I was your age, I hitchhiked Italy. You needed a lift." We talked about his son – who wrote poetry too modern for Janusz to understand – and listened to James Taylor on Polish radio. From Newbury to Oxford, I rode at the front of the empty coach, surveying my lands.

Having children, I noticed, was a common theme: Jim and Kate, my lift out of Wincanton, had a son with my name who'd hitchhiked South Africa; Cathy was a pastoral lead at a local school; and Allan told me (I think) that I'd made him feel maternal. To some extent I'd

manufactured this – shaving off my moustache and getting hold of a colourful jumper – but I was also lucky not to face any obstacles that couldn't be overcome by a new jumper and a shave. I'm a young man, who probably resembles a Cambridge Student in the minds of middle England. Especially in Dorset, where I began (and where Jim and Kate's shop is named after a Rupert Brooke poem), I imagine this worked in my favour. The only lifts I potentially missed out on were from women driving alone, from whom I'd occasionally get a rueful head-shake. Although Jim and Kate stressed that anyone from their family would have picked me up (including Kate's 80-year-old mum), Kate amended that if she was driving alone she'd only pick up girls.

It's a valid concern, which I don't wish to diminish. Websites like hitch-wikis, or 'Wand'rly' often attempt to prove hitchhiking is statistically safe – stating that you're "three times more likely to die in a car crash than by being murdered," and concluding that your chances of being murdered while hitchhiking are even lower. There are many problems there; the first being that if you choose to enter a room full of mur-

derers, then your odds change – and nobody really knows to what extent getting in a stranger's car equates to that kind of decision. The number of hitchhiking-related crimes is astronomically low, but we can assume the number of hitchhikers isn't exactly high either, and the data we'd need to work it out just doesn't exist. Apart from the odd book, hitchhiking doesn't usually leave a paper trail unless something goes wrong.

Nevertheless, I still think it's safer than it used to be. Thousands of us pay to get in strangers' vehicles every night, and (providing you take the measures I did) the only thing making Uber safer is the guarantee that your driver has a license and no criminal record. The reason we're willing to pay for this service but turn it down for free – I'd argue – comes back to Reagan.

As car ownership rose and commercial alternatives in-

creased, the suburban distaste towards hitching sublimated into policy: '50s legislation increasingly discouraged it, and by at least 1966 the FBI was producing posters of hitchhikers titled 'Death in Disguise' signed by J.

Edgar Hoover. Hitchhiking was a *bête noir* of his, in part because it allowed students to gather for civil rights marches. By the '70s, Police officers were distributing anti-hitching leaflets on campuses, and come Reagan – stranger danger and D.A.R.E. – the triumph of commercial over communal travel was complete. Uber, with its underpaid and exploited drivers, was in some ways the inevitable conclusion.

This has disadvantages that extend beyond the obvious. E. P. Thompson wrote about how employment (particularly during the Industrial Revolution) shifted our conceptions of time,



from time perceived through natural rhythms or tasks, towards time-as-cost. I think a similar thing has happened to distance. If I want to be in Cornwall, Cambridge, or London, the obstacle is no longer distance but money. Cornwall isn't 150 miles away from where I live – it's £70

“ Hitchhiking changes the relationship between driver and passenger

away by train, or £40 by car (not counting hidden costs or return journeys). There's something uniquely miserable about this; it makes every decision financial – whether or not to see an old friend, or travel somewhere new. In a country with some of the worst, and most privatised, public transport in Europe, that de-

cision is usually an uncomfortable one.

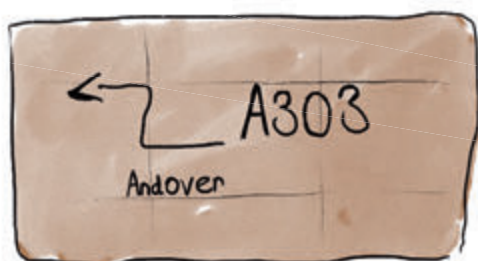
Hitchhiking is not an answer to this, but it provides a moment of liberation. It transforms not only how we see the world, but how we see each other – changing the relationship between driver and passenger, from consumer to human – something that was starkly obvious while talking to Janusz, in the front of his empty, branded coach.

There's a tendency in our society for 'freedom' to become equated with 'market freedom': the idea that the market affords individual freedom through the transferrable medium of currency. Standing in a layby, entirely reliant on strangers, amid the dusty cans and plastic bags

of worn-out A-roads, might not sound much like freedom either.

But although the

practice of hitchhiking has almost died, the cultural memory is yet to catch up. People still understand what you're doing if you stand on the side of the road with your thumb out, and it turns out, they still pick you up. Walking around Cambridge with an armful of used cardboard, I've never felt freer.



How to secure a May Ball headliner

OLIVER COONEY

As a finalist, I can confirm that it happens every year. It might be at brunch or in the Revs smoking area, or in the inevitable CamFest theorising, but one way or another, somebody tells you that Taylor Swift is coming for May Week. I can also confirm that every year, she doesn't.

But after three years of unsuccessful speculation, it did get me thinking: how on earth

would you get her here? If you've ever spoken to a May Ball committee member, they'll tell you it's a hellish job that takes up your entire year, but what does a year's worth of work even look like? To get some answers, I spoke to May Ball committees past and present to see how exactly you bag a May Ball headliner.

First thing's first, you've got to decide who to approach. With the likes of Bastille, Clean Bandit and Charli XCX all having graced our temporary stages, it can be daunting to find a big enough name to please the crowd with

a small enough price tag to book. For most committees, this means a collaborative effort. "We asked our committee to put ideas in a shared doc," said Lauren Welsby-Riley, co-president of Homerton's May Ball this year. "It was actually our publicity officer who put The Last Dinner Party." The London-based indie rock band have amassed a huge following over the past year, but with planning commencing well in advance of the Ball, Lauren told me that securing an exciting headliner meant taking a chance on an up-and-coming act that they hoped would make it big.

"It can be daunting to find a big enough name

The team for St John's 2023 May Ball told me that this early gamble can make it nearly impossible to tell if the act is a good fit. "Over the years, we've managed to quite spectacularly miss out on some incredible acts," said president Dommy Goddard. "Several years ago we doubted a girl who had an uncannily spooky voice [...] now it pains us to hear Billie Eilish's name."

Once the list of potential performers is set, it's time to get

in touch. Lauren told me that "this is actually the easiest part. You can Google pretty much any celebrity and find the contact info for their publicists." As a 21-year-old who still shivers at the thought of phoning the dentist, contacting a musical powerhouse like The Last Dinner Party terrifies me, and the presidents agreed. "We were really nervous [...] this was the dream headliner."

However, for many balls, the committee wouldn't just call Taylor up. The committees of John's, Trinity and Jesus may balls make use of a go-between company which covers the negotiation process. "We didn't have any direct contact with the artists' management at all," said the committee for last year's Jesus May Ball. This seems like a smart move to save a student drunk texting ShyFX (the Ball's eventual headliner) to ask if they liked their mate's recent Mash DJ set.

While using a private company can mean the artists take your offer more seriously, the negotiation process remains lengthy. Adanna, president of Christ's May Ball this year, explained: "We usually put in a low offer which would gradually increase." But pay isn't everything. Committees also have to consider if the artist is even in the country during May Week. Thankfully, the end of term ushers in festival season. Kelis, who also headlined Jesus 2023, "was already in the country for Glastonbury," the committee said, and "her management was looking to make a string of bookings in the lead-up".

On top of availability comes other conditions, known as 'riders'. These constitute a list of items the artist wants in their dressing room, and can vary massively, as Harriet from Trinity's 2023 committee explained: "Some are reasonable (a crate of beer and some snacks), others aren't (Moët champagne, face cloths of a specific material) and some are just random (scratch cards, really specific flavoured teas, specifically non-supermarket-own crisps)." While I may be partial to a bag of Sainsbury's *Taste the Difference* sea salt, I suppose they just don't cut it for big names like Boney M, who headlined last year's Ball.

But if the price is fair, the timing is right and you can convince Taylor that Gardies' cheesy chips are a sufficient rider, then you've got yourself one hell of a May Ball headliner. Sadly, the Eras Tour dates for Cardiff, Liverpool and London might get in the way of this year's May Week. Though, with John's May Ball committing to a headliner almost a year in advance, it might not be too long before we start guessing whether they've bagged her for May Week 2025.

To sell out, or not to sell out

Finalists and soon-to-be unemployed English graduates **Emily Lawson-Todd** and **Hugh Jones** reflect on choices made, flats in Zone 2, and the allure of corporate London

HUGH

Sitting in Guildford Wetherspoons, clutching my fourth unlimited tea refill, I realised that I had made a strategic error.

I was there with some friends from school. Two were on leave from the major consultancy and important defence firm at which they were doing their years in industry, and where they would probably return after a final year at university. A third was telling me that he had finally secured a job doing something too complicated for a humanities student like me to understand.

It was as these apprentice corporate weapons spoke that I realised where I had gone wrong. Studying the arts had seemed like such a good idea when I dropped all semblance of STEM from my curriculum in the wake of GCSEs, ignoring my father's anguished pleas as I consigned my Casio scientific calculator to the back of the draw where broken headphones and superannuated charging leads dwell.

While my drinking companions had been in the Maths classroom, I had been watching Andrew Marr talk about the making of modern Britain. I laughed at the pain in my history-loving friend's eyes as he was forced to forsake these delights for calculus and combinatorics. Now, however, I was facing what looked suspiciously like consequences for my choices. After two-and-a-half years of essay permacrisis, brutal supervisor feedback, and eccentric lecturing, I was facing unemployment, while my friends had won the greatest prize of all: working in London in their twenties.

As I sat in Spoons, I had a vision of that future. I saw the houseshare in Zone 3, the air-conditioned office, the post-work pints in the June sun on a cobbled street outside an ancient pub. I saw youth and disposable income in the greatest city on Earth. Later, I saw the promotion, an office of one's own, the company card, the unshared flat in Zone 2. I saw satisfaction at being a productive member of society. I saw the marriage and the children and the move to Surrey and the cycle beginning anew.

Then the vision darkened. I saw my own future. The worthless English degree. The move back home. I saw the shame in my parents' eyes as I insisted that my podcast would take

It is a truth universally acknowledged that any Cambridge English grad, in possession of a degree, must be in want of a job. Unfortunately, in this economy, it is also a truth universally acknowledged that a good job is very much not in want of an English student. Choosing Donne over Deloitte doesn't always lead to the easiest employment path post-graduation. It may even lead you, as it has done me, straight into the familiar arms of a Master's course.

Really, I should be kicking myself. While my friends are apartment-searching for Zone 3 pads whilst embarking on their first few steps up the corporate ladder, I am weighing up whether or not I can justify writing my thesis in Children's Literature on Jacqueline Wilson. At least they managed to pass the stupid personality

EMILY

quizzes and two rounds of interviews.

Despite this, I'm not splitting hairs too much. For all its chaotic deadlines, needlessly stressful referencing formatting, and decision to make Tragedy a compulsory paper, I have fallen in love with my degree, at least enough to want to do it for another year. No panic Master's here, unfortunately. This decision has been embarrassingly premeditated.

I also don't agree with the idea that English is unemployable. I could rattle off anecdote after anecdote of friends who studied English who are now in "good jobs". But why should I have to justify my degree by how much it appeals to the likes of JP Morgan? If going into investment banking or hedge funds (which, disappointingly, have very little to do with actual hedges) are the only ways to be "successful," then I am very worried for our future. Success should not be measured by a house in Surrey (especially because it's Surrey of all places. At least

pick somewhere interesting for crying out loud), or by salaries, but by our personal goals.

It probably comes as no surprise that I, the Northern English student who cried in every Maths lesson and is now embarking on a Master's in Children's Literature, have no desire to go into the world of investment banking, or even to live in London. And let's be honest, they certainly don't want the likes of me trying to set the interest rate. Sure,

I'm very tempted by the office life shown to me in *The Devil Wears Prada*, and I know all too well that academia is a dying field. But one more year studying something I love in a new city before trying (and, let's be honest, probably failing)

to get a job can't hurt too much.

Does the age-old adage "money can't buy happiness" wear slightly thin when you consider that it's probably more comfortable to cry yourself to sleep in a Zone 2 apartment with a stable job (and holiday benefits!), rather than a dingy flat on a student budget? Possibly. But at the end of the day, I have a very long time to consider selling out. Maybe next year, deep into writing my thesis and facing the inevitability of unemployment, I'll re-read this article and curse my foolishness. But for this English student, at least currently, there's another truth universally acknowledged: I don't regret a thing.



Cambridge un

Dion Everett profiles each of Cambridge's many bookshops, hoping to find serenity between the stacks

Read all about it, folks: pub crawls are so last year. It's Easter term, so what better time to activate those synapses and embark on a crawl which will enrich your mind instead of rotting it: a bookshop crawl. This tour will take you on a journey through a whole manner of bookselling businesses, from the salubrious to the spooky. Join me as I brave the crush of the Cambridge city centre on a Sunday afternoon to visit the city's favourite bookshops.

Waterstones

You know it, you love it, it's Waterstones, a true staple of the British high-street. You can't pass through a town these days without finding at least one (if not more), and I for one am thankful for it. Open until 7pm, Waterstones is perfect for those post-Sidge grind evenings. Waterstones is, without a doubt, the most reliable bookshop of the tour, with a wide variety – from children's literature to manga to poetry to essays. The familiar, albeit corporately optimised, layout is open-plan and airy, leaving no room for dissertation panic. But if you're really desperate to think about exams, there are two cafes packed full of delicious yet overpriced toasties for your tasting pleasure. Make sure your laptop is charged before you go, though, as Waterstones' plug socket-to-desk ratio is especially horrendous.



Heffers

The unfortunate fact that Heffers finds its origins in Oxford cannot subtract from the simply wonderful vibes of this bookshop. Simply put, its layout inspires joy. Similar to Waterstones, Heffers provides numerable sprawling tables with the vivid front covers of contemporary fiction, poetry, non-fiction and more smiling up at you, but is somehow more charming in every conceivable way. And unlike Waterstones, where the additional levels only go up from the ground floor (boring and lame!), in Heffers you have the option of hitting the stairs and disappearing down into the franchise's signature basement book stacks. Here you'll find a large second-hand section which will be favoured by the students of the Engling persuasion, due to its propensity for literary criticism.

For those among us who love a sit down as much as I do, there are several sofas in the basement to perch and peruse.



Cambridge University Press

Entirely unique in the Cambridge scene, the CUP focuses on academic literature in every genre. You can find in this small space everything from Quantum Physics to Law to Medieval History.

There are a few seats here and there, and they always play classical music which is deeply soothing, although sometimes sleep-inducing. There isn't much in the ways of amenities in the shop, but it's got plants, natural light, and endless shelves on a range of subjects you've never even heard of before - what more could you want? Whatever you do, though, don't check the prices on the books unless you want to have a meltdown. £70 for one textbook? That 20% discount for Cambridge students is looking very appealing right now... Perfect for those looking for a place outside of the libraries to feel like an academic weapon, stocked with leather-topped desks to boot.



der the covers

Market Books

On the edge of Market Square closest to King's Parade, tucked in between vibrant food stands and vendors selling trinkets, you'll find the Books at Market Square stall. Offering a quaint selection of second-hand texts, with a particular focus on recipe books and random gems, the range isn't elite but it sure is sweet. And if you want to browse with some fresh food, you needn't look further than literally right behind you. When the sun is out, there is no better way to procrastinate revision than to grab a quick read and a freshly squeezed orange juice from Market Square, find a spot on the grass outside King's, and let the hustle and bustle of Cambridge life pass you by.



G. David

The elusive mistress of Cambridge bookshops, G. David sits at the other end of St Edward's Passage. If you can figure out its opening hours, this is the perfect place for both a cheap win and a break-the-bank purchase. From their £2 classics collection to the fancier antique section in the back, there's something for everyone. The baskets of books out front are a welcoming sight, allowing one to get a feel for the selection before entering, and the pastel-coloured bikes often parked nearby are a Wes Anderson's fan delight. G. David boasts whimsy and variety in this perfectly positioned shop. Make sure to check out the church opposite for an all-round picturesque afternoon stroll.

The Haunted Bookshop

The Haunted Bookshop does what it says on the tin: it's tiny. It's old. It might be haunted. Down St Edward's Passage you'll find this red-fronted store, packed to the brim with narrow shelves of antique books. If you're in the market for a cheap win, then you might be better sticking with an old faithful, but if you're looking for that special purchase, that limited edition Thomas Hardy, then browse away. A cult favourite, the new additional measure of locking the door so that patrons have to knock gives this bookshop a feeling of forbidden exclusivity. Move over, Pitt Club! There's a new secret society in town. If dust in your lungs and cobwebs in your hair is your thing, this might be the one for you. But you and you alone, since you'd be more likely to fit an elephant through a keyhole than fit more than one person at a time in this shop.

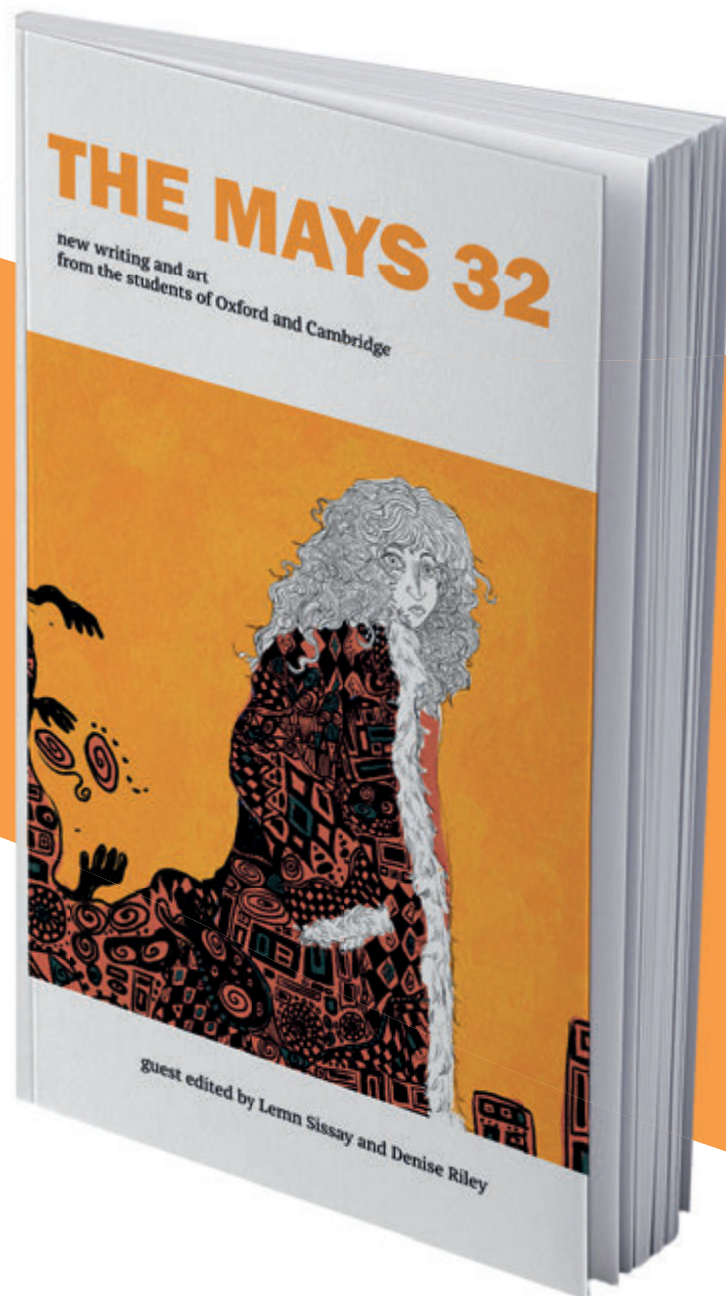
“Enrich
your mind
instead of
rotting it



▲ MARTHA VINE

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Enmeshment, kazooos, and the jigsaws of our lives

Dissertations submitted, Molly Scales muses on the things that stay with us

Ecocritics Timothy Morton and Donna Haraway depict speculative epochs in which the category of 'human' is deconstructed - wait. Sorry folks, that's my dissertation. Let's try that again.

In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway urges humanity to exist within the 'Chthulucene', a state in which the human and non-human are enmeshed in "unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles". We must, Haraway says, "make oddkin".

Yep, it's terminal.

When I say I have thought of nothing except my two (yes, *two*) dissertations for the last month, I am not exaggerating in the slightest. My emotions present themselves to me in perfect MHRA. When I said I was hungry, I cited my sources (Stomach, 2024). A fellow English Tripos sufferer told me she's been having nightmares in which she submitted her passport photo instead of her dissertation, helpfully labelled 'fig.1.' I tried to describe my situation by comparing it to the Chthulucene (pro tip: don't tell your long-suffering friends who are trying to advise you that you feel like the Anthropocene and you would prefer to be ecologically enmeshed). That one's even crazier if you consider that my other dissertation was about lesbian identities and code-breaking, and still I plumped for the project about tentacles as a metaphor for resisting global warming.

Though I slammed my laptop shut after submitting said dissertations (one minute to the deadline - don't say I don't live dangerously) and swore never to think of them again,

I can't help but do just that. They're a part of me now. You could almost say I'm enmeshed with them in the way that Haraway wants us to be enmeshed with the non-human: one big, happy compost. Or maybe I'm just thinking about compost because it's 1 pm and I'm currently rotting in bed, sipping tepid Cava that was opened 12 hours ago through a straw.

It's funny, the troubles that stay with you - and I'm not just talking about the hangover from drinking the lion's share of a bottle of Cava the night before. When I look around my room, I see the evidence of three years of enmeshing: there's pilfered clothes, a Christmas cactus which flowers at exactly the same time as its sister plant in Glasgow, and paint tubes on my nightstand because an architect left them there and I'm trying

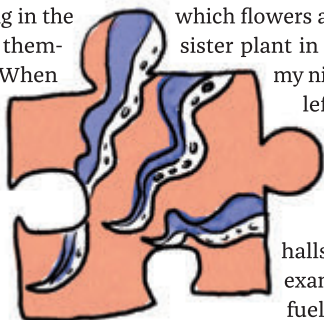
to cement my status as artsy. Oh, and there's a kazoo that forms a set of five because my college wife thought that what halls were really missing during exam term was a wheezy, saliva-fuelled quintet. The room forms

an esoteric jigsaw; appropriate, I think, as the framed photograph of my grandad's finished jigsaw catches my eye (he was truly rubbish at jigsaws so every completed one went into the hall of fame). I'd say I'm as much of a jumbled collection as my bedroom. Like the British Museum, I've been pilfering bits of myself for years now. Unlike the British Museum, I don't have the Elgin Marbles rattling around my ribcage.

I pull the sweaty slop that is my duvet around me, thinking about how Marilyn Hackman said "bed is just a swamp to roll in". I found that poem when my best pal in high school told me I was a lesbian and that I should probably read up on the subject. I turn up the Joni Mitchell, murmuring a quick prayer of thanks to the Spotify Gods that the mothership (*Blue*, 1971) has come back for me. My long-lasting love affair with the song 'California' was brought about by my much shorter love affair with the girl who recommended it to me. I

ponderously on a garlicky tofu sandwich and remember that I only salt and crush my garlic every time I cook because an old friend taught me it unlocks flavour. We don't speak anymore, but we'll always have the garlic trick. I try to write, trip, and fall helplessly into watching *The Sound of Music* thirst traps instead (because if there's one thing Cambridge has taught me, it's new heights of procrastination). Everything I do, I've watched someone else do first, filched it, and tucked it away, magpie-like; I touch my nose whenever I see a magpie because of someone else's superstition. To paraphrase Emily Brontë, everyone's more myself than I am. It's inescapable as a 3 am kazoo cover of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, heard halfway across Newnham.

I'm not really me - but that's alright. As a finalist currently orbiting the melodramatic black hole that is graduation, it's oddly comforting. If I'm not so much myself as a Chthonic puddle of people I've met, then maybe leaving some of those people behind isn't so bad. After all, I've got Joni and garlic and a porter at my door while I clutch a kazoo behind my back. And two finished dissertations. And lesbianism. My grandad's photo of his completed jigsaw catches my eye again and I think about how he thought it was worth framing. Maybe I wasn't too far off when I said I wanted my situation to be a Chthulucene. Maybe I wasn't thinking big enough. What do you reckon - see you in the compost heap?



▲ EMILY LAWSON-TODD

Beyond black tie

Cambridge is a city we might perhaps define in relation to its diligent commitment to tradition. Every formal dinner is adorned with gowns, often accompanied by a Latin grace and candlelit waiter service. Our time as students here starts with grandiose matriculation ceremonies, and will end with even grander graduation ceremonies, where we will all wear the same uniform hoods. We devote ourselves to three terms of eight weeks, subject ourselves to the arduous rigour of weekly supervision essays, 9am lectures, and the horrors of Rumboogie each Wednesday night.

May Week offers us a final release, a week-long escape from this routine and tradition and an opportunity to revel in the grandest and most idyllic events: May Balls. Ever since the first ball at Trinity in 1866, these celebrations have epitomised magic with their black-tie grandeur, fireworks and unlimited food and drink resulting in a night of lucid euphoria.

May Balls offer a point of reference throughout Easter term thanks to constant discussions of themes, headliners and outfits. These events provide an opportunity to celebrate a range of cultures. Whether it be the beautiful layered silks of a Tamil sari or the vibrant patterns of a Sudanese toub, cultural clothing serves as a tangible expression of something both extremely personal and fundamental. It is a proclamation of pride in one's culture and an affirmation of belonging in a landscape that wasn't necessarily designed with us in mind.

We spoke to our models to discover how their cultural wear intersects with the drama and fashion of May Balls:

“People are generally really happy that you wear your cultural dress out

For Rohan Afaq, reconciling his queer identity and Pakistani heritage has been a challenge. He recalls that, at first, he wore a classic suit and tie to events and only later began to “re-visit colourful and extravagant cultural wear,” which made him “fall back in love with the traditional Pakistani dress”. For Rohan, it became quite “cathartic” to connect his academic Cambridge identity with his Pakistani culture. So, for our photoshoot, he wore a shalwar kameez, a combination of a long tunic and flowing trousers that were brought into South Asia by the Mughals in the 1200s. Pairing his cultural clothing with makeup and jewellery is some-

thing that Rohan embraces: “It feels right for me to merge my cultural wear into who I am.”

Attire isn't just a matter of fashion; cultural dress becomes a conduit through which identity and heritage can be proudly asserted and a broader conversation about inclusivity and representation can be instigated. As Nima Babijer explains: “Sometimes sparking up a conversation with a stranger through a little compliment goes a long way to discovering more about the outfits.”

“It feels right for me to merge my cultural wear into who I am

For Nima, bringing aspects of your culture into an academic setting like Cambridge is crucial, “particularly when they can inform so much of our affective and intimate aspects of life”. For Nima, it's about “bringing a part of home with you so that you never feel too far away”. After explaining that Sudanese toubes are usually reserved for older women, Nima expresses how having a reason to wear one has made her feel “incredibly happy,” recalling memories of those “who have lived and loved in such clothing”.

Yet, wearing traditional clothing at May Balls isn't without its challenges. Irisa Kwok recalls horror stories of people mistaking those in cultural dress for “part of the attraction because they're wearing a certain headdress or dressed in a certain way”. There are also practical issues such as the cost of dress repair. Irisa highlights how, if traditional clothing gets ruined, buying a new one often entails additional import costs, which can dissuade students from wearing it to events.

While she wouldn't usually wear her traditional Chinese hanfu dress or her Manchu wear to May Balls, Irisa insists that “there can be some really lovely moments as well”. She reflects that “people are generally really happy that you wear your cultural dress out” and it can be nice to send photos back home and “be like, I'm at a May Ball, I'm repping the family!”

Creative directors: Amira Mumin and Emily McDonagh

Photographers: Tomos Davies and Chiara Delpiano Cordeiro

Models: Rohan Afaq, Nima Babiker, Irisa Kwok, and Raheal Mensah

Makeup Artist: Erin Tan







Hangging after a Mo your May Week mo

LAUREN WELSBY-RILEY

May Week is fast approaching, and we all know what that means: day drinking in Grantchester, may balls with open bars, farewell formals before you leave Cambridge for the summer, and endless debriefs in the sun about the shenanigans of the night before. But the thing with the night before is that there must eventually be the morning after, and with the morning after comes a grizzly, sweaty reality check: the hangover. Worry not, innocent student. If you can muster the strength to lift your pretty little head out of your toilet bowl long enough to read this article, I've got you covered.

The waking up

If you're lucky, you'll wake up with a giggle as you realise that you're actually still a bit tipsy. If this is you, then feel free to skip to Step Three

to make sure you defeat the dreaded 3pm nausea attack. For most of us, though, the moments which immediately follow the opening of your eyes are punctuated by cold sweats, a headache, and the unshakeable pit in your stomach which tells you that you did something really, *really* bad last night.

If you only take one thing from this guide, let it be this: stay the hell OFF your phone! The human brain was truly never supposed to consume so much information about the world so soon after switching back on, so save yourself the horror and postpone checking Instagram for now. The last thing you need to see right now is a video of you and your friend croaking your way through 'Misery Business' by Paramore at your May Ball's karaoke... not that I would know.

I know it feels like living out your Rot Girl Fantasies is going to help right now, but look at me, this isn't you. Change out of your clothes from the night before, even take your makeup off and brush your hair if you're feeling crazy.



Tactical chunders aren't just for getting drunker

We all know tactical chunders as the foolproof, albeit somewhat concerning, method for continuing to drink for as long as possible. But they are surprisingly multi-purpose. The way I see it, you can't have a hangover if there's no alcohol left in your stomach to be hungover from, right? (That was a rhetorical question, please do not get in touch with scientific explanations to the contrary; I will not read them.) This is a necessary evil for the greater good. So swallow your pride, find someone in the vicinity to hold back your hair, and give your stomach a clean slate to work with for the rest of the day.



Lauren's Vodka & Mixer Fixer Elixir

Okay, I might have lied a little bit in the last step - we do occasionally buy into science here at *Varsity*. And according to my very limited knowledge of the biology of hangovers (cut me some slack, they were generous to add the word science to social sciences), drinking alcohol dehydrates you. If this were WebMD or the NHS website, I might just tell you to chug some water, but literally where is the fun in that? Follow this easy recipe below for Lauren's Vodka & Mixer Fixer Elixir (patent pending).

The method:

1 Soda water. I know it's vile, you know it's vile, but the carbonation will settle your stomach and keep the dry-heaving at bay.

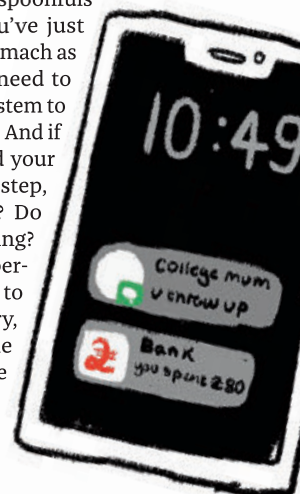
2 A bit of cucumber, because really being hungover is a mindset which can easily be altered by kidding yourself that you're a wellness girlie.

3 A squeeze of lemon or orange, or one of those fizzy vitamin C capsules. Sorry to get scientific again (someone buy me a lab coat and goggles) but my mum told me years ago that vitamin C speeds up the recovery process and I believe anything she tells me so I've never questioned it. Plus, it tastes yummy, so why not.



LAUREN MUNGER ▲

4 Three generous spoonfuls of sugar - if you've just emptied your stomach as per my last step, you'll need to get some sugar in your system to boost those energy levels. And if you haven't just emptied your stomach as per my last step, what is your problem? Do you hate me or something? You think I'm an awful person and you never want to speak to me again? Sorry, don't know what came over me there... must be the hangxiety. Anyway!



ay Ball? Let us cure oodies...



Let yourself be touched by the sun's rays

Listen, okay, I hear you. You've got a splitting headache that just won't quit, and it's looking pretty attractive to just stay in bed all day watching Reddit 'Am I The Asshole?' videos while some 13 year old boy does Minecraft parkour in the background. (And just in case you were wondering, if you take your mother-in-law's side when she shows up to your wedding in a white dress, you are very much the asshole). But trust me, stepping outside for five minutes will do a world of good. Let the mundane beauty of a bee suckling from the wildflowers on your college grounds reintroduce some whimsy into your terrible morning.

Nap it up



Stop counting the money you spent on the 5 for £5 J-Bomb deal in MASH last night, and start counting sheep. Your body is recovering internally from all of the TLC you've been doing throughout the day, and now it is time to switch off, and enter what is potentially going to be one of the most fitful sleeps of your life.

Finally, get ready to do it all again tonight

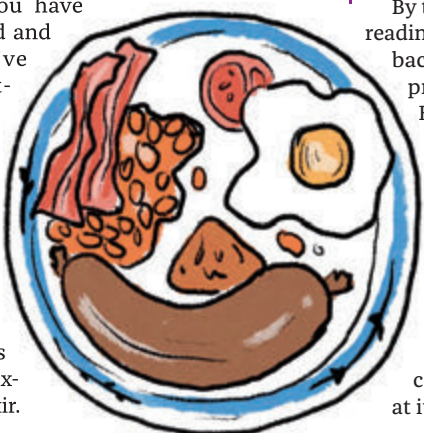
The time has almost come for me to send you on your way, brave soldier, but I have one more pearl of wisdom left to share with you. If you're still not feeling 100% (which, let's face it, is impossible; I am a genius), it's time to rely on an old faithful: hair of the dog. May Week is going to ask more of you than just the one night (clue's in the name, babe), so as a failsafe there is always the option of starting tonight's celebrations before the night before has a chance to bite you.



5 Paracetamol – self-explanatory and so, so necessary. Simply crush it up, and sprinkle it in.

There you have

it! The tried and tested (I've never attempted this before in my life) tonic guaranteed to help you beat your hangover: Lauren's Vodka & Mixer Fixer Elixir.



Let's get greasy

By this point, you might be tempted to stop reading. After all, my advice so far is so well-backed by facts and research that you're probably ready to do a cartwheel down King's Parade. But trust me, making it to the end is the only way to really stave off a hangover for the entire day. Having said that, I would encourage you to get proactive with this step if you're feeling up to it. That's right: it's time to chef it up! Grab your silly poofy hat, throw on an apron, and... okay, who am I kidding? No one sane is cooking with a hangover. Order yourself the greasiest fry-up you can possibly find on Uber Eats, and have at it. No one's judging you here.

Costuming Camdram

Alex Brian counts down the best costumes from this year of student theatre, speaking to those sat behind the sewing machines

5 *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)* Abi Beton

Based on the concept of performing all 37 Shakespeare plays in 91 minutes, this sketch comedy brightened up the end of Michaelmas – literally. Inspired by *The Goes Wrong Show* and *Monty Python*, Beton's costumes featured neon-coloured tights and Jacobean pantaloons. Yet, her favourite costume was unquestionably the fake boobs. When designing costumes, Beton always considers how the characters would acquire the clothes themselves: "I was fascinated by the idea of creating costumes which looked like they had been put together by an amateur theatre society on a shoestring budget with little time but buckets of creativity (kind of like us!)."

4 *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* Robin Simon

For this Lent term play, the directors brought in a freelance costume designer from London. Set in 1956, the show follows a group of women whose quiche breakfast is interrupted by a nuclear alert. However, Robin Simon rejected period-accurate designs, calling them "terribly boring": "Costume can be so much more – an engagement in artist dialogue, socio-political commentary, aesthetic research." Rather, the historical context was referenced through allusions to abstract expressionism and women claiming their right to wear jeans. The costumes were beautifully incoherent, as Simon explains: "With a set as sparse as this one, I felt it would be appropriate to amp up the colours and patterns."

3 *Exit the King* Esme Bishop

Early in Michaelmas, Eugène Ionesco's absurdist play about a king's final evening of existence graced the stage of Corpus Playroom. Bishop's vision for this production was "post-apocalyptic camp". To achieve this, she sought inspiration from fashion designer Simone Rocha: "Her work is defined by contrast: blending hard and soft, masculine and feminine, and classical and avant-garde." Thus, her costumes featured an eclectic mix of styles, from Queen Mary's pink tulle dress to the King's corset over a tailored shirt and tie. But that wasn't the only inspiration driving her design: "I think I was also subconsciously influenced by Ryan Gosling's Ken costume from *Barbie* when I put [the King] in that fur coat."



▲ PAUL ASHLEY

2 *5/11* Freya Cowan & Lucy Wright

5/11 was rare among ADC shows in that the costumes were essential to the storytelling. Director Evie Chandler's vision was to make the plot feel relevant by turning it punk – and, as Cowan acknowledges, "there was no other way to do it but through costuming." Thus, £900 of the show's £2,300 budget was dedicated to costumes. But that didn't make it easy: "The cast of 5/11 was huge, and so although our budget was far larger than is typical for costumes, it was still a challenge to ensure that every single costume felt interesting." Cowan's solution was to purchase basic items cheaply off Vinted or Depop. This was a careful process: "My worst nightmare was to make a show that was visibly 'Cambridge students do punk!'"

1 *The Tempest* Esme Bishop

Every Christmas break, the European Theatre Group tours a Shakespeare play around the continent before landing at the ADC. This year's production was a re-imagining of *The Tempest* with Prospero as a tortured artist distorting reality to manipulate the other characters. The show was a visual spectacle thanks to Bishop's paint splatters, flowers, and masks. Unable to rely on colour (the director demanded beiges and creams to present the characters as "blank canvases"), Bishop diverted her attention to "shape, style, and silhouette". Consequently, *The Tempest* was one of the most "hands-on" projects she had undertaken: "I spent hours like a madwoman in my room glue-gunning and painting."

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It's about (fake) bloody time we talk about SFX!

JACK MARLEY

So, you've decided to put on a naturalistic production of *Titus Andronicus* (in this hypothetical, you're a psycho). That's only nine killings to stage, plus some cannibalisation and mutation, or as one scholar succinctly observed, 5.2 atrocities per act. No big deal. There's only one problem: you've never worked with fake blood. It can't be that hard, right? Well, if you ask the theatre-makers of Cambridge who've worked with the stuff, you'd find out there's more to it than you might think.

Central to good fake blood is the recipe, and finding the perfect mix requires some creativity and patience. Seasoned blood technician Maisie Johnson told me, with slightly unnerving nostalgia, about how she "got a big tub and sat in the middle of [her] carpet," spending "hours covered in flour and food colouring and oil and all sorts" as a fresher stage-managing Nadia Lines's *The York Crucifixion*. She is a modern-day Goldilocks, looking for the blood porridge that is just right. No one blood fits all however, and suiting viscosity to the demands of the show is crucial, so be ready to experiment. While Nadia said that a thicker oil-based blood worked well for the dramatic scenes of *Crucifixion*, for a base mix Maisie recommends food colouring combined with unscented and uncoloured shampoo, the logic being that it is easier to clear up something that is designed for the very act of cleaning up. Clever. You just have to be careful with this concoction; it's safe, but it's not particularly pleasant to burst a bagful of it into your eyes, as she found out while testing on herself for the eye-gouging scene in this Lent term's production of *King Lear*. The final solution was chunky apple sauce dyed

red – yummy!

Now, staining has long been public enemy number one of those in the fake blood world. It's safe to say that some of the red leather seats in the Union chamber were slightly richer in hue once *Lear* was finished with them. That's after the show was pushed over budget by having to buy every pack of Mainsbury's baby wipes multiple times, according to producer Luke Morris. With rehearsals, tech, and dress runs, and a full set of performances to clear up, you better be prepared to get scrubbing. Good luck with any white clothing: director Maddy Sanderson remembers giving up trying to clean the white costumes of her show *My Eyes are Not Scabs* every night. By the final performance, the "originally white t-shirts had a distinct reddish/pinkish tint". And it's not just the costumes (and seats and ceilings and floors) you'll have to deal with, but yourself too. Maisie showed off her fingers to me, well cleaned, but nails still the stylish red of caked food colouring. If it's any consolation (as Oscar Wilde once foretold) after every show life will come to imitate art.

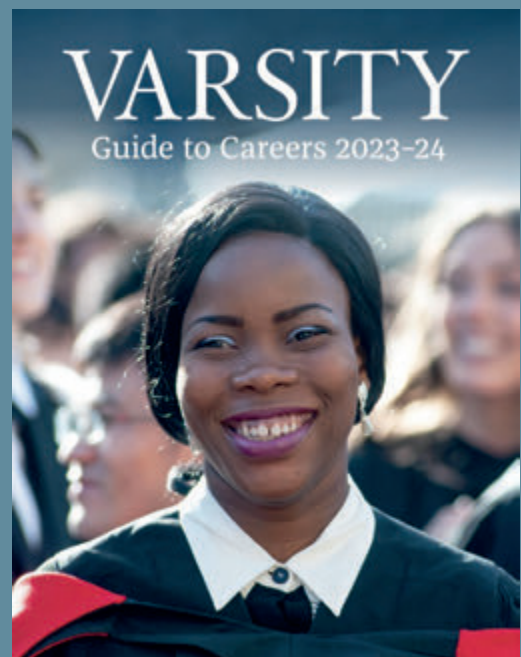
Sometimes, just blood won't be enough. In this game, you have to be prepared to go the extra mile. Indeed, with *Titus Andronicus*' handful of hands full with other people's hands (recently divorced from their full bodies), you're going to need much more than some dyed shampoo.

Perhaps inspiration can be found in the 2022 production of Sarah Kane's

Phaedra's Love. Having been talked down from visiting an abattoir, director Ralph Jeffreys instead brought to life the ripping apart of Hippolytus at the end of the show via some dyed intestinal sausage casings, with a friend "channel[ling] all his rage into slamming them into a Sainsbury's disposal barbecue in front of a surprised audience". Jake Burke, who played Hippolytus during his first term at Cambridge, summed up having to store the intestines in his gyp kitchen after all five performances as "not ideal".

Not everyone has what it takes for the cut-throat (pun intended) world of fake blood, and with *Titus Andronicus*, you're in for a baptism of fire. However, just maybe, after a few weeks of red shampoo, vigorous floor scrubbing, biological hazards, and some bloodbath performances of "one of the stupidest and most uninspiring plays ever written" (according to T. S. Eliot), you might have caught the blood bug, and be ready to join the elite world of Cambridge's fake blood aficionados.

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Finding my feet as a small club fan in Cambridge

OROMILLY NORFOLK
ne of the best parts of going to university is the new environment you find yourself in, surrounded by people of different backgrounds from up and down the country, even beyond our shores. For me, this has meant meeting people who I share something with, and that thing is supporting a shit football team.

Anyone who knows me knows of my love for Brentford F.C. A club with a stadium capacity of below 20,000, the 1942 London War Cup is the closest we've got to a real trophy. At Cambridge, I have found solidarity with those I meet with a similar passion for a football club with little to its name.

One of the first people I became friends with at Cambridge is a Brentford fan. We technically met before even coming to university. I, like any normal person, tweeted that I got into Cambridge on results day, which led to a DM from someone who followed me, also saying he got into Cambridge. This meant that, when I moved to University, I didn't have to watch Brentford's first game alone, because I was joined by a random MML-er who I'd met on Twitter just because we support the same football team. This was the beginning of the community I have found at university just through following football. A community that has even gone beyond my own team.

Two of my closest college friends share my affliction of supporting lacklustre football teams (although none of us will admit this out loud). One is a Sheffield United fan (poor sod), the other a Portsmouth supporter.

Now, if you follow football, you'd know this means that as a trio we've had a bit of a roller coaster of a season, with a promotion and relegation between us.

But it also has been a brilliant season of friendship, making journeys together to Sheffield and London to watch one another's clubs. My team was so generous as to give Sheffield United their only clean sheet of the season in front of our very eyes. I even braved a cold Tuesday night in Cambridge to watch Portsmouth produce one of the most boring games I've ever attended. This friendship formed around football has led to a tradition of commiserative pints and a fantasy football league with a MASH-related forfeit.

But, most importantly to me, it has allowed me to connect with the minimal football roots in my family, that being my grandad's club Portsmouth. Celebrating their promotion was a lovely moment, witnessing the joy of my friend but also knowing that my grandad, who has been through his fair share of struggles as a Pompey fan, would also be celebrating that night.

I would never have had the opportunity to do these things without the camaraderie 'small club' fans have with one another. We all share experiences, despite wearing different coloured shirts. Football is an emotional sport. I cried when my club moved stadiums, I felt sick as we got promoted, and I cried again when we won our first Premier League game. Only football fans can recognise this passion, but only fans of shit clubs can truly understand what it means. We come from garden shed stadiums, with pillars that block your view of the goal. We have watched our teams climb the leagues and suffered seeing them plummet down them.

We have witnessed our clubs scrounge for money, shaking buckets just so they can keep the lights on.

Fans of 'big' clubs simply don't understand witnessing something you love go through this. They may complain when they lose three games in a row, but they have never had to witness their club nearly cease to exist, or in some cases, actually go extinct. The hardship of supporting a smaller club creates unique bonds between strangers. I've chatted with a random guy in the Eagle because he was wearing a Brentford scarf. I've had a Middlesbrough fan congratulate me on how well my club are doing. I've had a Newcastle fan in college recognise me just from wearing my Brentford shirt at brunch.

These links between people were made simply because we recognised one another as someone we can relate to: someone who has sat in the rain on a cold evening watching their team lose to Bolton, or travelled the length of the country just to see a nil-nil draw.

Having grown up with few friends who liked football because of its (slowly changing) image as a boys' sport, I have finally found community. These are people who might understand why I decided to spend my 18th birthday watching my team lose to Chelsea. People who won't call me crazy for going home during term just to watch some football.

Despite the prevalence of the 'big six', especially among football fans at this University, those of us with tinpot running through our veins will always have one another.

“We all share experiences, despite wearing different coloured football shirts”

▲ EMILY LAWSON-TODD



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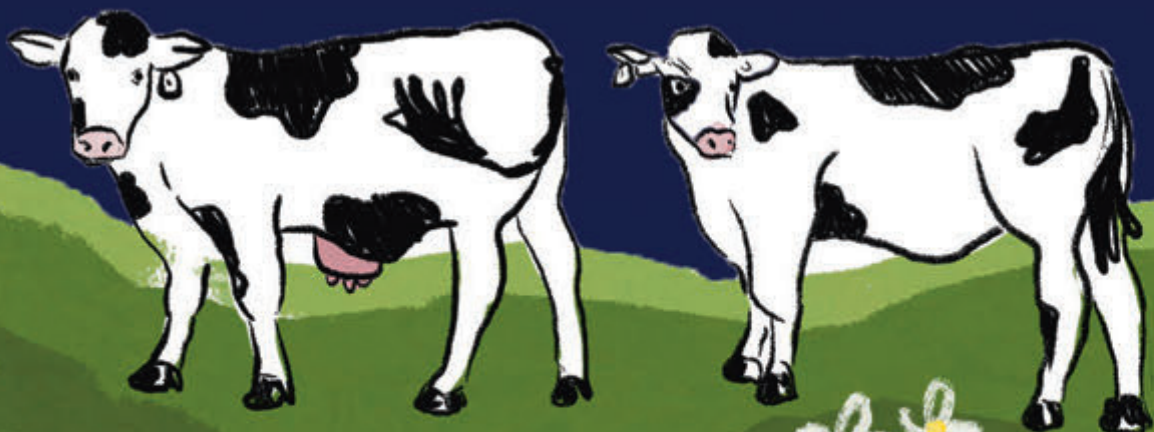
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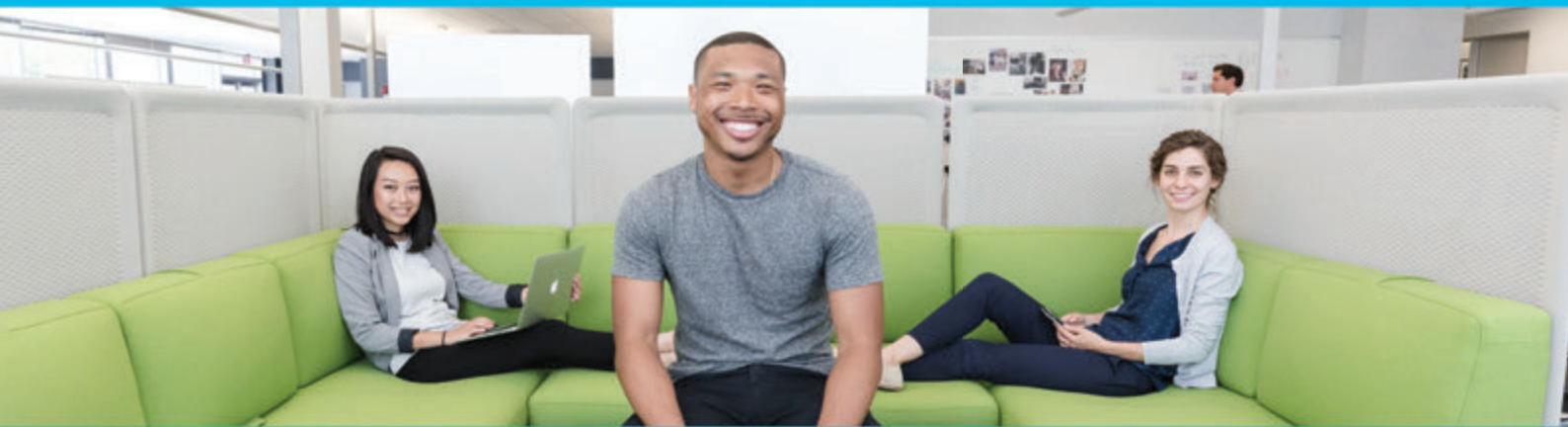
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